

# Shell Va'a back to winning ways

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The crew of Shell Va'a from Tahiti raced toward the finish in Waikiki.

After what was supposed to be a storybook finish at last year's Molokai Hoe turned into a nightmare by Shell Va'a's lofty standards, the dynastic Tahitian outrigger canoe team retooled with the goal of returning to glory.

Shell Va'a began a new chapter in the crew's rich history as the Tahitians claimed the 63rd annual Hawaiian Airlines Molokai Hoe for the ninth time in 10 years with a mark of 4 hours, 57 minutes and 42 seconds midst sweltering conditions on Sunday. Fellow Tahitian crews Team Air Tahiti Va'a (5:08:27) and Team OPT (5:08:32) battled down the stretch for second and third place. Defending champion EDT Va'a, which upset their countrymen from Shell Va'a last year, did not participate in this edition of the Molokai-to-Oahu world championship.

"To come back this year and win, it's very important for the team," said victorious crew member Hiromana Flores. "I know last year we lost, but it's time to write a new story for Shell Va'a."

Flores also made sure to credit the crew's steersman, Iorama Teahu, who completed the prestigious race for the first time. Shell Va'a headlined the field of 93 crews that made the 41-mile trek from Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor to Duke Kahanamoku Beach in Waikiki.

"This year we won again, thank you God for this victory," said Flores. "Our team, Shell Va'a and our family in Tahiti, I know they support us, too. We'll come back again next year, I hope for the tenth victory. We trained hard for this race and we won again. Excellent."

Shell Va'a, winners of eight consecutive Molokai Hoe championships prior to last year's runner-up effort, also featured crew members Tere Ronald, Yoann Cronsteadt, Raihere Tevaeearai, Damas Ami, Kevin Ceran, Paiateuira Tamaititahio and Solomona Teuruarii.

After winning their eighth straight crown in 2013, some Shell paddlers confidently proclaimed that they 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 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.

"It was flat, hot," said Air Tahiti Va'a steersman Tuhetarii Bernadino. "We fell behind Shell right off the start. Thank you to God for this."

Team Air Tahiti Va'a's runner-up crew also included Hititua Taerea, Klaus Mai, Kyle Taraufau, Ritchy Labbeyi, Tavaearii Veselsky, Ariimatatini Salmon, Manuarii Maihota and Mike Voirin.

Na Koa O Kona, the first Hawaii-based crew to cross the line, finished fourth in 5:16:48. The Big Island team bested Wailea/Team Primo of Maui (5:20:30), Australia's Mooloolaba Outrigger (5:25:03) and Hui Nalu-Hokupa'a (5:25:28), the first Oahu finisher.

"The rougher the better, it gave us something to shoot for," said Na Koa O Kona paddler Daniel Chun when asked about the choppy, churning ocean conditions throughout the Kaiwi Channel. "These conditions separate the crews that have knowledge of the water from others, but the top teams all know what to do in the channel. We had a pretty good run with the second- and third-place teams but fell behind after getting stuck outside of Hawaii Kai."

Chun was joined in Kona's canoe by Edward Aldridge, Earl Cox III, Ikaika Hauanio, Haamatai Leon, Thibet Lussia'a, Keakuahanae Nolan, Kainoa Tanoai and Mesepa Tanoai. The crew had formerly raced as Livestrong—embattled cyclist Lance Armstrong's former charity—then switched monikers to Mellow Johnny's, Armstrong's bicycle shop in Austin, Texas, before settling on Na Koa O Kona this year.

"We did this for our family and supporters," Chun said. "We've got to keep pushing and bring younger guys up. Hopefully Hawaii can continue to elevate the sport to the next level."

Veteran Team Primo paddler Will Reichenstein noted that paddlers enjoyed "more wind" than expected and thought "it would be flatter, it wasn't big, it wasn't bombing, but (the waves) were enough to get us going with something to chase."

Team Primo set the record for the fastest time by a Hawaii competitor in 2011 (4:42:59) and the crew represents a model of consistency after having garnered sixth place or better every year since forming in 2009. Reichenstein explained that training as a group was tough this season as paddlers dedicated time to taking care of their growing families.

"It was more of a surprise, this has been a real low-key year," Reichenstein said. "It's going to take a lot of time before we really start giving (the Tahitians) a run for their money. Teams like Na Koa O Kona are going down to Tahiti to train and get advice from those guys while adapting to a style of paddling that's new to us."

"It's good to see the progression. We're trying to incorporate a few new ideas, but when it comes down to it, we're a surfing team."

The progression Reichenstein referenced also extends to the growth of paddling internationally. First-time competitor in Team Brazil, which is based in Sao Paulo and goes by "Samu," won the Hawaiian Airlines Liberty Challenge open division in New York on June 20 and, as part of its championship purse, the team was granted complimentary Molokai Hoe entry as well as a significant savings on airfare via free trips from the Big Apple to Hawaii (the team fund-raised for the leg from Brazil to New York).

Team Brazil (5:33:48) finished 10th overall and helped compose a diverse field that also included crews from the United Kingdom and California.

PADDLING  
MOLOKAI HOE  
Sunday

From Molokai to Oahu Koa Division

1. Outrigger, 5:50:54 2. Lanikai-Koa, 6:20:59 3. Kai Wai/Puakea, 6:38:06 4. New Hope-Koa, 7:33:13

### Junior Division

1. Hui Nalu-White, 5:45:37 2. Hui Nalu-Yellow, 6:06:12 3. Keola O Ke Kai/Team Waipio, 6:32:40 4. Lanikai-Jr., 6:32:46 5. Keahiakahoe, 6:40:00

### Open Glass Division

1. Shell Va'a, 4:57:42 2. Team Air Tahiti Vaa, 5:08:27 3. Team Opt, 5:08:32 4. Na Koa O Kona, 5:16:48 5. Wailea/Primo, 5:20:30 6. Mooloolaba Outrigger, 5:25:03 7. Hui Nalu-Hokupa'a, 5:25:28 8. Kauai Wa'a-Mo'ikeha, 5:25:33 9. Taha'a Nui Vaa, 5:26:58 10. Samu Tam Brazil, 5:33:48 11. Lanikai 1, 5:34:03 12. Healani-Kana'i, 5:34:48 13. Outrigger, 5:37:25 14. Waikiki Beach Boys 1, 5:38:01 15. Kailua-Blue, 5:38:38 16. Keahiakahoe-Kue, 5:39:01 17. Wa'akapaemua, 5:39:20 18. Leeward Kai, 5:40:37 19. Marathoner Madness, 5:44:03 20. Puna Canoe Club, 5:45:34 21. Hui Nalu-Mokuahi, 5:46:52 22. Keaukaha Canoe Club, 5:47:21 23. Kai 'Ehitu-Red, 5:49:29 24. Lanikai 2, 5:51:03 25. Kauai Wa'a-Manokalanipo, 5:56:20

### Masters 40+ Division

1. Na Koa Kona/Keauhou, 5:42:17 2. Kailua, 6:03:51 3. Healani-Makoa, 6:23:08 4. New Hope-40's, 6:56:53 5. Kamamalahoe-40's, 6:58:36

### Masters 50+ Division

1. Mooloolaba, 5:50:23 2. Puna 50's, 5:50:54 3. Lanikai-50's, 5:52:18 4. Outrigger Team California, 6:00:47 5. Kukui'ula, 6:15:12 6. Outrigger-50's, 6:16:50 7. Kailua-Team HI Outrigger 50's, 6:18:12 8. Lokahi-50's, 6:46:37 9. New Hope-50's, 6:57:06

### Masters 55+ Division

1. Kailua-Team HI Outrigger 55, 5:59:14 2. Hawaiian 55's, 6:13:26 3. Keahiakahoe Bag-O Hammers, 6:15:43 4. Kamamalahoe-Ames, 7:35:08

### Masters 60+ Division

1. Hawaiian 60's, 6:07:00 2. California Gold, 6:10:17 3. Keahiakahoe 60's, 6:25:27

### Masters 65+ Division

1. Waimanalo Outrigger/kanaktion, 6:31:17 2. Anuenue-65's, 6:41:39 3. New Hope 65's, 7:12:41