

California rules the waves

Off Shore shatters Molokai record

By Stephen Tsai
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The Molokai Ho'e is supposed to be the marathon of outrigger canoe paddling, but Off Shore Canoe Club of California yesterday treated it like a sprint, winning the 30th annual 40.8-mile men's Molokai-to-Oahu race in record time.

The nine-man Off Shore crew, using a borrowed koa boat, crossed the Fort DeRussy Beach finish line in five hours, 25 minutes and seven seconds, shattering the previous mark of 5:43:52 set in 1978 by another California outfit, the Blazing Paddles.

The pace was so fast that even the seventh-place crew, Hanalei Civic Canoe Club, bettered the 1978 record.

Another California crew, Imua, placed second in 5:29:53, followed by Ihilani of Tahiti. Defending champion Outrigger placed fourth and was the first Hawaii club to finish.

"It was a dog fight," said Off Shore captain Billy Whitford. "We just had the breaks, we just won the race."

The race was a fight from the start, with Off Shore and Imua battling for the lead. After three hours Imua held a slight lead.

Then, as the three crews approached Oahu's Windward side, Imua's chase boat began to experience engine trouble, forcing Imua's paddlers to go 55 minutes without a crew change. The normal interval is 15-20 minutes.

Offshore took advantage of Imua's problems, pushing its way to the front of the pack to take a lead it would not yield the rest of the way. Imua finished second with a time of 5:29:53.

Imua crew members Mike Swenson and Per Hurtig didn't use their chase boat trouble as an excuse. "We went 55 minutes without a change and

it hurt, but it wasn't the deciding factor," Swenson said.

"They were stronger than we were, but we kept the pace for the first two hours. We even had a two-minute lead," Hurtig said.

Kaiwi Channel was flat and glassy. The absence of large waves meant most teams had to paddle hard throughout the race and could not gain a breather by riding waves.

Whitford said despite the outcome of the race, his team would have preferred to paddle in rougher conditions. "It's a killer when you don't have Mother Nature behind you. It's just a grind," he said.

Teammate "Fast Eddie" Fraser agreed. "We thought it would be rough," Fraser said. "The weather was windy on Friday, but on Saturday it flattened out. Same as today.

"It was a horse race. For three hours they were leading us. Then we saw Imua going high, and we knew we couldn't stay with them there, so we went low. We played cat-and-mouse with them, it was the only thing that we could do."

Said Off Shore's Jay Kearny, "We wanted to be out to the Point (Molokai's Laau Point, where the crews can make their first changes) first, so there wouldn't be a lot of chop when people were changing boats."

While Imua claimed the second spot in the race using a fiberglass boat, the next two places went to clubs that raced with koa canoes.

Ihilani placed third with a time of 5:32:57 and the Outrigger, the defending champion, finished fourth, clocking 5:36:37.

OCC coach Walt Guild, who said his crew made few mistakes during the race, said he likes the move towards faster long distance races.

"We're not as fortunate as a lot of teams, since

we have a regular regatta season and we're separated," said Guild, a former University of Hawaii football player.

"With the California teams, their training and intensity is much more advanced," Guild said. "They've opened up the sport and raised it to a new competitive high. It'll be interesting to see people rise to that level in the next few years."

Rev. Abraham Akaka performed the benediction at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor before the start of the race. Lt. Gov. Jean King and A.E. "Toots" Minvielle, who founded the race 30 years ago, also attended the ceremonies.

Minvielle said he is pleased with the way the race has grown, this year having 41 entries.

"There were only three canoes in the first race," said Minvielle, who was the grand marshal of this year's race. "We didn't get much kokua from the people downtown. But look at it now, we have a team from Chicago. My God, imagine that. There's always room for improvement. I want this race to be to Hawaii what the Kentucky Derby is to Kentucky."

MOLOKAI HO'E RESULTS

1. Off Shore 5:25:07. 2. Imua 5:29:53. 3. Ihilani 5:32:57. 4. Outrigger 5:36:37. 5. Hiti Au Ote Ra 5:40:12. 6. Blazing Paddles 5:41:01. 7. Hanalei 5:42:35. 8. Naire Nui 5:46:17. 9. Pirae 5:46:27. 10. Lanikai 5:50:11.
11. Hul Nahu 5:52:21. 12. Koolau 5:56:11. 13. Ke'oua 5:56:19. 14. Hiloa Brigade 5:57:01. 15. Kamehameha (Hilo) 5:57:56. 16. Koolau 5:58:35. 17. Molokai 5:59:04. 18. Outrigger 5:59:35. 19. Lokahi 5:59:47. 20. Leeward Kai 6:04:40.
21. Napili 6:08:56. 22. Kailua 6:07:30. 23. Kiheti 6:08:34. 24. Koa Kai 6:08:56. 25. Healan 6:09:27. 26. Waikiki Surf 6:11:07. 27. Lanika 6:11:16. 28. Ka Mo'i 6:14:15. 29. Hul Lanika 6:15:56. 30. Hanalei 6:20:08.
31. Kamehameha (Oahu) 6:20:46. 32. Na Kai Ewalo 6:21:05. 33. Keolu 6:22:24. Windward Kai 6:24:45. 35. Lanikai 6:32:05. 36. Ka Mo'i 6:37:39. 37. Pohai Ke Aloha 6:40:25. 38. Kamehameha 6:44:08. 39. Hang Ohana 7:08:12. 40. Maunawili 7:24:40.