

It's up to luck — or *ti*

10/16/87

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On the eve of last year's Bankoh Molokai Hoe, a member of Outrigger Canoe Club slipped down to the beach at the Sheraton Molokai with some *ti* leaves. Alone in the stillness of sunset, she bowed in the direction of Oahu and asked the powers that be for waves—preferably big ones—for the next day's race across the Kaiwi Channel.

The woman figured that only by the grace of big swells would a Hawaii team—preferably Outrigger—win the 40.8-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor to Ft. DeRussy Beach. She got half of her wish Outrigger won, for the 11th time.

But Tom Conner steered his seventh victory without benefit of heavy seas. Taking a chance on the currents off Sandy Beach, and taking advantage of the swell from the incoming high tide, Conner's triangular course gave fifth-seeded OCC an "upset" win.

The *ti* leaves may or may not have something to do with OCC's victory, but Walter Guild always mentions 'luck' as his first ingredient to repeat as champions tomorrow. Despite having eight of nine crew members back from last year's winners, he knows OCC will need more than luck to win for the fourth time in five years.

"The top five crews are very, very close," said Guild. "When you come this far in the season, you're not going to fool anybody with anything new. The secret is to get out in front and stay there, just outpaddle everyone to the finish."

Outrigger has the slight home-water advantage but anything could happen during the course of the 36th annual event. Waves, lack of them, conditioning, timing, steering—all are variables the 49 nine-man crews have to deal with.

Revenge is also a strong motivator. Tahiti No. 1 was heavily favored last year but a straight line course to Diamond Head and a ½-hour bow-to-bow battle with California's Imua midway across the channel took its toll; the Tahitians finished second, six minutes behind Outrigger.

Tahiti No. 1 promises not to make the same mistakes that cost them last year, that of sloppy crew changes and being unaware of

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OCC's position. The all-star crew wants nothing more than to be the second-ever Tahitian crew to win the channel challenge and end the drought since Te Oro Paa won in 1976.

Should they fail, F.F.P.P., another Tahitian team, is ready to wear the winners' leis. Seeded third due to its third-place finish last year, F.F.P.P. was second in 1985.

Fourth seeded is Imua of California, winner of the 31-mile Catalina-to-Newport race last month. They beat Outrigger by two minutes but, said Guild, "it's been such a long stretch since we've seen each other, you can't predict how we'll do against each other based on the Catalina race."

Offshore did not race Catalina—instead it has beefed up its crew with world-class kayakers. Names like Greg Barton, the world champion at 1,000- and

10,000-meter K-1s; Philippe Boccarra, the French national champion and former K-2 world champ; former Lanikai resident and current U.S. national team member Bo Eastabrooks; and former Outrigger paddler Kevin Olds, also on the U.S. national team.

But if No. 5 Offshore is to win for the first time since its last of two straight wins in 1983, it could be because of its steersman. Billy Whitford is hoping for big waves as much as the Hawaii steersmen.

"Hey, if you want flat water, you might as well stay in California," he said. "We're going into the race with seasoned reality. We've got top athletes but have we got the top paddlers is the question. Luck and planning are all keys and I'd love to go on the big seas."

Steering supposedly gives the Hawaii teams an edge, but only if the waves are bigger than they have been in recent races. The

Illinois Brigade, which dropped out earlier this week, won in 1985 on very flat water.

If the seas come up, look for Top Ten finishes from crews with the better steersmen. Nick Beck from Hanalei; Nappy Napoleon of Anuenue, and Kalama Heine, the young but very experienced steersman for the Healani Renegades.

Heine and his crew switched from Hui Lanakila and have looked strong during the distance season. With steersman Gary Murakami missing his first race in 23 years to coach his "young bucks," this could be the surprise team.

A Big Island top finisher should be Kamehameha of Hilo, bolstered by its always strong junior men's crew. And Kailua No. 1 and Hui Nalu No. 1, both mostly consisting of top local kayakers, could prove that the best training outside of a canoe is on a surfski.

The unknowns, the biggest worries to the top teams, are just that—teams that have never paddled here or in the big California races.

Arkansas Outrigger, which bought a canoe from Outrigger last April, could be the Illinois Brigade of 1987. Or it may be Atlantic Division from the East Coast or Canada's False Creek. And England's first-time entry, the Royal Canoe Club, has over 120 years of tradition to uphold.

Ti leaves may be a very popular item at sunset tonight.