

**ACTIVITY:** Surfing, sitting on his board

**CASE:** GSAF 1996.06.04 / SA-426

**DATE:** Tuesday June 4, 1996

**LOCATION:** The incident took place in the Indian Ocean at LaMercy Beach, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. La Mercy is a kilometre south of the Umhloti River and 17 kilometres north of Durban Harbour.



*La Mercy Beach*

**NAME:** Justin Sanders

**DESCRIPTION:** The surfer is the National Junior Surfing Champion.

### **BACKGROUND**

**MOON PHASE:** Waning Gibbous, 91% of the Moon was illuminated. Full Moon, June 1, 1996.

**SEA CONDITIONS:** Sanders described the surf as “perfect three- to four-foot barrels”.

**ENVIRONMENT:** A pod of dolphins passed just as Sanders arrived at the beach.

**NARRATIVE:** Justin Sanders had been in the water about ten minutes and was sitting on his board when he saw a large dark shadow moving toward him below the surface:

“At first I thought it was a baby whale, but only when it swam right under my board did I realize it was a shark. Two friends, Clint Spinelli and Kevin Freel were close by me and I just froze up. They turned and paddled in.

“The shark turned and slowly came back towards me and bumped me off my board. I climbed back on and it circled me for five or six more times before turning away and disappearing into deeper water. Eventually all I could see was its wake. I started paddling in just praying that it wouldn’t come back, but it did and circled me one more time before moving off again for good.

“I thought it was going to be the end of my life. It was the worst and closest experience to death I’ve ever had. People say you must punch or poke the shark in the eye. Let me tell you that’s rubbish! You can’t do anything, they’re so big and powerful it’s like they’re invincible. There’s nothing you can do, if he wants you he’ll have you.”

**INJURY:** No injury. The surfer’s board was bumped by the shark. The surfer reached shore, shaken but unharmed.

**SPECIES INVOLVED:** The surfer estimated the shark to be three to four metres total length, “and about a half-metre wide.”

**SOURCE:** *Zig Zag* surfing magazine

**CASE INVESTIGATOR:** Andrew Gifford, Shark Research Institute