

EGYPT'S NUMBER ONE SPORTS MAGAZINE



SPORTAHOLICS

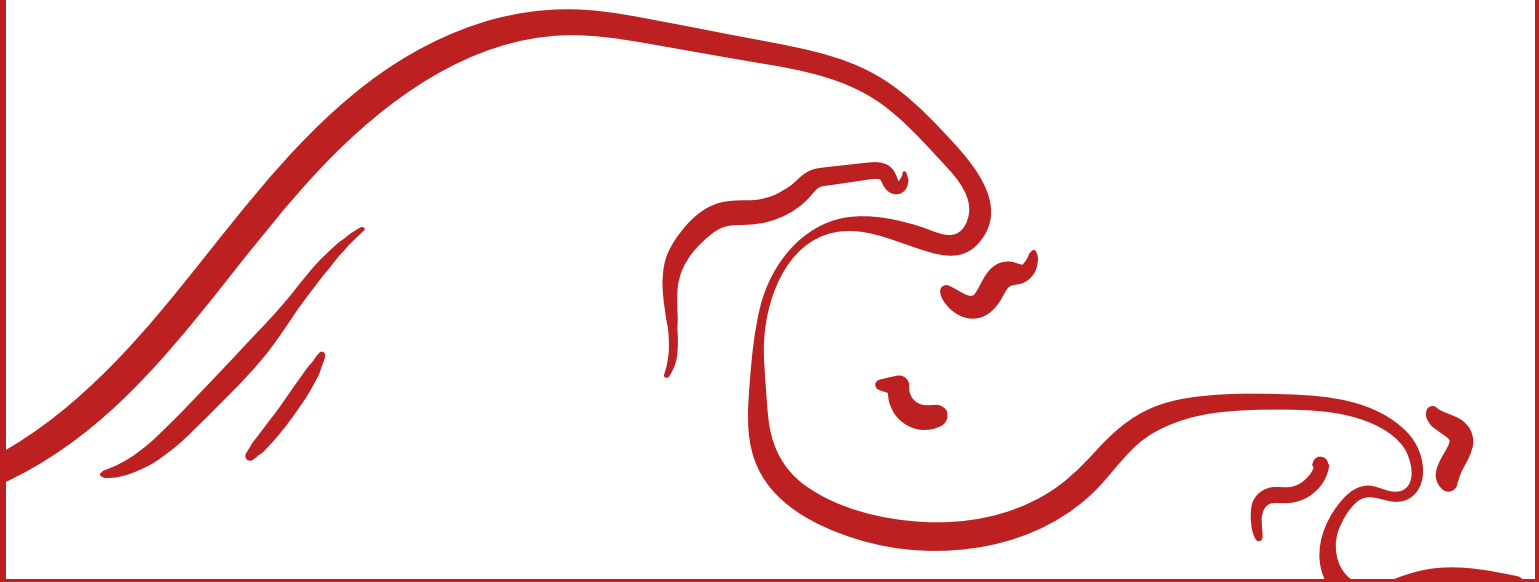
EDITION

NEW SPORTS IN EGYPT

SPECIAL FOCUS ON SURFING

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

- 1) PROFILE: *Omar ElSobky. Catching Waves.*
- 2) HARD NEWS: *Omar ElSobky Opens the First Surf Skating Ramp in Egypt.*
- 3) EVENT COVERAGE: *Talk Discusses Passion and the Benefits of Surfing.*
- 4) FEATURE: *The Rise of Unconventional Sports in Egypt.*
- 5) MOVIE REVIEW: *Soul Surfer.*



Profile: Omar ElSobky Catching Waves

Omar ElSobky had always been passionate about nature and outdoor sports. He actively pursued sports like climbing, snowboarding, kite surfing and skating. Yet he never thought that by falling in love with surfing, it would change the trajectory of his life.

Sobky is a chemical engineer, born and raised in Cairo, Egypt. He is the first person to introduce surfing to Egypt and has formed a team of instructors and partners. He then introduced surf-skating which is a form of surfing on land to practice surfing skills.

“I discovered surfing and it changed my life,” said Sobky.

His corporate job led him to living in the United States, where one day he found some surfers and decided to follow them to their surfing spot. He started trying to mimic them and eventually that is how he began surfing for the first time, and has never stopped since.

“I found a little shack with surfboards you can rent. I caught my first wave and it was the only thing I could think about,” he said.

He then invited his friend to go surfing with him. When they got back to Egypt they started surfing there together and planned on introducing the sport to the Egyptian community. He was surprised to find that some people were against the idea and others were looking forward to it.

“I’m diagnosed with ADHD and surfing brought me back to peace and taught me to live in the now; which I didn’t know before surfing. The more I’m present, the more I’m content and the more I can interact with nature.”

The first competition Sobky held was in Agamy, Egypt. He and his small team went to teach children about surfing and its lifestyle. He was met with positive feedback from the children and their parents. He then was determined to pursue teaching people about the ideology of surfing.

He created a school with a structured program, with the mission of teaching more and more people. The goal is to inspire people to think differently about the environment by immersing themselves in it.

“What if surfing can change our life, community, environment. The kids I taught grew up to be surfers and instructors that are still working with us, for more than 12 years now,” said Sobky.

SPORTA HOLICS

Sobky's ultimate goal is for Egypt to become a surfing nation like Australia, and have a national surfing team that competes at the Olympics. Surfing, for him, is connecting with and healing his inner child, by interacting with nature and learning to go with the flow.

"Waves are kind of like toys from god. You connect with your inner child even if you're in your 30s or older. It teaches you to enter in the flow state," expressed Sobky.

Sobky was faced with many struggles on his journey to introduce surfing to Egypt. He was first met with resistance because a lot of Egyptians are intimidated by the sea. Others didn't believe that Egypt had waves good enough to surf on. The culture wasn't aligned with the surfing culture.

What he wanted to teach people was that surfing is not about catching the perfect wave. He went to surf in Alexandria, Agamy and the North Coast (Sahel) to prove to people that they can surf in Egypt and find decent waves. Sobky then started breaking the stigma associated with surfing.

"Here, having a surfboard in the water is viewed very differently than a kid with a soccer ball in a field. Of course soccer is a great sport and very popular here, but I wanted to introduce surfing as a sport too. That's why I went to Sahel, that is where the people are," he explained.

Sobky successfully started integrating competitions but the main challenge was for surfing to get recognized by the government as a sport. Eventually, he transformed his shack in the North Coast to a surf camp. Shortly after Egypt became a member of the International Surfing Association.

"Before each season we would give around a thousand hours of classes. It's crazy, I wouldn't have ever imagined it to be possible. The ideology and community developed and I think they will have an amazing impact," said Sobky.

Sobky then started experimenting with surf-skating, which is a way surfers can practice within Cairo until they hit the next waves. He opened the first ramp in Cairo called "Amped". New technologies are being introduced to Egypt like surf pools that can mimic the ocean waves.

"Surfing taught me how to be present, kind and care about the community. Hopefully Egypt will have its own national team and join the Olympics," he concluded.



Omar ElSobky Opens the First Surf Skating Ramp in Egypt

The first Surf Skating Ramp in Cairo, Egypt has been introduced by Omar ElSobky, an Egyptian surfer, in October 2022. It has been established by Stoked Egypt, an outdoor sports company founded by Sobky.

This aims to bring a unique sport to Egypt, giving surfers the chance to practice surfing techniques on land, which provides them with unique benefits. Non-surfers, on the other hand, can get to experience a new sport that combines surfing and regular skateboarding.

“Surf Skating is actually a really good practice for surfing and since we’re living in Cairo and not next to the ocean all the time or the sea, we needed something that we could practice on,” Sobky said.

This ramp can be found at Eden Mall in Sheikh Zayed. Through this introduction of surf skating, Sobky aims to expand Egyptians' athletic choices, while providing surfers who are based in Cairo a chance to improve till the next time they hit the waves.

“We have several skate parks here, but we never had a surf skating wave before and this is why we wanted to do something new,” he said.

Surf Skating isn't popular in Egypt, where regular skateboarding is more common due to better facilities. Sobky's Wave Ramp gives people a chance to try something new while potentially being introduced to the magic of surfing.

The ramp, shaped like a wave and made out of concrete, wood, or steel, allows people to experience surfing on land, mimicking movements similar to those in the ocean.

“Building a wave out of wood kind of mimics the surfing techniques that we can learn and apply in the water when we go surfing,” Sobky said.



SPORTA HOLICS

MAKIN' WAVES

What makes a surf skate board different from a normal skateboard is that it uses a "surf adapter" on the front trucks for improved movement, allowing tighter turns and the ability to pump side to side to move forward without pushing off the ground.

This is not Sobky's first time introducing a foreign sport to Egypt, as he previously founded the country's first Surfing School, "Surf Camp Egypt" in 2010 with the dream of building a bigger community for these sports.

As a renowned surfer, Sobky is trying to introduce more and more people to these sports, as he believes that they are upcoming, and have the ability to positively change a person's lifestyle and mindset in general.

"They change your lifestyle, your mindset, they can heal you if you have issues dealing with life. So, I'm trying to influence people towards these sports so that hopefully one day we will have bigger and bigger communities in these sports," he stated.



Talk Discusses Passion and the Benefits of Surfing

Surfing, its benefits, and the importance of following your passion and sharing it to connect with others was discussed by Easky Britton, a passionate surfer at TedxDublin on October 8, 2013.

The talk highlighted the power of surfing to heal, build community, and break down cultural, social, and gender barriers.

Britton is an Irish surfer, marine scientist, and social activist who has helped promote surfing in Ireland and the Middle East. She is known for her work using surfing as a tool for empowerment, particularly for women and marginalized communities.

“Passion is a core part of what it is to be a human being,” she said.

She started her talk by emphasizing the importance of sharing passions and highlighting the benefits of her own passion, surfing.

“I believe in the power of surfing to heal and to connect with others. It brings people together,” she said.

She proceeded by discussing the fear of failure, and how it “dampens our creativity and keeps us in our comfort zone,” and how surfing can help get over that fear.

“Surfing teaches us to let go, keep calm, and not panic even when being tossed beneath a watery avalanche. In those situations, you have to learn to relax and let go, which is a little like life,” she stated.

Britton continued her talk by stressing the importance of following passions, explaining how commitment, trust, and support from a team can help individuals persevere, even in challenging times.

“The key element for survival in such situations is becoming part of a solid crew, working together as a team, and developing trust in myself and each other,” she said.

She then proceeded by discussing gender norms, highlighting that “some of the first surfers were women” who surfed alongside men in the 1700s. Britton emphasized the importance of female athletes sharing their stories to inspire and create opportunities for girls in sports.

SPORTA HOLICS

“Gender norms control our beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, impacting the accepted roles for women in different cultures and societies. UN Women emphasizes the importance for female athletes to share stories to inspire and create visions for girls, opening up new opportunities,” she stated.

She also talked about how her passion for surfing came to be on Ireland's northwest coast, inspired by Rell Sunn, a Hawaiian surfing queen, who later became her role model, and who emphasized the importance of sharing passion and surfing's healing power.

“She embodied the Aloha spirit, bringing kids into the sport and pushing the standards of women's surfing. She talked about surfing's power to heal, giving you great inner strength. She taught me the importance of sharing your passion,” Britton said.

Britton proceeded by discussing her recent journey to Baluchistan, Iran, which evolved from a surfing expedition into an initiative fostering engagement and understanding among local women through surfing.

“Our aim was to engage with women and learn from their experience of surfing for the first time, and how women's surfing is perceived by both men and women. This project encourages open-minded travel, tolerance, and understanding from a different perspective,” she stated.

She continued her talk by stressing the power of the ocean to “dissolve the rules and norms of society” and to “connect and spread happiness”, and how surfing makes one be completely present in the moment, removing all barriers and fears they might have.

“Just adding surf can challenge and transcend social and gender inequalities, bridging our fear of the unknown and embracing the unfamiliar,” she said.

She ended her talk by emphasizing the importance of connection and teamwork, and how being a part of a community, specifically surfing, can create really strong bonds that “lead to understanding”, and “eliminate fear” and that continue to feed ones passions.

She concluded her talk by sharing a few words she received from a young Balochi guy, “You're like my big sister. We've become sea sister and sea brother.” Britton then ended her discussion by stressing the power the ocean wields when it comes to bonds.

“if you share the ocean well, it's like you're bonded as blood brother and blood sister. Aloha is to keep giving love and feeling it come back until there's nothing else to give,” she said.



The Rise of Unconventional Sports in Egypt

Ziad Omar, a medical student, had been looking for a sport to practice after having stopped his childhood sports due to his stressful schedule. When his friends introduced him to padel, joy sparked into his life again as he was able to go back to being active while socializing with like-minded individuals.

“From my point of view, I think it's changing habits in Egyptians. When padel was introduced to Egypt it's a fun way to hang out, but at the same time you're exercising so it's making Egyptians more healthy, so I think it's having a good impact on Egyptians,” said Omar, a professional padel player

In recent years, Egypt has adopted several foreign sports, including Padel, Pilates, and Surf Skating. All of which are rapidly gaining popularity in the country due to their social aspect, making them enjoyable physical activities that people want to continue practicing.

As these sports become more and more attractive in Egypt, citizens are discovering the immense health benefits and overall positive outcomes offered by these new sports. This growing interest has turned them into a significant topic of discussion across the country.

Some of these foreign sports, such as pilates, have been around in Egypt for many years. However, they were often overshadowed by the more traditional sports. Since their growing trend, these sports are starting to gain the recognition they deserve.

“Pilates was introduced in Egypt around 15 years ago, and actually it wasn't well known at all, but because of its huge benefits, the physiotherapists started to introduce it to their patients, and since then it started to spread,” said Cinderella Abd ElMotaleb, owner of the Cinderella Yoga and Pilates studio.

While all sports carry great benefits, Pilates, Surf Skating and Padel all have common advantages that contribute to them being an asset to any individual's routine. They improve balance and coordination, engage major muscle groups and strengthen the whole body.

“After I got to know that Pilates is really beneficial for our health, and not only the body or the physical health but as well the psychological health, so I started to study Pilates and attended my course with a canadian school which is STOTT Pilates, then I started my career and then I opened my studio,” explained Abd ElMotaleb.

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Practicing any of these sports requires focus and attention. But one of the reasons why people are driven towards trying them out is their social aspect. Whether it is attending a Pilates class, a Padel match, or going to a Surf Skating ramp, anyone is guaranteed to make new lasting friends.

“After COVID the game started to become a hangout for everyone. Everyone wanted to hangout and exercise and play Padel. The game evolved in Egypt very fast and now there's an Egyptian federation for padel and it's becoming very popular for people to play it professionally not only as a hangout,” said Omar.

These sports benefit not only non-athletes, but also athletes alike. Surf Skating aids surfers in practicing techniques away from the ocean, Pilates serves as rehabilitation for injuries and muscle strengthening, and Padel helps racket sports players refine techniques and strategies.

Their similar, yet different approaches to traditional sports allow for athletes to prepare for their main sport in different and unique ways to enhance their performance.

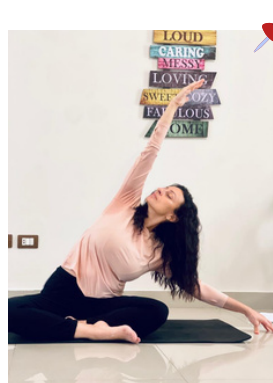
“Before our surfing trips abroad with Surf Camp Egypt, we usually encourage people to come and practice here so that they can be ready when we go over there, at least they'll have some practice in for their stands, their turns, so when they get in the water it's actually one less thing that they have to worry about,” said Omar ElSobky, owner of Amped Egypt and Surf Camp Egypt.

Overall, many Egyptians find these sports interesting, beneficial, and freeing. They believe these sports deserve more recognition and want their community to grow in Egypt.

“I think it's a really interesting sport and I think it should grow, the community should grow, it's really good, it makes you feel a lot freer,” said Leila Aziz, an instructor at both Surf Camp Egypt and Amped Egypt.



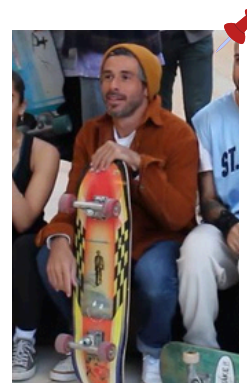
Ziad Omar



Cinderella AbdelMotaleb



Leila Aziz



Omar Sobky

Movie Review: Soul Surfer

Soul Surfer is an inspiring movie based on the real life of American surfer and writer Bethany Hamilton. From a young aspiring surfer, to a heartbreaking story about tragedy and loss, to a powerful journey of resilience and ambition.

Starring as Bethany Hamilton is Anna Sophia Robb. The cast includes Dennis Quaid as Tom Hamilton and Helen Hunt as Cheri Hamilton, Bethany's devoted and loving parents. Playing Sarah Hill, Hamilton's youth leader, is the renowned Carrie Underwood.

Bethany Hamilton (Robb) is a 13 year old talented surfer, it is a part of her identity and daily routine. As she was surfing on a beach in Kauai, Hawaii she got attacked by a shark, resulting in the loss of her left arm. Nonetheless, she finds a way to get back on her board and compete.

Bethany (Robb) goes through extreme physical and emotional turmoil in order to get back to competing. Since her attack she has caught the attention of many people, from magazines to news outlets, to medical experts approaching her to participate in experiments and photoshoots.

The movie takes the audience through the journey of not only Bethany (Robb) herself and the many struggles she faced after coming out of surgery, but also her parent's (Quaid and Hunt) determination to help her in every way possible; their encouragement, support and confidence in her capabilities.

Beyond the personal barriers that appear after such an unexpected turn of events, more major societal issues are discussed. Athletes with disabilities struggle to feel equal to others, they face skepticism, judgment and condescending comments from peers as well as from coaches.

An important storyline in Soul Surfer is about faith. After Bethany's (Robb) surgery she struggled with the reason why this happened to her. Her youth leader, Sarah Hill (Underwood) guided her to believe that there is something positive that she can get out of this situation.

This movie takes the viewer on an emotional rollercoaster. Watching it is a thought-provoking journey about the importance of having a supportive community, supporting others, self-love and the power of determination. It is a message about hope and an invitation to dream and believe.

Soul Surfer is recommended to sports drama fans who connect more to a movie when it is based on real-life. While it tackles difficult themes, it is appropriate for young viewers who will definitely learn important lessons from Bethany Hamilton's story. Reviewers give it an 8/10.

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WHAT TO EXPECT

