

Lanikai shapes up after loss

Defending champs back in focus for Molokai Hoe

By Dayton Morinaga
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The Lanikai Canoe Club's best preparation for tomorrow's Bānōhō Molokai Hoe probably came three weeks ago at the Skippy Kamakawiole Race. It lost.

The sixth-place finish at the last long-distance canoe race may prove to be the slap in the face Lanikai needs. Now, Lanikai enters tomorrow's prestigious race with an angry crew.

"That probably was the best thing that could have happened to us," said Lanikai coach Gale Berengue. "I got everybody re-focused. I would say we're as ready now as we'll ever be. A month ago, I don't know if I could say that."

A month ago, Lanikai was like the Nebraska of college football — defending champs and seemingly unbeatable. But like Arizona State's upset of the Cornhuskers, Outrigger's victory at the "Skippy" proved that anything can happen.

Depending on whom you ask, any of about 10 teams have a shot at winning this year's Molokai Hoe, which is considered the world championship of long-distance canoe racing.

"The Tahitians (Faa'a) definitely," said Berengue. "Outriggers will be up there, the Australians will be tough, Waikiki Surf Club could be the surprise of the whole thing. . . ."

Outrigger head coach Mike Mason countered: "Lanikai is the favorite. But Dana Point (California) will be right there. Faa'a will be tough. (Waikiki) Surf Club has been coming on . . ."

In any case, Lanikai is not yet ready to concede the trophy it won last year for the first time in 21 years. According to Berengue, Lanikai will



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The Lanikai 1 crew celebrates as they glide across the finish line for first place off Waikiki in last year's Molokai Hoe.

abide by the theory: "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."

The same nine paddlers — Bo Eastabrooks, Jim Foti, John Foti, Kalani Irvine, Rich Lambert, Bob Nottage, Rocky Owens, Mike Pederson and Mike Smith — will paddle in the same canoe they used last year.

"We've really come together these last two weeks," said Owens, the only Lanikai member to paddle on both the '74 and '85 Molokai winners. "It feels almost exactly like it did last

year.

"(The loss) was good for us. Up to that point, we might have been a little over-confident. I guess you could say it's what we needed to get everybody into shape."

At the same time, other clubs are now confident going into tomorrow's race because of Lanikai's newfound imperfection.

"The Skippy race showed us that we can win," said Mason. "We were fortunate that Lanikai made some mistakes that

helped us win, but winning definitely didn't hurt our confidence."

Like Lanikai, Outrigger is hoping not to mess with a good thing. The same nine paddlers who won both the Skippy and Catalina races last month will paddle again tomorrow: Courtney Seto, Mark Riggs, Marc Haine, Walter Guild, Bruce Black, Chris Kincaid, Bill Pratt, Clayton Chee and Todd Bradley.

Waikiki Surf Club — which

finished second in the Skippy race, Waikiki Beach Boys and Hui Nalu are the other local clubs that could contend.

The outside clubs remain a mystery. Faa'a, which dominated the '93 and '94 races, will enter a full Tahitian crew this year. In the last three races, local paddler Tom Conner steered the Faa'a canoe.

"What that will do remains to be seen," said Berengue.

This year, Conner will instead steer Dana Point Outrig-

Race Facts

■ **WHAT:** Bānōhō Molokai Hoe

■ **WHERE:** Start at Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai; finish at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki

■ **WHEN:** Tomorrow, 7:30 a.m. start; finish around 12:30 p.m.

■ **WHO:** 105 men's crews (nine paddlers per team) from Hawaii, Tahiti, Australia, Canada and the mainland United States.

ger from California. "That makes a contender in itself," said Mason.

Dark horse teams include Tui Tonga, Maohi Nui, Sydney Outrigger and Rocky Outrigger. Tui Tonga will be comprised of world-class kayak paddlers from Hawaii and the Mainland. Maohi Nui is another crew from Tahiti rumored to be as strong as Faa'a, just not as experienced. Sydney and Rocky represent Australia's best.

NOTES: Team Kupuna, a group of paddlers from the Big Island, will defy age barriers by entering a crew in the senior masters division. Although the division is for men 45 and over, all of Kupuna's paddlers are over 55, including 68-year-old Jerry Halverson. . . . A record 105 crews are registered to compete in tomorrow's race. The previous record was last year's 90. . . . The course record for the 41-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki is 4 hours, 53 minutes, 3 seconds, set by Lanikai last year. . . . Other notable crews in this year's race include: Kalama Malolo, which is an entry from Johnston Island; Jancho, Rainbow Outrigger and False Creek, which are teams from Canada; and the Columbia River Poi Boys, a crew formed by Oregon native Brian Mulvaney that will consist primarily of paddlers from the Pacific Northwest.