

Riding High

SURFER Brittani Nicholl is used to making a splash – just not in the newspaper.

"I did the story (for the *Gold Coast Bulletin*) and wasn't even sure it would make it in to the paper. The next day I walked in to the newsagents and saw a big picture of me on the front page. I didn't expect that," Brittani said.

The modest 18-year-old Queenslander, who also appears on *Inside Insight's* inaugural cover, was promoting the Stradbroke Ferries surfing competition, where she competed last month as a member of the Cabarita Boardriders. She also spoke openly about her experiences with Crohn's disease, which she was diagnosed with 11 years ago.

"It's good to get a positive image out there and to show people we are not always sick. You have your tough times, but you have your good times too," she said.

The Tweed Coast resident won her heat, and helped her team to finish sixth overall. She was also awarded a prize for the best wave, judged a nine-point ride. After undergoing an ileostomy last year, Brittani is back to full health and is again able to compete on an equal footing. "Having the bag has been a big help ... And I am taking humira and have noticed changes, things are getting better," she said. "Being healthy is a big factor. You can compete with everyone out there. It's just who is the best out there on the day. When I am in the water, it's the only time I forget about it (Crohn's)."

Brittani said her decision to be open about her illness had helped her develop a healthy attitude to life, and she hoped it would help others too. "I spoke to a girl on the internet and she was saying how I was a hero and such an inspiration. She said it's hard to believe you can be so open about having a bag. But as I said to her, you can't help that you have got it. There is no use hiding it," Brittani said. And while she remembered how "scary" the prospect of the ileostomy was, Brittani now describes it as "the best decision I ever made".

The newspaper story and Brittani's openness inspired the family of a newly-diagnosed Crohn's sufferer to contact her for advice. "That was good ... It just shows you can put a smile on someone's face just by doing what you do," she said. With all the national competitions finished for the year, Brittani is focusing on her next goal: making the headlines for qualifying for the pro-surfing circuit.