

Tahitians, Tahitians, Tahitians, T

By MARK OSMUN

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History has its sacred storms that come at the last moment and save a nation by wiping out the enemy's fleet. Providence was not so kind yesterday to the nation of Hawaiian outrigger canoe paddlers, who saw their 24-year domination of the Molokai-to-Oahu Canoe Race buried by a fleet of Tahitian paddlers.

THE TAHITIANS took the first four places in yesterday's race which finished at Ala Wai Harbor among thousands of fans. The winning Te Oropaa crew came in approximately three miles ahead of Kaihua, the first Hawaiian finisher.

The much-heralded Tahitians made good the early predictions that they would excel in calm water, covering the 55.6-mile course in 7 hours, 53 minutes and 40 seconds.

Saturday night, nearly all the Hawaiian crews went to bed hoping, despite contrary weather reports, that the channel would rage the next day. The thinking was that low-draft boats and the smooth-water style of the visitors would suffer most in rough water.

However, in the darkness before yesterday's 6 a.m. start, there was placid water, faint wind, and a moon grinning through clear skies like a malevolent cheshire cat.

THE STARTING LINE off the Kuanakakai Pier stretched perhaps a half-mile, having to accommodate the record field of 35 canoes. It also afforded the local paddlers their last look at the Te Oropaa crew for the following eight hours.

Neatly one-third of the race was in the sheltered waters off the Molokai coast. And before 20 minutes had passed, the winners had put about a quarter-mile between them and the pack. Most paddlers expected the Tahitians to do well before reaching the channel, though they also hoped the visitors' lead might dwindle in the rougher waters. But the channel was little worse.

When the first Tahitians had reached the channel, the pack was rounding Hale O Lono, some four miles back. When they reached mid-channel, they were so far ahead that the next boats could not be sighted even with binoculars.

What amazes those who have learned to paddle in Hawaii is that the Tahitians do everything "wrong," yet win by incredible margins.

THEY DON'T BEND down while taking a stroke; their strokes are short; and when they substitute paddlers, their boat comes to a dead halt.

They even defy logic. At the start, both Te Oropaa and the Outrigger-Canoe Club

paddled at 52 strokes-per-minute. Since Outrigger used a much longer stroke, it should have been moving faster. Yet the Tahitians pulled away.

"They practice three times a day; go spend two weeks on an island away from their families to train . . . they're just too strong for us," said Russ Wilbur-of-Kaihua.

"We are well trained. We have a nice canoe. We know how to race better this time," said John Oabilou of the winning team. "Our changes (substitutions) are better."

While their four months of training actually did little to improve their changes, it did wonders for their paddling.

OVERALL

1—Te Oropaa 7:53:40. 2—Maire Nui 1:8:55:04. 3—Kaihua, 8:16:02. 4—Maire Nui 11:8:17:40. 5—Kaihua, 8:18:16. 6—Teve, 8:24:00. 7—Outrigger, 8:26:30. 8—Ke Au Hou, 8:31:16. 9—Bare Matai, 8:31:36. 10—Loeward Kai, 8:32:00.

Race results:

KOA

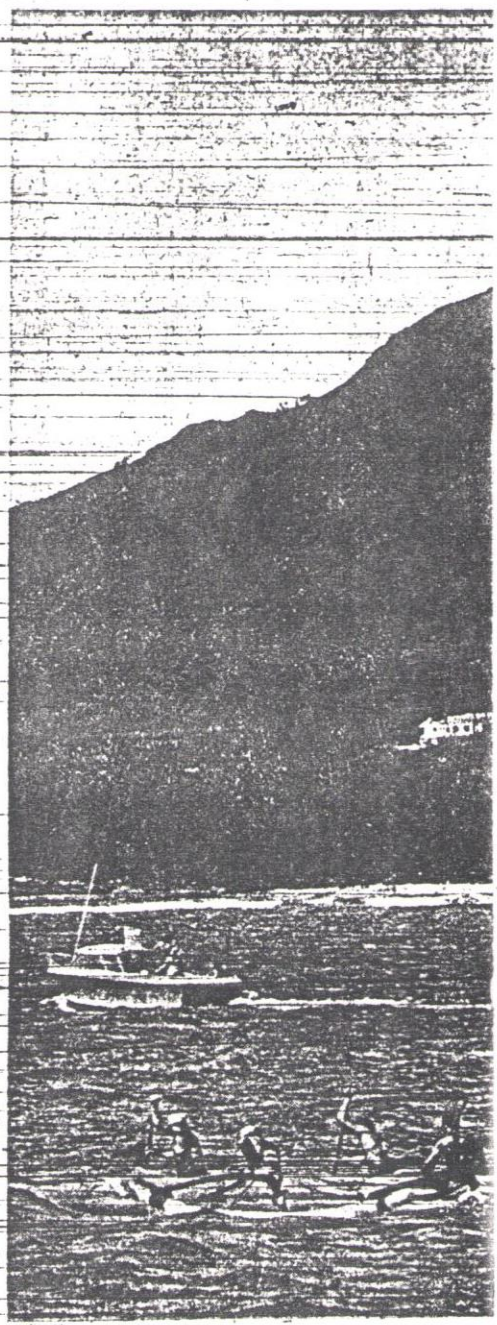
1—Maire Nui 1, 8:05:04. 2—Outrigger CC, 8:28:46. 3—Te Oropaa, 8:32:57. 4—Lanikai, 8:35:49. 5—Waikiki Surf, 8:39:46. 6—Bare Matai, 8:40:40. 7—Honolulu, 8:42:47. 8—Mokohai, 9:28:24. 9—Kuaei, 9:43:45.

HON-KOA

1—Te Oropaa 1, 7:53:40. 2—Kaihua, 8:16:02. 3—Maire Nui 9, 8:17:40. 4—Kaihua, 8:22:14. 5—Teve, 8:24:50. 6—Ahanui Wae o Ke Au Hou, 8:31:16. 7—Bare Matai 1, 8:31:36. 8—Loeward Kai, 8:32:00. 9—Imua, 8:34:55. 10—Hawaiian Warrior, 8:35:48. 11—Lanaina, 8:45:01. 12—Loe o, 8:49:02. 13—Moi Moku, 8:53:12. 14—Bare Matai 2, 8:55:16. 15—Honolulu Clinic, 9:50:25. 16—Waikiki Beach Boys, 9:08:32. 17—Arue Ka Oia, 9:10:42. 18—Kai Ohi, 9:12:45. 19—Kauaou Outrigger, 9:25:12. 20—Kai Moku, 9:31:41. 21—Makiki o Kama, 9:35:22. 22—Kamoharua, 9:43:11. 23—Moana Kai, 9:52:37. 24—Honolulu, 9:58:54. 25—Waikiki Surf, 9:58:13. 26—Ewa Beach, 10:20:12.



Advertiser photo by Gregory Yamamoto



A dejected and-exhausted Outrigger Canoe Club crew demonstrates the effects of paddling full-speed 55.6 miles across the Molokai Channel yesterday. They finished seventh overall.

The Te Oropaa canoe passes Diamond Head on the way Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race, leading a