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HAWAI'I ON A ROLL PRODUCING CHAMPION SPORTS FIGURES
Little League World Champs, Bryan Clay, Michelle Wie Lead the Charge

HONOLULU – Following its dramatic victory in the Little League World Series championship on August 28, the West Oahu baseball team, Hawai'i's newest sports kings, returned home last week to a hero's welcome celebrated statewide.

The championship was just the latest in a string of national and world titles earned by Hawai'i sports teams and individuals in 2005.

It was also the third youth baseball championship earned by a Hawai'i team in August. On August 21, the Oahu All-Stars took home the championship of the Cal Ripken World Series (12 years old and younger). Before that, on August 5, the Hawaii Warriors won the Continental Amateur Baseball Association 9-and-under World Series.

August turned out to be a special month for Hawai'i world champions. On August 10, Bryan Clay, who was raised on O'ahu, took home the gold medal and title of "world's greatest athlete" after winning the decathlon at the World Track and Field Championships in Helsinki.

Hawai'i's outstanding young golfers have also been making their mark this year on the national and international stage. Michelle Wie, 15, continues to be the most dynamic young player, male or female, in golf today. In July, she became the first woman ever to qualify for the U.S. Amateur Public Links Championship, reaching the quarterfinals before losing to the eventual champion.

Wie isn't Hawai'i's only golfer making a splash on the international scene. In July, Stephanie Kono, 15, traveled to Ohio and went wire-to-wire in winning the 2005 Westfield Junior PGA Championship, and followed that up in August by winning the Harder German Junior Masters.

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Also in July, Bradley Shigezawa, 13, and Lorens Chan, 11, won their respective age division titles at the Optimist International Junior Golf Championships in Palm Beach Gardens, Florida.

What makes these young stars of Hawai'i so good? They grow up in a sports paradise where champions come to play.

Hawai'i residents love their sports, and who wouldn't given the year-round climate! A weekend hardly ever passes by in the islands without a sports event taking place involving golf, running, cycling, swimming, surfing, or paddling. It's one reason why Hawai'i has the nickname, *The Healthy State*.

Despite having no professional team, Hawai'i's sports credentials are impressive. The islands are a much-anticipated winter showcase for the world's top two sports brands: the PGA TOUR and National Football League. The triathlon was invented here. Surfing, the "sport of kings," was born here centuries ago.

Hawai'i sports events are an alluring draw for national and cable TV networks like ESPN and OLN. To no one's surprise, viewers especially enjoy winter broadcasts.

"Hawai'i is an athlete's paradise – it's where the best-of-the-best match their skills," said John Monahan, president and CEO of the Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau (HVCB). "World championships and elite competitions take place throughout the year. It's the lure of sunshine, clear blue ocean waters, exotic tropical beauty, and all the things to enjoy and see when the games are done."

Starting in October, as much of America starts bundling up to ride out winter's chill, Hawai'i heats up with numerous world-renowned sporting events through February emphasizing the islands' unique appeal to athletes and world travelers.

The Ironman Triathlon World Championship, taking place October 15 on Hawai'i's Big Island, began over beers among local runners as a "What if?" kind of challenge in 1978. It is now widely regarded as the world's most prestigious endurance title across the combined distances of three well-known Hawai'i events: Waikiki Roughwater Swim (2.4 miles), circle O'ahu bike ride (112 miles), and Honolulu Marathon (26.2 miles).

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On October 23, the XTERRA World Championship crowns a winner from the top extreme sports competitors after testing their skills at swimming, mountain biking, and trail racing on Maui.

Surfing's greatest championship, the Vans Triple Crown of Surfing, takes center stage among the giant waves of O'ahu's North Shore over a six-week period, November 12 – December 20. The world's top surfers gather for a global sport inspired by the great Duke Kahanamoku, a record-setting swimmer and Olympic gold medalist, who's best remembered for spreading the gospel of surfing worldwide.

All the sports excitement doesn't take place outdoors. From November 21-23, the college basketball world turns its attention to Lahaina for the nation's premier early-season tournament, the EA Sports Maui Invitational.

On December 11, the Honolulu Marathon will wind its way along Waikiki Beach and O'ahu's south shoreline. Now in its 33rd year, "the people's marathon" has grown into one of the world's most popular international road races, drawing both elite racers and joggers worldwide.

In 2004, more than three-quarters (19,000-plus) of its entrants came from outside Hawai'i. The sentiment among many is that if you're going to do a marathon, there's no better place to go than Honolulu in December.

Pro golf begins and ends in Hawai'i with the *Aloha Season*, six glamorous golf events played in shirt-sleeve conditions and brilliant sunshine on four islands.

The PGA TOUR tees off January 2-8, 2006, with the Mercedes Championships on Maui followed by the Sony Open in Hawaii on O'ahu a week later from January 9-15.

The Champions Tour for pro golfers age 50 and over begins January 16-22, with the MasterCard Championship on Hawai'i's Big Island, followed a week later by the Turtle Bay Championship on O'ahu from January 23-29. A week after that, Maui plays host to the popular Wendy's Champions Skins Game, February 5-6.

In addition, the LPGA Tour will tee off its season with the "SBS Open at Turtle Bay" on O'ahu's North Shore, February 23-25, 2006.

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At season's end, the PGA TOUR's four major champions come to Kaua'i in November to play in the PGA Grand Slam of Golf, the icing to golf's cake for making history. This year's event takes place November 21-23, 2005.

Rewarding a season of individual excellence is what the NFL had in mind when it first brought the Pro Bowl to Hawai'i. Twenty-six years later, the Pro Bowl and Hawai'i have become such a synonymous pairing the NFL fondly refers to the 50th state as its "33rd Franchise." Players revel in the honor of "going to Hawai'i."

Football fans agree. This year's game drew more than 25,000 visitors who planned their trip to attend the Pro Bowl and take part in the weeklong festivities.

College football teams enjoy their own reward in paradise for excellence with a Christmas Day gift in the form of the Sheraton Hawaii Bowl.

Hawai'i's spring and summer seasons offer a full schedule of canoe racing for teams and individuals, perpetuating the ancient cultural means of travel to and among the islands.

The single-person Molokai World Championship Canoe Race in May along with the team-based Moloka'i Hoe in October, both covering more than 30 miles of open ocean, are world championships in their own right.

"Hawai'i offers a never-ending sports schedule with signature events that mesh with our island culture and take advantage of our natural qualities," Monahan said. "It's just one more enticing reason for visitors to come here and experience our islands."

For information about Hawai'i – The Islands of Aloha – visit HVCB's website at GoHawaii.com or call 1-800-GOHAWAII.

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