

2003 Women's Head Coach John Puakea

By Genie Kincaid

John Puakea is a former Kaneohe canoe paddler who parlayed his experience as a national caliber kayaker into coaching and in the manufacturing of boats and canoes through his company, Kaku Designs. After a critical injury ended his career as a competitor on the national level, Puakea got involved in coaching, first with the Hawaii Canoe/Kayak Team and later with the U.S. junior national team.

Together with many outstanding kayakers and paddlers including Billy Whitford, who coached Off Shore to numerous Molokai Na Wahine victories, and the late Kala Kukea, one of Hawaii's premiere ocean athletes, Puakea helped to cultivate a strong reputation and tradition for excellence and talent among its young competitors at the Hawaii Canoe/Kayak Team.

From 1990-1991, Puakea was the assistant coach for the U.S. junior development program in Lake Placid. Then from 1993-1994, he was the head coach and coordinator. When funding for the program began to wane, he got into the business of

manufacturing his own surfski designs.

Puakea's grandfather, Robert, and father, Bobby, who is currently head coach at Lanikai, are well-known canoe builders. During a successful season running the women's program at Hui Nalu Canoe Club in 1999, Puakea developed the Kaku OC-1 design. For the past couple of years, Puakea has spent time perfecting and building the boat at his manufacturing facilities in Newport, California.

Though it does not pay the bills, coaching is Puakea's passion where his extensive knowledge of training for competition and teaching technique have a platform. Puakea is a believer in the rewards