

Unstoppable

Outrigger's girls 16 crew owns an impressive win streak that goes back more than three years

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Outrigger Canoe Club's girls 16 crew, from left, Suzanna Bradley, Kiele Schwinn, Kaimi Yoza, steersman Al Van Gieson, Ellen Ashford and Alyssa Basdavanos kept their win streak alive with a victory Thursday at the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta in Waikiki.



As throngs of paddlers and spectators packed Waikiki Beach to enjoy Thursday's holiday amidst the surf, sand and sun, Outrigger Canoe Club's girls 16 crew was hard at work.

The crew of Kiele Schwinn, Ellen Ashford, Suzanna Bradley, Alyssa Basdavanos, Kaimi Yoza and Alfred Van Gieson completed the 1/2-mile race in 3 minutes, 58.97 seconds and extended an impressive unbeaten streak in the process.

"We've been together for a really long time, and we wanted to keep it up. We've been working really hard, and like to win," said Yoza, who has been paddling since age 10. "We work hard in the weight room, and hit it hard in practice. This is our biggest race of the year in our home waters."

The same group of girls has strung together an undefeated run spanning more than three years, going back to when the keiki paddled in the girls 14 division. The crew's lone loss during the streak came three years ago at the Walter J. Macfarlane Regatta, an exhibition contest that did not blemish the undefeated mark.

"The girls get along really well, and they've embraced the program we run here," said Bobby Yoza, Kaimi's father and coach of the Outrigger girls 16 and 18 crews. "They put in the extra work we ask of them, including training in the weight room and surfing outside of practice. It's very special, and it's a race we definitely wanted to win."

Paddlers braved humid conditions and surf that escalated as the day went on, but Outrigger rode the swells to victory Thursday at the Oahu

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Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association's 71st annual Macfarlane Regatta.

OHCRA's traditional July 4 event was held in the waters fronting the iconic Royal Hawaiian and Outrigger hotels as thousands of spectators looked on from the beach and hotel balconies.

Outrigger and Lanikai have combined to win the last 20 Macfarlane regattas. Outrigger has now claimed eight victories in that span.

"Not only is this the Macfarlane Regatta and the Fourth of July, but it also represents that we're still free and we are able to celebrate that in a great country and a great state," Bobby Yoza said.

The regatta served as an exhibition and had no bearing on the organization's cumulative point standings, which determine state championship berths. The Macfarlane is traditionally a favorite of many paddlers, with a course set up perpendicular to the shore, allowing crews to catch ocean bumps as they race toward the finish line.

Thursday's races were often won and lost based on catching the right wave at the right time, and many crews used the open steering exemption, which allows experienced steersmen to paddle in as many races as necessary to help the club keep its paddlers and canoes safe. In the early afternoon, as the tide crept in, waves increased in height and frequency, sporadically swamping canoes as crews zigzagged to avoid hitting the walls of water head on.

The perpetual Senior Women's Bowl and Walter Macfarlane Memorial Trophy were awarded to the victorious crews in the 1 1/2-mile women's and men's senior races. The respective winners in both contests from Lanikai were awarded the trophies in a post-race ceremony fronting Duke's, which now stands in the area formerly occupied by the Outrigger Canoe Club's original headquarters. Following tradition, the winning crew members took sips of champagne from the cups topping both trophies.

Lanikai outlasted Hui Nalu to win the men's senior event, a victory made possible in part by Keahiakahoe — the would-be winner, which led wire to wire — and Kailua both earning disqualifications after running over flags marking the race's second of five turns. The engaged crowd

on the beach groaned collectively as Keahiakahoe buried the flag, but the crew finished the race despite realizing it would not factor in the official outcome.

Lanikai's crew of Chauncey Cody, Manny Kulukulualani, Matt Crowley, Tapa Worthington, John Foti and Kekoa Bruhn took home the hardware, completing the course in 11 minutes, 18.07 seconds, while Hui Nalu finished 2.8 seconds off the lead time.

The Lanikai women completed the senior sweep, as Jenna Strapple, Ingrid Seiple, Jami Strapple, Vai Sunaoka, Brittney Keith and Jim Foti crossed the line in 11:41.78 seconds to edge host Outrigger by four seconds.

The day's final event featured members of the armed forces competing in a special Independence Day competition for bragging rights. Various clubs sponsored a branch of the military that in turn used that club's canoe and an experienced steersperson. The quarter-mile exhibition featured seven canoes as participating paddlers were lauded for their service to the country.

Outrigger's victory netted the club its first AAA Division (27-39 crews entered) title of the season with 191 points, while Lanikai (157 points), Hui Nalu (134 points) and Kailua (124 points) rounded out the large division.

Keahiakahoe claimed the AA Division (14-26 crews entered) crown with 75 points, while Healani dominated the A Division (1-13 crews entered) with 41 points.

OHCRA clubs have the weekend off and return to action July 14 at Kaneohe Bay for the annual John D. Kaupiko Regatta. The Na 'Ohana O Na Hui Waa organization returns to action Sunday at Keehi Lagoon for the Koa Kai regatta.