

OCC Captures Molokai-to-Oahu Race

By Jack Wyatt

Special to the Star-Bulletin

For Outrigger Canoe Club's coach Brant Ackerman, guiding his senior men to a successful regatta and long distance racing season was nice. Looking back, Ackerman said recently, it had been a good year.

But winning local canoe races are so hum when compared to what OCC pulled off yesterday. The Ackerman-led Outrigger crew won the prestigious Moloka'i Ho'e—the men's annual Moloka'i to Oahu canoe race. And that, according to most paddlers, is what Hawaiian outrigger canoe racing is all about.

"A higher stroke count and fewer mistakes won it for us," said the lei-laden Ackerman, who steered OCC's koa-constructed *Leilani* 40.6 miles across the bumpy channel. But an emotional Gib Bintliff, an OCC crewman, said it even better: "We won the race with team determination—for Outrigger and Hawaii."

With California's Offshore Canoe Club winning the Moloka'i Ho'e for the past two years—in 1981 in record time—some local crews felt discouraged, even asking, how can they compete against those Mainland all-stars? But Ackerman's marauders pulled together and did the job. They simply trained harder and tried harder than any other crew," said a bikini-clad OCC booster. And it paid off big with the best canoe racing prize of the season.

FORTY CREWS, FROM Canada, Tahiti, the Mainland and five Hawaiian islands, struck out from Moloka'i's Hale O Lono Harbor shortly after daybreak bound for Waikiki and the Ft. DeRussy finish. "Imua (Calif.) passed us in the smooth water just after our second crew change," Bintliff said, "but we got them back when they hit the rough water."

Powering across the choppy channel, Outrigger held off Imua, plus defending champ Offshore, finishing in a non-record five hours, 45 minutes, and nine seconds. "With the adverse current as we approached Koko Head," said OCC crewman Walter Guild, "a record crossing wasn't there." OCC finished 11:30 ahead of second place Offshore and 27 minutes in front of Imua. Offshore holds the record of 5:25.07.

In addition to steersman-coach Ackerman, OCC's winning crew included Henry Ayau, Gib Bintliff, Bill Bright, Walter Guild, Marc Haine, John Finney, Ed Pickering and Bob



Riley. "Now I can go back to living a normal family life," said Ackerman, clutching his 37-year-old son Aaron whom he hadn't seen in some time.

NO LONGER CAN the Moloka'i Ho'e be taken lightly. With more talented visitors and better trained local crews, winning will go to the best prepared crews making the fewest mistakes. "I've never seen better competition," said race follower Masa Takauchi. The leisurely Sunday paddle across the channel is apparently over.

Offshore made the mistake of gathering its Olympic kayak paddlers too late for the race. "Our athletes are scattered all over the country," said Offshore coach Billy Whitford, "and it's tough to get them together for practice." Imua's coach Dennis Campbell says that his crew is tops but that paddling in rough unfa-

miliar waters makes this race difficult for Imua to win.

What most visiting crews hope for is a flat Moloka'i Channel. "Our paddlers are Olympic kayak and canoe paddlers," said Canadian Outrigger's Preston Fisk. "We'd love to see what we could do in flat water." By placing fourth overall and first in the fiberglass division, the hand-picked Canadians—all members of the Canadian National kayak team—were the race surprise.

Canada's Geronimo—a crew of native Indians from British Columbia—placed 33rd overall but said enthusiastically that they'd return better prepared. The Illinois Brigade (21st), a crew of mid-western endurance paddlers, plus the Nuutere Ihilani (Tahiti) who finished sixth overall, said that they're coming back to win. The magic of the Moloka'i Ho'e surges on.

The weary but elated Outrigger Canoe Club crew relaxes after winning the Moloka'i to-Oahu race yesterday. —Star-Bulletin Photo by Dennis Oda.