

A M E R I C A N

# KITE

FALL 1995

## On the Edge

*Kiteskiers fly in  
ESPN Extreme Games*

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# KITE



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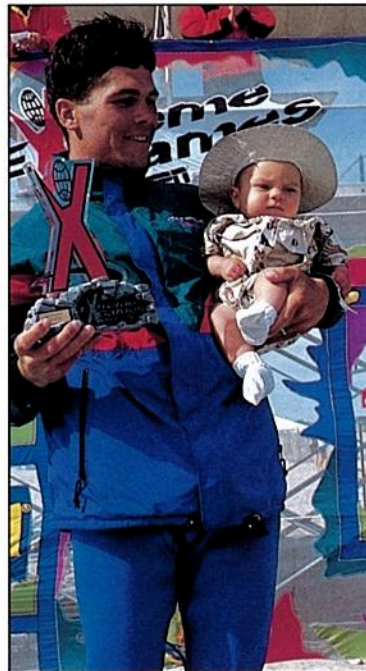
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◀ **ON THE COVER**  
Cory Roeseler was ready, willing and able to give the ESPN world a taste of kiteskiing excitement.

COVER PHOTO BY CHARLIE SAMUELS

**PUBLISHER** Daniel Prentice  
**EDITOR** Tim Devaney  
**ART DIRECTOR** Charlie Hayward  
**ADVERTISING AND CIRCULATION** Janet Cohen  
**EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD**  
Margaret Greger, George Ham, Bob Ingraham, Bill Lockhart, Ron Reich and Steve Kohler.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLIE SAMUELS



# HOT WATER

## Kiteskiers find frustration at ESPN "Extreme Games"

BY TIM DEVANEY

**T**HE ESPN "Extreme Games," broadcast daily by that cable network from June 24 to July 1, were a sort of Olympics of cool. There were cool sports, like skateboarding, skysurfing and bungee jumping; there were cool athletes, like shave-pated rollerbladers and longhaired street lugers; best of all—from a kiteflyer's point of view anyway—there was to be a kiteskiing competition. Finally, recognition from the major media. Cool.

And then, just when all the pieces were in place—course markers, chase boats, photographers, lights, camera, action!—the wind died.

Uncool.

"It was a bit of a disappointment," reports Troy Navarro, one of 12 kiteskiers from around the world who traveled to



*Clockwise from far left Nils Andermo explores the wind envelope; Clarin Mustad clocks practice time offshore in this wet and wild four-shot sequence at Newport; Cory Roeseler explains kiteskiing to the ESPN camera crew; Terese Roeseler catches a ride when the wind dies.*



nail-biter, but at least it was on videotape. "We didn't mind making it an exhibition," Navarro says. "They passed out trophies, presented on the trophy stand, there were start horns, chase boats, the whole thing—it was run like a race. And that's why we've all got a bit of a nasty taste in our mouths about turning around and being told, 'Well, thanks for giving us enough to do a TV show, but we really don't feel like paying you.'" Rather than the \$10,000 in prize money promised (and paid to competitors in other events), ESPN decided to give the kiteskiers only \$5,000. Navarro, who finished fifth, received the same \$416 and pat on the back as the rest of the field. And worst of all, Navarro says, "no-

Newport, Rhode Island, to take part in the games. "The wind just wasn't in our favor—we never really had the 10 miles per hour that was mandatory for a start." Without the weather necessary for an official race, ESPN organizers asked the kiteskiers what they *could* do. Since they're the cooperative sort of people that most kiteflyers are—and since, wind or no wind, this might well be their only chance at national exposure—the kiteskiers did their best. They ran seven heats of four, the final heat determining the top four places. Few kites ended up in the water and most starters did manage to finish, in about 8 knots of wind. It wasn't exactly a





body saw anything but a second and a half of airtime on the 'Extreme Games.'" ESPN killed the kiteskiing segment. Instead of the giant leap they were expecting, the kiteskiers had to settle for a small step.

"We had our hopes set pretty high," acknowledges Cory Roeseler, who is kiteskiing's foremost promoter and who, with his

father, Billy, founded Kiteski Inc., manufacturer of the first kite-powered waterskiing rig. "As far as a step forward for the sport of kiteskiing, yes, it was a step—it wasn't a huge, huge step. We were hoping for huge exposure, awesome competition."

It was Roeseler who got ESPN interested in kiteskiing in the first place, at-

tracting the attention of producer Ron Semiao several years ago. Semiao is the man responsible for the concept of an "extreme game," an admittedly loose category of sports that the program's executive director, Jack Wienert, defines as "on the edge, outer limits, new, daring, thrill seeking—all those things that the new genera-





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tion is looking for.” Semiao finally narrowed the “Extreme Games” field to 11 events: bungee jumping, in-line skating, BMX and mountain biking, street luge racing, skysurfing, skateboarding, sport climbing, barefoot waterski jumping, windsurfing—and kiteskiing.

Given the potential exposure that the “Extreme Games” represented—ESPN sends its signal to 600 million homes in 160 countries—Roeseler remains admirably philosophical about the negative turn of events.

“It was worth going,” he reasons. “Nobody lost any money, we got to meet all the other cool kiteskiers who have really progressed in the sport. It was more of a nice gathering than a competition. We got free room and board—ESPN treated us like Olympic athletes. You couldn’t come away disappointed.”

Roeseler finished first in the finals behind his Kiteski kite and harness, the same equipment that most of the racers used. France’s Bruno LeGaignoux sailed a catamaran rig behind his Wipiki, an inflatable-

frame kite designed for easy launches from the water. Navarro opted for a wakeboard pulled by a 6-meter SkyTiger.

Though he’s bitter about the prize money, and “furious” that the kiteskiing competition was run by a windsurfing organizer, who gave what wind there was to the windsurfers, Navarro says every kiteskier learned from the “Extreme Games” experience.

“It allowed all of us to step away from the canvas,” he says. “I’m going to work on a quadline with inflatable cells. For Cory and them, who race up at the Columbia River Gorge, I think this was an opportunity to step back and say, ‘OK, maybe we need a lighter kite.’ The sport itself has to become more user-friendly. People have to be able to do it in less than 20 knots of wind. Everybody says you should be able to do it inside 10 knots, but unless you’re really good or really small it’s not real. I’m coming in at like 210, 215—I’m just a big-old boy.”

Roeseler, who weighs in at about 150



**Clockwise from far left**

Troy Navarro, the only kiteskiier flying a quadline, shows off for the crowd when the wind wanes; Andermo checks his ski. ESPN erected nearly Olympic-size facilities at the kiteskiing course and other venues; Navarro gets ready to launch from the ESPN chase boat; Though winds were light for the heats, only a few kites got wet; Roeseler talks strategy with his wife, Terese.

pounds, admits that the light winds in Newport made the race unfair for the heavier skiers. “Had it been windier it may have been the same result, but who knows?” he laughs. “They gave me the trophy, anyway.”

Roeseler figures the conditions at the kiteskiing world championships, which take place August 11-14 around a figure-eight course off Coyote Point in the San Francisco Bay, will provide a better indica-



Above and left The news was not good at the wind speed meeting. In between racing, kiteskiers like Navarro enjoyed a little camera time and a little camaraderie. "This was a good first step," he says. "Everyone learned a lot. Cooperation and good sportsmanship were the rule."

"This allowed all of us to step away from the canvas. The sport itself has to become more user-friendly. People have to be able to do it in less than 20 knots of wind."

tion of just who is the top kitesurfer. Not that he has any doubts himself. "There's me," he says, "and then there's these other seven guys who are pretty close to each other."

Asked about a full-fledged kiteskiing tour, Roeseler says that goal is at least a couple years away. "I don't think we have enough good competitors yet. We really only have about eight guys who are competition-ready. There are a lot of avid kiteskiers out there but they're not going to compete with the best of them."

"With the 'Extreme Games' and the worlds, this year we've got two somewhat legitimate competitions," Roeseler says. "Next year we should have four, with probably twice as many competitors, and I think it'll

multiply like that for two or three years. Maybe there'll be a dozen or so kiteski races within two years, with 16 to 24 competitors."

And maybe they'll be on television. There is certainly an audience for the sport—Roeseler reports that nine out of 10 spectators he talked to in Rhode Island were asking when the kiteskiing would be on TV.

Roeseler says even people who had never heard of kiteskiing were looking forward to the event. "They got a little tickler on the hype and then, since we had no wind, they were sitting in front of their TVs watching skysurfing—and that's neat but it's not what they're looking for. They *do* want to see kiteskiing. The public response has been really positive. I had this truckdriver say, 'Yeah! I've been looking for the kiteskiing. Where is it?'"

Keep looking, Bubba—and pray for wind. **AK**

## "EXTREME GAMES" FINAL RESULTS

- 1st **Cory Roeseler**, Hood River, Oregon
- 2nd **Clarín Mustad**, Norway
- 3rd **Thomas Jeltsch**, Germany
- 4th **Terese Roeseler**, Hood River, Oregon
- 5th **Randy Schumacher**, Hood River, Oregon
- Bruno LeGaignoux**, France
- Troy Navarro**, Smithville, Texas
- Nils Andermo**, Sweden
- 9th **Eric Steinbronner**, Mountain View, Calif.
- Peter Fleck**, Orlando, Florida
- dnf **Vittorio Sanvito**, Belgium
- Billy Roeseler**, Kirkland, Washington

