

Paddling Season is Opportunity for New Paddlers

By Bart Wilson

Even if you have no canoe paddling experience, consider turning out for an OCC team this year. The regatta races begin in June and the distance races start in August, culminating with the Molokai Hoe in October. All you need is the desire, time commitment, athletic ability and hard work.

Prior paddling experience is not mandatory for success in your first year. Longtime OCC paddler John Finney is a good example. John's paddling experience prior to the 1977 season was, as he jokingly says, limited to paddling an Indian canoe on the Red River of Oklahoma.

John decided at age 33 to try out for the Novice B crew at Outrigger in the spring of 1977 which was coached by Brant Ackerman. John is quick to give much credit for his desire and interest in paddling to Brant. After his Novice B crew won the Macfarlane and Oahu's and lost the state championship by a nose, he was hooked. His crew included such notable athletes as John Wilbur and Hank Lass. At this point, after counseling with fellow rugby player and senior paddler Tim Guard, he decided to try out for Outrigger's long distance crew. Tim gave him encouragement to "give it a try."

In 1977 Outrigger's men distance program had a new coach, Tom Conner. The first team had won Molokai in 1975 but lost to the Tahitians in 1976 in a very discouraging and hard race. Tom was and is a strict and fair coach. When John asked Tom about "having a go" at distance paddling, Tom said he had about 50 experienced paddlers trying for the team and really didn't see any novice making it. However, later that week Tom called John and said maybe he should come down for tryouts. Tryouts consisted of one man time trials (in a six man canoe). When John posted the fastest time that day he soon found himself on one of the world's great canoe teams.

That team, which included Brant Ackerman, Jay West, Marshall Rosa, Mark Buck, Tom Conner, Colin Perry, Ed Pickering, Tim Guard and John Finney won every distance race entered that year, including the Kona Flat Water World's Championship and the 1977 Molokai Hoe.

So five months after first touching an outrigger canoe paddle John found himself a member of a world championship canoe team. He was given the Most Outstanding Paddler award at the year end banquet. Tim described his efforts as follows: "John Finney was the success story of the season.

Paddling the summer season as a Novice B, Finney went on to become one of the strongest members of OCC's premier distance crew" (*Outrigger* magazine, November 1977). In the same article John was quoted as saying he "just might quit while I'm ahead." However, that was not to be as John has basically never passed up a six man canoe race since.

Including that remarkable 1977 season he has paddled with Outrigger (and a couple of other clubs) through 29 Molokai Hoe races. His record is distinguished by his membership on Outrigger's Molokai Hoe championship crews in 1977, 1979, 1980 and 1983. He also joined Outrigger teammates in division Molokai wins in 1984, 1987, 1990, 1992 and 1993 (masters men); 1994 (open koa) and 1998 (senior masters men).

He remembers with special pride not only his first Molokai race but the 1983 overall Molokai win in a koa canoe (*Leilani*) and the 1984 masters win when OCC master's men led the race for a couple of hours and ended up third overall.

John credits the great program at OCC and its fine coaching staff and Club support for his success and interest in canoe racing. John has coached both masters and novice men canoe teams for Outrigger and was head coach in 1989 when OCC won the state championship.

Just last year John was a member of OCC's men's 60 team. The team won the state and Oahu championships and was undefeated in all scored regatta races and had the fastest time for the year. Only surgery for a hand injury stopped him from competing in his 30th Molokai.

So even if you have no prior canoe paddling experience, consider turning out for one of Outrigger's many canoe teams this year. It might be the start of a life long interest in outrigger canoe paddling.

Invitational Swim Meet in June

By Ray Robinson

Swimmers you have a few short weeks to get in shape for the Outrigger's traditional one-mile and two-mile swim meet to be held Sunday, June 14. The one-mile swim is for swimmers over 50. The swim is being held in