

Spotlight on Outrigger's 2007 Men's Head Coach



John Puakea

By Erika Eberhart

With the regatta season wrapping up and the distance season upon us, August seemed to be the perfect time to shine the spotlight on our dedicated Men's Head Coach, John Thomas Puakea, also known as "Johnny".

This is Johnny's fifth year coaching at the Outrigger; he was the Women's Head Coach in 2003 and 2004, and has been the Men's Head Coach since 2005. His past coaching experience also includes coaching Olympic Development flat water kayaking from 1988-1998.

Johnny's life is centered around paddling. He has been paddling for 29 years, and he started paddling distance in 1980. To date, he has logged 14 Molokai Hoe finishes. If you ask Johnny what his favorite seat to paddle in an OC6 is, he matter-of-factly counters with: "The seat I LIKE to paddle, or the seat they MAKE me sit in?" The answer is, he likes to stroke, but is usually asked to steer.

When you ask him what his favorite regatta is, his hands-down favorite is Oahu's, with Macfarlane as a close second. The reason is clear-cut; per Johnny, Oahu's usually offers more of a fair course, so you get a better idea of where you are in comparison to the competition.

Working as a canoe builder, Johnny spends the majority of his down time coaching. In addition to coaching the Outrigger men, he also coaches the Na Wahine O Ke Kai champions, Team Bradley.

Outside of working, coaching and paddling, he also enjoys surfing, mountain biking, yoga, and snowboarding. But with 18 hours per week dedicated to coaching the Outrigger men alone, to include the 2.5 hours of driving to and from his North Shore home he shares with wife Nicole, there isn't a lot of time for other passions.

Johnny's goals for the 2007 distance season are to prepare his paddlers well, and achieve better results than in 2006. The challenges he faces, outside of his long commute and rising gas prices, are getting the men to change the way they paddle and think to change habits.

His words of wisdom are, "This sport is changing; change with it."

The next time you see Johnny at the Outrigger, pat him on the back and thank him for his selfless efforts coaching our Club's athletes through another successful regatta season, and wish him luck on what is bound to be another fabulous distance season.

2007 MEN'S HEAD COACH: John Thomas Puakea,
also known as "Johnny"

Born: January 13th, 1962, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Family: Married to Nicole

High School: Kalaheo

Current Job: Canoe Builder Extraordinaire

Started Paddling: 16 years old

Years Coaching at OCC: 5 years