

Water ski tour pairs best with the rest

By Nick Hodge
Staff Reporter

Hot-shot local water skiers will have a chance to compare themselves to professionals this weekend, when 30 world-class skiers will be in Lincoln.

The 1988 Coors Light Water Ski Tour presents the Hy-Vee Tournament of Champions this Saturday and Sunday from noon to 5 p.m. at Capitol Beach Lake. The tour, in its fifth season, features world-class skiers pitted against each other in the world's only professional and cash prize circuit.

The 11-city tour, making its first stop in Lincoln, showcases top skiers from nine nations in five different events — eight in men's slalom, four in women's slalom, eight in men's long distance jumping, four in women's long distance jumping and four in freestyle jumping.

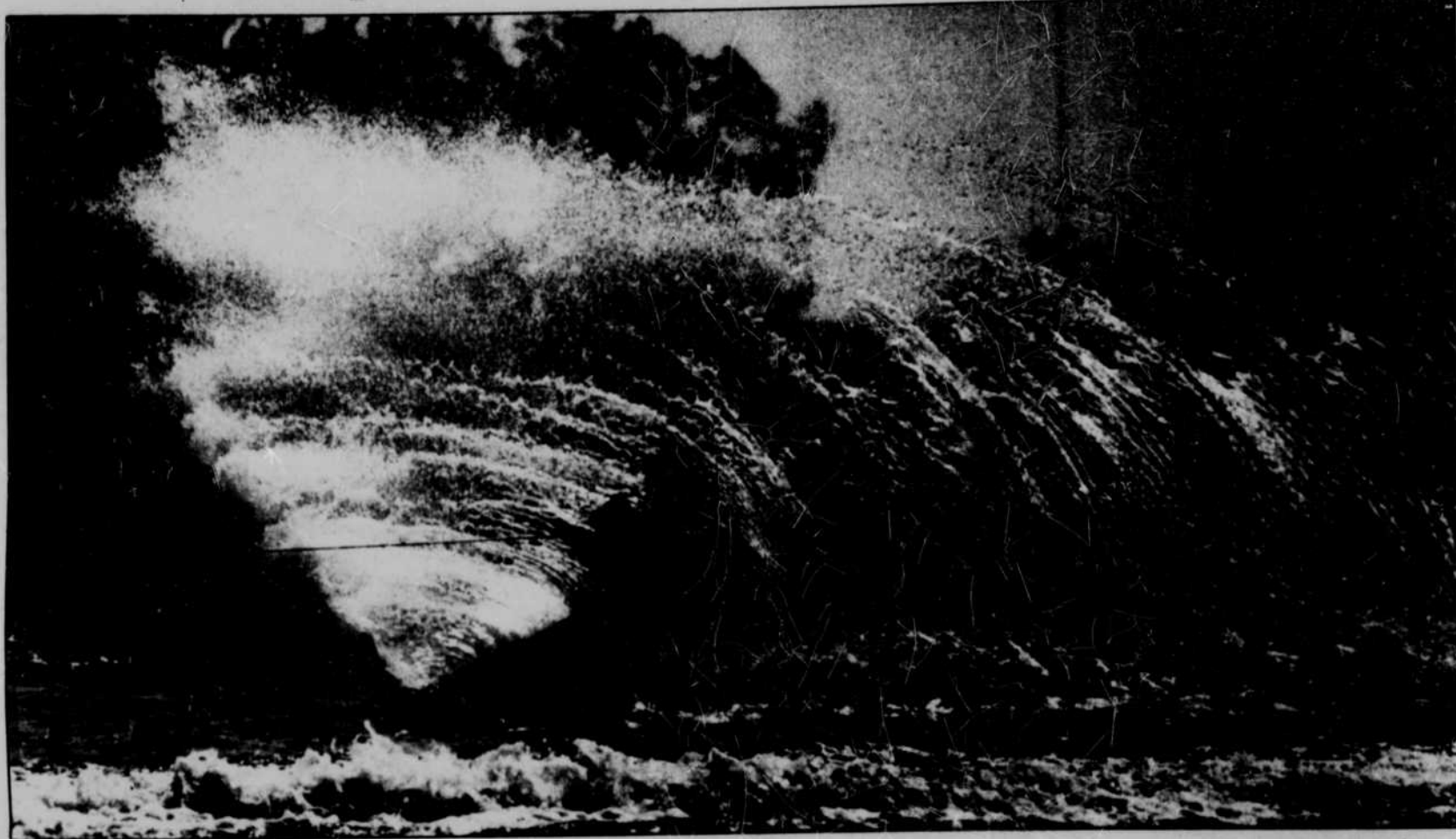
Tickets for this weekend's tournament action may be purchased at any Hy-Vee Food Stores and Burden's Outdoor Outfitters.

One of the tour's top skiers, Mike Hazelwood, holds the world and tour distance jump record of 203 feet set in 1986. Hazelwood does not believe the sport of water skiing has gotten the public attention it deserves.

"There are more water skiers than golfers, but golf gets more public attention and media coverage," Hazelwood said. "People need to get into the competitive side of skiing and find out how much fun it really is."

"People should come out and see a competition. Most people think water skiing is something you only do to cool off and have a good time. It gets boring just whacking golf balls down the course, so people need to compete to get the most fun out of it."

Hazelwood, a native of Lin-



Eric Gregory/Daily Nebraskan

Ron Bonebright is silhouetted in front of a wall of water as he makes a run through the slalom course set up at Capitol Beach for a stop of the 1988 Coors Light Water Ski Tour on July 23 and 24.

colnshire, Eng., who now lives in Leesburg, Fla., said more people need to go beyond the leisure sport of water skiing and become active in competitive skiing.

"It's more fun to slalom and jump and freestyle when skiing than simply being pulled around behind a boat," Hazelwood said. "If people do more

stuff when they ski, they'll get more interested."

Hazelwood, 30, began skiing in most U.S. water ski tournaments when he was 21. He first skied when he was eight years old in a gravel pit near his family's residence in England. He came to the United States at the age of 17 to train. He entered his

first tournament, the U.S. Masters in Georgia, when he was 18.

Hazelwood said his age is both a help and a hindrance at the professional level.

"It helps in that I have the experience in knowing what to do in most situations," Hazelwood said. "I'm not as fast as when I was 21, but I know how to train. I do have to be more careful at my age."

Hazelwood, the men's long distance jump champion of the tour the past two seasons, was last season's overall male leading money winner with \$18,850. Over the last three seasons, Hazelwood, who also competes in slalom, has won \$55,570.

Hazelwood said he and Sammy Duvall, his top competitor on the tour, have been jumping head to head since 1979.

"Sammy's jumping really well right now," Hazelwood said. "He's won all but one meet this year."

Hazelwood said he enjoys skiing and will stay with the tour as long as he can.

"I'm taking one year at a time," he said. "I enjoy the tour and skiing as a living. It's a good job with my sponsors, and I'll ski until I'm forced to quit by injury or somebody beats me out."

Hazelwood aggravated a hereditary lower back problem last season, which has hindered his performance so far this season.

"I'm about 80 percent now, but I'm on a weight program to help build up my strength," he said. "My dis-

ances have been lower this year, so I'm really looking forward to a good year next season."

Hazelwood said he feels healthier for this weekend's tournament in Lincoln, but plans to train hard in the off-season.

"I feel pretty good," Hazelwood said. "I feel quite strong and will be going for the win."

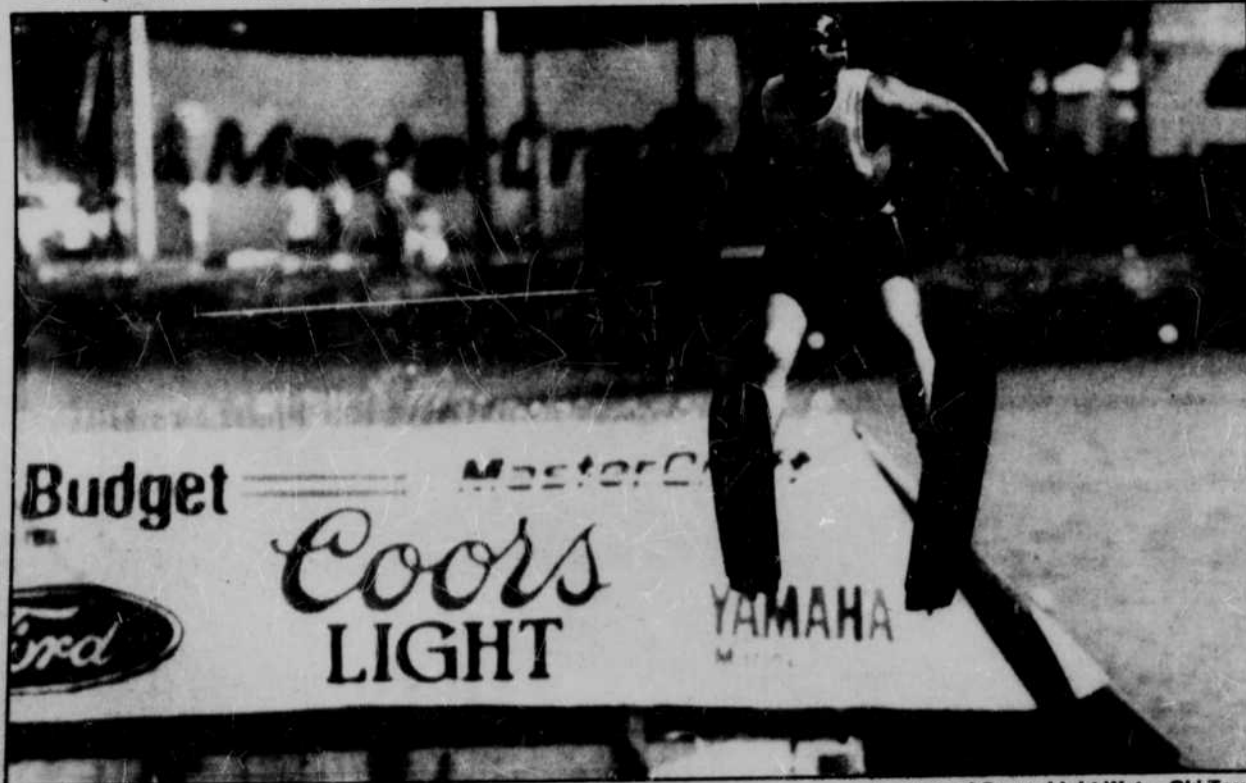
"I'm going to go straight to the weights once this season is over to help get myself healthy and back into shape," he said. "It's good for young skiers to ski year around, but at my age you need to get yourself into the right physical condition and mental state of mind."

Business obligations have kept Hazelwood from competing in all the tour's meets this season, which is a problem he hopes to avoid next year, Hazelwood said. He owns and operates the Mike Hazelwood Ski School in Leesburg.

"My ski school takes up quite a bit of my time — more than I thought it would this year," he said. "Next year I hope to get some help, but it's good to be training other people."

Hazelwood said that getting the opportunity to travel across the United States has its advantages and disadvantages.

"It's good to travel and see all the cities because it's what I like doing," Hazelwood said. "Skiing is what I like to do. But, traveling is tough. If anything stops me from skiing, it's the traveling. It makes it tough to stay in shape."



Courtesy of Coors Light Water Ski Tour

Mike Hazelwood shows the jumping form which helped him set a Distance Jumping World Record of 203 feet.