

# firsthand

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# Eurosurf 2011

By Derek Parle, MISCP

**S**urfing is a fast growing sport and lifestyle in Ireland. For years travelling surfers from more established surfing nations dropped in to ride the waves of the west coast, but in the last decade a home-grown surf boom has seen a huge uptake of local surfers enjoying this invigorating sport. "Surf towns" such as Portrush, Strandhill, Tramore, Lahinch, Easkey and Bundoran have enjoyed a steadily growing flow of visitors, ranging from keen beginners taking lessons in surf schools and summer camps right through to professional big wave fanatics.

Riders are attracted to the clean water, abundant ocean swell and a convoluted rocky coastline that combine at times to make Ireland a richly rewarding surf location, with spots framed by beautiful landmarks adding the finishing touch to the experience.

Eurosurf 2011, the European Surfing Championships, enjoyed a window of fine fortune in Donegal at the end of September. Bookended by extreme winds and treacherous waves, the event enjoyed eight days of bright weather with pristine surf conditions. 160 surfers from 10 nations came together to compete for both individual and team prizes, the latter won by a deserving and dynamic squad from Portugal. The Irish team placed a respectable sixth, and one of the Irish ladies placed second in Women's Bodyboard. The town of Bundoran made everyone feel at home and the eight-day contest was dubbed by some as the "best Eurosurf ever."

Surfers are not particularly injury-prone. Hours of surfboard paddling can lead to muscle imbalances, akin to swimmers with rotator cuff wear and neck strain. A sway posture can be frequently observed, or occasionally hyperlordosis, with low grade backache common in those who fail to address their core weaknesses or instability. Hip impingement can be seen in older surfers following a similar movement dysfunction.

Acute injuries are often attributed to two main factors: unchecked rotation and sudden compression. Medial knee ligament and



Dr. Philip Murphy with Derek Parle MISCP heading up the medical team

meniscal sprain from rotational valgus knee loads are fairly common, so too are compressive ankle injuries from landing awkwardly from manoeuvres. Patellofemoral pain can occur in bodyboarders from having limited functional range in their fin stroke coupled with fin asymmetry. More extreme injuries such as femoral and tibial shaft fractures, hamstring avulsion and disc herniation can occur in the big wave arena, as the lip of a falling wave can exert thousands of pounds of pressure on the unfortunate surfer below. A final group of injuries can come from the general trauma of hitting surfboard fins, rails or the reef/sand itself. Fortunately, the Physiotherapy team at Eurosurf 2011 had no such testing work to do.

Competitors were treated to a full week's roster of Chartered Physiotherapists on site volunteering to assess, treat or advise in a private ISCP clinic area on the competition site. Conditions ranged from ankle impingement and low back pain right through to trauma from hitting the cliff at Tullaghan Strand.

The competitors were visibly impressed by the detail of their assessment and commented on the professional manner of

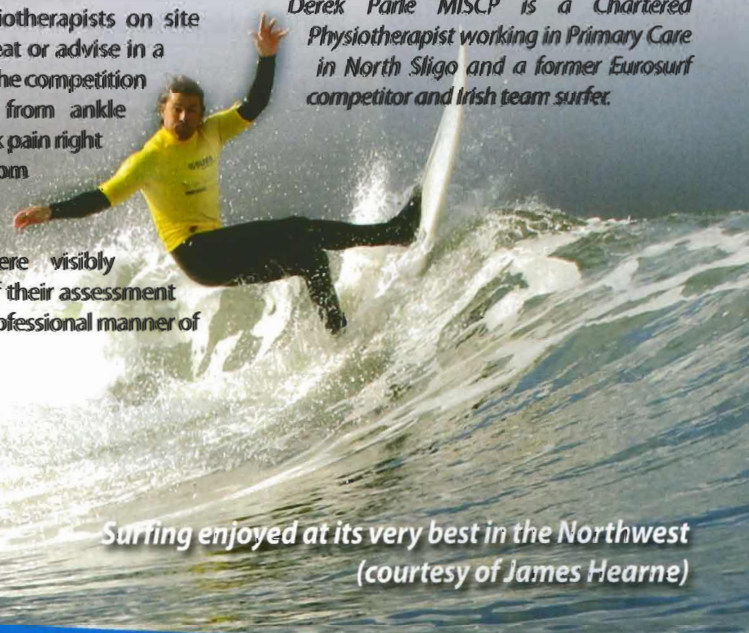
communication, education and note-taking. Over thirty surfers were treated and because of effective intervention very few needed follow-up on sub-sequent days. The event organisers were grateful for the peace of mind that their overseas guests were in safe hands.



Team Portugal revelling in winning Eurosurf 2011 (courtesy of James Hearne)

I would sincerely like to thank the team of volunteers who made this clinic possible; Shirley Foley, Cindy Ward, Aine Tunney, Yvette Morrow, Siobhan O'Reilly and Ann Prendergast. Thanks must also go to Dr. Philip Murphy of Bundoran for working alongside our Chartered Physiotherapists.

Derek Parle MISCP is a Chartered Physiotherapist working in Primary Care in North Sligo and a former Eurosurf competitor and Irish team surfer.



Surfing enjoyed at its very best in the Northwest (courtesy of James Hearne)