



**ACTIVITY:** Surfing

**CASE:** [GSAF 1988.10.22](#)

**DATE:** Saturday October 22, 1988

**LOCATION:** The incident took place at Surfers Point, Phillip Island, Victoria, Australia.

**NAME:** John Wonham (or Wosnam)

**DESCRIPTION:** He is a 38-year-old male from Kurnell and had been surfing for 20 years.

**BACKGROUND:**

**MOON PHASE:** Full Moon, October 25, 1988

**NARRATIVE:** The incident took place during a surfing competition. The surf brushed past one competitor as he was paddling back out, then attacked Wosman a few moments later. "The shark just came at me from behind," Wonham said. "It was hanging on to my leg and I just wanted to get it away from me." The surfer repeatedly punched and kicked the shark in the head and snout until it released him. He returned to shore unassisted. The event was ended and plans were made to continue the competition next day and another beach.

**INJURY:** The surfer sustained lacerations to his right calf.

**TREATMENT:** The surfer was taken to the hospital where more than 50 stitches were required to repair the injury.

**SPECIES:** Not identified. The shark was thought to be about seven feet in length.

**SOURCES:** Miami Herald, October 25, 1988, Page 8A  
The Valley Independent, (Monessen, Pennsylvania), Monday October 24, 1988. et al.

## Shark attack leaves surfer unimpressed

By TOBY DARVALL

Many shark stories have been told in Phillip Island's Isle of Wight Hotel in its 64-year history, but few as vivid as that told by Mr John Wonham on Saturday night.

Mr Wonham, in his late 30s, reclined in a chair and told how six hours earlier a one-and-a-half-metre shark had savaged his right lower leg while he was surfing. The shark had dragged its teeth across his lower calf, leaving gashes that required 31 stitches.

Mr Wonham, who lives in the Sydney suburb of Kurnell, was a member of the New South Wales team competing in the National Malibu Championships at Surfers Point on Phillip Island. While he was sitting on his surfboard waiting for a wave, the shark pushed its way on to the back of his board and bit his leg.

Mr Wonham managed to kick the shark off and paddled ashore. He was taken to Frankston Hospital and discharged three hours later.

"It attacked me from behind and I didn't realise what had happened until I turned around," Mr Wonham said. "It happened so fast. I turned around and gave it a couple of kicks. Then all I wanted to do was get in.

"I knew I hadn't lost my leg because I could see what was going on."

As a result of the attack, the competition was switched to Summerlands Beach.

Despite his injuries, Mr Wonham said he would "be back".

*The Age, Monday October 24, 1988, page 3*

8A The Miami Herald / Tuesday, October 25, 1988

## Surfer is badly gashed in attack, but escapes from 7-foot shark

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punching it in the snout.

John Wonham's right leg required 31 stitches after Saturday's attack.

The 38-year-old Wonham said he struck the shark repeatedly with his fists.

## Attacked by shark

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## Man punches shark; survives mauling

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Wonham, 38, a surfer for 20 years, was attacked during a veteran's long board competition off Phillip Island in the state of Victoria.

"The shark just came at me from behind," Wonham told reporters. "It was hanging on to my leg and I just wanted to get it away from me. I knocked it on the head and kicked at it. It didn't come back."

## Shark attack interrupts surf titles

MELBOURNE: The Australian malibu surfing titles were interrupted at Surfies Point yesterday when a shark attacked Masters competitor John Wosnam.

The one-and-a-half metre shark brushed past Malcolm Gregson as he was paddling back out and then attacked Wosnam a few minutes later.

Wosnam got to the beach under his own power and was taken to hospital for treatment to his calf which required more than 50 stitches.

The attack brought a premature end to the day's events which will be completed today at another beach.

Nine-foot classic malibu events in open, women's and veteran's divisions were held to bring the competition to the semi-final stage.

In the women's long board, the semi-finalists were Sandy Carlton, Lewis White, Colleen Branch, Sally Paxton (all Queensland) Karen Dews (Tas) and Terri Mares (NSW).

The nine-foot open classic malibu semi-finalists were Wayne Dean, Albie Curtis and Jamie Brownlie (all Qld) Norm Brokenbrough, Peter Hudson and Jeff Fanning (all NSW), Graeme Slade and Steve Friedman (both Vic).

*The Canberra Times, October 23, 1988, page 16*