

The Outrigger

OUTRIGGER CANOE CLUB

OUTRIGGER BEACH AT DIAMOND HEAD, HONOLULU, HAWAII

NOVEMBER 1977

Outrigger Canoe Club Paddlers win the Big One!

by Tim Guard

Sorry, Teiki Tamari, there's no tomorrow, no next week, no next month. Come back to Hawaii next October, however, if you want another shot at winning the Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race.

Teiki Tamari is a Tahitian paddler and the official apologist for the Maire Nui entry in the annual 42-mile Aloha Week marathon paddle. According to Tamari, the second place Tahitians were beset by problems from the outset of the fall classic from Hale O Lono on Molokai to Magic Island. That was the basis, he said, for challenging the Outrigger to a rematch, presumably a week or two after the official running of the October 16th event.

Obviously the Outrigger declined Teiki Tamari's challenge.

As OCC paddler Mark Buck put it: "You run what you bring, brother, and if you aren't ready on the day of the big race, you have a year to think about getting ready for the next one."

Outrigger's veteran-laden crew obviously had it all together as the starter's flag dropped to signal the commencement of the 1977 Aloha Week classic. When 49 crews surged

away from the starting line at 7:00 a.m., Outrigger's red-and-yellow Manu 'Ula (Red Bird) picked up a small, feathering swell and immediately gained a two boat length advantage over its closest pursuers. And as the crews sprinted down Molokai's southeastern shore towards Laau Point and the Molokai Channel itself, Outrigger's lead increased first to a hundred yards, then two hundred, finally a quarter mile of open water at the point. Already the outcome of the race had been determined, though five and one half hours of hard paddling were left and the Tahitians were not yet aware they had met their match.

In fact, some seven miles out from Hale O Lono, the Maire Nui team mounted a furious challenge, and by raising their stroke to 60 beats a minute, the onrushing Tahitians ate away at Outrigger's lead until only four or five boat lengths separated the two canoes. A re-run of a 1975 encounter with the very same Tahitian crew was uppermost in coach Tom Conner's mind.

"We paddled side-by-side with Maire Nui for over 20 miles in the 1975 race," Conner reflected. "It was

mentally and physically exhausting, and it was simply a matter of time before one of us cracked. Luckily the Tahitians cracked first. At all costs I wanted to avoid another long duel with them. I figured our best strategy, then, was to throw a few more coals on the fire to see if we could bury them early in the race."

Conner's strategy proved to be flawless. By calling on his paddlers to up their pace to a virtual sprint, and by exhorting them to draw upon their reservoirs of "carbohydrate" energy, Conner led the charge that moved the Manu 'Ula into a clear lead, by a margin that grew by a hundred yards with each passing mile.

Now Maire Nui was in disarray. Relief paddlers tore holes in the boat's nylon splash cover as they hastily tried to board the canoe. Maire Nui's steersman, obviously unaccustomed to the rough, open-ocean conditions prevailing in the channel, was hard-pressed to keep his canoe from sliding erratically down the sides of the wind driven swells. But the greatest error of all occurred when Maire Nui turned

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Victorious OCC crew finishing
Crew members (bow to stern): Tom Conner,
Marshall Rosa, John Finney, Tim Guard,
Mark Buck, Brant Ackerman
Star-Bulletin photo, John Titchen





Lei-bedecked Outrigger crew at Magic Island. Front row, l/r: Brant Ackerman; Aaron Young; Marshall Rosa; Mark Buck; Don Maifer. Back row, l/r: Tom Conner; Colin Perry; Ed Pickering; Jay West; Tim Guard; John Finney. Photo Scoop

towards the north in hopes of finding a favorable current inshore along the Koko Head cliffs. Instead, Maire Nui found itself caught in a strong current running towards Makapuu which only served to compound the lengthening disadvantage.

As the Outrigger made landfall off Black Point, a growing armada of pleasure boats joined up to escort the leader towards the finish line. By now OCC's lead had grown to nearly three miles. The margin was so convincing that the final few miles of the race had no more urgency than one of the innumerable Sunday workouts that had preceded the race. Bouyed by the shouts and cheers from hundreds of wellwishers on the spectator boats, and then by an enormous roar of welcome from 8,000 people gathered at Magic Island, Manu 'Ula surged across the finish line at 12:55 p.m.

Maire Nui was a distant second, with two Hawaiian crews - Hui Nalu and Kailua Canoe Club - finishing third and fourth respectively.

For Brant Ackerman, OCC's super steersman, who gave an ironman performance throughout the race, the win was sweet revenge. "We waited and prepared all year long to redeem last year's loss," Ackerman said. "Everything our crew did this year focused on one goal: beating the Tahitians."

John Finney was the success story of the season. Paddling the summer season as a Novice "B", Finney went on to become one of the strongest

members of OCC's premier distance crew. In Finney's opinion the Molokai race is a vast undertaking and winning is an overwhelming accomplishment enjoyed by a select few paddlers. "It's my first Molokai race and, naturally, my first win, and I just might quit while I'm ahead," Finney mused.

This year's race was the 16th time Mark Buck has crossed the Molokai Channel in a canoe. He's been in the winning boat five times. For Buck, though, winning the 1977 race was the most satisfying experience in all his years as a paddler. "Our crew this year was better trained and better disciplined than any other I've ever paddled with. I know we could not have achieved our win without those qualities, either," Buck said. "The Tahitians are awesome, so when you finally beat them, you really know you've reached the summit."

For Tom Conner, OCC's coach and builder of the Manu 'Ula, Outrigger's win was the culmination of competition against the Tahitians which began in 1975. "We 'surprised' Tahiti in 1975," Conner said, "and they simply annihilated us last year. This year's race was a third and decisive meeting. We wanted to prove we were worthy to be called champions."

Other members of the crew were Colin Perry, Ed Pickering, Jay West, Marshall Rosa, and Tim Guard.

