



Bruce Asato/The Honolulu Advertiser

The Lanikai senior men's crew — here en route to a record-setting performance in last October's Molokai Hoe — has been dominating canoe regattas for the past four years. This year, the men have led Lanikai to victories in three of four Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association regattas.

# Lanikai turns the tide

Senior men's crew is at the heart of club's sudden surge

**By Dayton Morinaga**  
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Thanks in large part to its men, Lanikai Canoe Club is paddling on a wave of confidence that it hopes to ride all the way to the state championship.

After not winning a regatta in 24 years, Lanikai has emerged on top in three of four Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association regattas this season. Tomorrow at Waikiki Beach, Lanikai tries to add the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta to its growing list of victories.

"The emergence of our women and

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**"We were almost ready to disintegrate . . . But a couple of the older guys held the club together and got us back."**

— **John Foti**  
Lanikai paddler for 24 years

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kids are the main reason why we've done this well this year," said head coach Bob Puakea. "But the men

have always been, and still are, our strength."

Indeed. In the senior men's division — considered the top division in canoe regattas — Lanikai is the four-time defending state champion. Last October, those same men won the prestigious Molokai Hoe in record time.

Now, veteran Lanikai paddler John Foti said the crew feels like every race it enters is theirs.

"It's just going out to the line and knowing you're going to win it," Foti said. "You just know it."

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# Lanikai: Senior men at heart of club's surge

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It wasn't always that way. Foti, who has been a member of Lanikai for 24 years, remembers the tough times.

"We were almost ready to disintegrate," he said. "It was right on the verge. But a couple of the older guys held the club together and got us back."

Through it all, a group of guys refused to wear anything but Lanikai's green and white jerseys. Born and raised in the area, Foti and his brother Jim, Mike Smith, Kalani Irvine, Rocky Owens and Bo Eastabrooks joined Lanikai in the late 1970s and have never paddled for any other club. Today, they are the core of the senior men's crew.

"We were tempted," Foti said. "A lot of people would say, 'Come paddle for us.' Some of the coaches from other clubs approached us."

But, as Foti put it: "We had a lot of pride and we were a bunch of hardheads. Maybe it was kind of stupid in a lot of ways, but we decided to stick it out on our own."

In the lean years — which was practically the entire 1980s — that meant a lot of struggle. Without enough coaches to go around, Lanikai's men guided themselves. Without enough money, they used outdated canoes and paddles.

"We had no idea what we were doing," Foti said. "But as the years went by, we learned through trial and error."

What they lacked in knowledge and equipment, they made up for in persistence. Still, something was missing.

"We didn't believe in ourselves," Foti said. "A lot of times we would jump out to a lead, but it was like Outrigger knew they would reel us in."

And most times they did. But about five years ago, the trend started to turn. Rich Lambert, Bobby Nottage and Mike Pederson joined the Lanikai men. Soon after, Lanikai was dominating.

"Believing you can do it has a lot to do with success," Lambert said. "We used to have a mental block that we'd always lose to Outrigger. Now, we believe that the other teams have to beat us."

In the past four years, the Lanikai senior men have been virtually unbeatable. In fact, the only regatta Lanikai did not win this season came three weeks ago when the senior men were in Australia competing in the Hamilton Cup.

The trade-off proved to be worthwhile, however, as Lanikai won the two top races for men in the Hamilton Cup. The contest included many of the world's top paddlers.

"The fact that we're now starting to become successful in international contests can only help the club," Foti said.

Added Eastabrooks: "There seems to be a winning energy and a real deep sense of pride now. Hopefully, it will ride for a while."