

Tahiti team wins Molokai Hoe, but it's not Shell Va'a

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The crew from EDT Va'a 1 of Tahiti sprinted toward the finishing buoy ahead of eight-time defending champion Shell Va'a, back, to win Sunday's Molokai Hoe. [MORE PHOTOS](#)

For the first time in nearly a decade, the heralded outrigger canoe paddling crew of Shell Va'a sat in stunned silence after completing the rigorous Molokai Hoe.

The crew did not appear tired, but wore blank stares of disappointment after fellow Tahitians from EDT Va'a 1 celebrated as Tahitian drummers riled up the throng of onlookers along Waikiki's Duke Kahanamoku Beach upon completion of the 62nd annual Hawaiian Airlines Molokai Hoe early Sunday afternoon.

EDT Va'a 1 navigated the 41-mile course that began at Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor in 4 hours, 51 minutes and 43 seconds and improved on a streak of three consecutive runner-up finishes while also preventing countrymen Shell Va'a from winning a ninth consecutive Molokai Hoe.

Shell Va'a (4:51:59) crossed the line second in one of the closest finishes in recent memory, while EDT Va'a 2 (5:00:11), Air Tahiti Va'a (5:12:12) and Lanikai (5:15:05), the top local finisher, rounded out the top five.

After proclaiming in recent years that its paddlers would continue chasing the world championship "until we die" and that the talented Tahitian paddlers needed to "win 10 in a row, then we can stop," Shell Va'a made a crucial navigational error and took an outside line while passing Kahala just prior to Diamond Head. After trailing by more than a quarter-mile as the crews neared Oahu, EDT Va'a 1 took advantage of its counterpart's mistake and took an inside line closer to shore that allowed the blue-clad paddlers to make up ground as the increasing tradewinds pushed Shell Va'a farther out to sea.

"No words to say, just congratulation to these boys. We work hard, train hard and that's the result," said Lonomahiki Teururai of EDT Va'a 1, which is sponsored by a Tahitian energy company. "The coaches were saying that the wind was coming up, so as we got closer to the island, we came closer to land. Just past Diamond Head, we also tried to catch some waves.

"That's the point of coming here. For three years we came in second. We were bored of that. Now we have the yellow (champion) shirts, so we have to come back and defend."

The victorious crew also included Manatea Bopp Du Pont, Taaroa Dubois, Rete Ebb, Chevalier Hikutini, Laurent Paiea, Heiva Paie-Amo, Charles Taie and Steeve Teihotaata. EDT Va'a 1 built momentum as Shell Va'a made a crew change just prior to the race's home stretch fronting the Waikiki Natatorium and powered through the final sprint to pull the upset.

"I told our guys 'Eh, go! It's not next year, it's now," Dubois said, describing the perfectly timed push to overtake Shell.

Shell Va'a took a northerly route through the treacherous Kaiwi Channel and established a slight lead, but instead of hugging Oahu as the canoe passed Koko Head, the iconic red-and-yellow clad crew allowed EDT Va'a 1 breathing room to creep up and eventually pass the dynastic defending champions.

"We went outside, and they passed us. But congratulations to EDT and thank God for this second place," said Shell Va'a's Hiromana Flores. "We accept this second place, but we need to train (for next year). No sleep."

One hundred and three crews from around the world, including representatives from Tahiti, Australia, Japan, France, Hong Kong, Washington, California, Pennsylvania, New York and all Hawaiian Islands save Lanai, set out to knock off the perennial champions from Tahiti. Shell Va'a set the course record in 2011, as the paddling powerhouse finished in 4 hours, 30 minutes and 54 seconds; nearly eight minutes faster than the previous record, which it also held.

Lanikai, the last local crew to win the Molokai Hoe in 2005, turned in a memorable performance behind paddlers Matthew Crowley, Chauncey Cody, Jim Foti, Nicholas Foti, Andreas Gaeta, Matthew Mench, Kasey Romero, Jack Roney and Tapa Worthington.

"We were battling with Primo and some of the Tahitian crews earlier in the race, but we separated and Air Tahiti came up and passed us outside of Portlock," Worthington said. "All in all, we had an awesome race. We couldn't have raced any better than we did today. I'm stoked for the guys; to be the first Hawaii team, it's an awesome feeling."

While the race provides a gauntlet of challenges and inherent danger even amid favorable conditions, Sunday's clear weather and calm ocean swells allowed crews to ride waves and battle for positioning while traversing the channel. Not only does riding the surf aid paddlers in making it through the channel faster, but time spent on each wave allows crews to conserve energy and save strokes.

Team Primo (5:16:56), which represents Maui's Wailea Canoe Club and set the record for the fastest time by a Hawaii competitor in 2011 (4:42:59), garnered a sixth place after finishing fifth at the past two Molokai Hoe races. The crew has remained consistent, finishing second, fifth and third in the 2009, 2010 and 2011 editions of the Molokai Hoe.

Hui Nalu-Hokupa'a (5:17:26), Kauai Wa'a-Mo'ikeha (5:26:16), Outrigger-Red (5:28:42) and Mellow Johnny's Va'a (5:30:40) rounded out the top 10.

PADDLING

MOLOKAI HOE

Molokai to Oahu

Overall—1. Edt Vaa 1, 4:51:43; 2. Shell Va'a, 4:51:59; 3. Edt Vaa 2, 5:00:11; 4. Team Air Tahiti Vaa, 5:12:12; 5. Lanikai-1, 5:15:05; 6. Wailea-Team Primo, 5:16:56; 7. Hui Nalu-Hokupa'a, 5:17:26; 8. Kauai Wa'a-Mo'ikeha, 5:26:16; 9. Outrigger-red, 5:28:42; 10. Mellow Johnny's Va'a, 5:30:40.
Junior—1. Waikiki Surf Club-Aunty Moku, 6:26:47; 2. Outrigger-Jrs, 6:31:07; 3. Hui Nalu-Kepo'inalu, 6:39:40; 4. Keahiakahoe, 7:01:24; 5. Keola O Ke Kai, 7:03:35.
Koa—1. Outrigger-Koa, 5:55:03; 2. Lanikai-Koa, 5:55:27; 3. Team Puakea, 7:06:27.
Masters 40+—1. Na Koa Kona, 5:32:12;

2. Tahitian Ohana, 5:46:02; 3. Hui Nalu-40's Mokuahi, 6:04:19; 4. Kailua-40's, 6:12:41; 5. Offshore, 6:17:28.
Masters 50+—1. Lanikai-50's, 5:56:30; 2. Outrigger Team California, 5:58:18; 3. Mooloolaba Outrigger, 6:01:53; 4. Northern Beaches, 6:13:42; 5. Kailua-Team Hawaii 50's, 6:32:34.
Masters 55+—1. Kailua-Team Hawaii 55's, 6:05:25; 2. Kamamalahoe/Kihei 55's, 6:31:15; 3. Kamamalahoe, 7:41:06.
Masters 60+—1. Hawaiian Canoe Club-60's, 6:13:24; 2. California Gold, 6:21:02; 3. Namolokama, 6:33:30; 4. Keahiakahoe-Team Gilbert, 6:35:18; 5. Team Tri Nations, 6:57:37.
Masters 65+—1. Keahiakahoe-Team Gilbert 65, 7:12:37; 2. New Hope-65's, 7:29:28.