

Di's Ladies Were Unbeatable

By Barbara Del Piano



Winning Ladies:
Peggy Danford
and Diane Stowell,
seated.
Standing: Marilyn
Haime,
Keanuenu
Rochlen, Gerri
Pedesky, Ann
Cundall Buck,
Coach Di Guild.

Diane Guild, better known as "Di," took over as coach of the Women's Masters paddling crew in 1982. For the next 11 years, the team was practically unbeaten; to this day, Di holds the record for the coach with the most consecutive wins.

Although many wahine paddled on the team, the original "core group" consisted of Ululani Davis, Gerri Pedesky, Gerry DeBenedetti, Ruby Ifversen, Diane Stowell, Peggy Danford, Marilyn Haime and Keanuenu Rochlen, who steered the crew to its numerous victories. Others who joined the team at various times were Kathy Clifford, Patty Mowat, Ronnie Kilpatrick, Hillary Eggers, Bonnie Eyre, Ann Cundall, Cathy Ostrem, and Shay Bintliff.

Begun in 1977, the Women's Masters originally consisted of women over the age of 35. When Di took over, two new groups had been added: Senior Masters over 45, and Golden Masters over 55; Di coached them both.

The same paddlers, as they aged, moved on to the next group. It was a very hard-working, compatible, spirited bunch of wahine with a gung-ho, winning attitude. Although extremely competitive, they exhibited a great feeling of camaraderie toward their opponents, and once the race was over, got together with members of opposing clubs to partake of the delicious food they had all prepared.

Because of this, the combined crews were known informally as Hui O Kaukau. The Outrigger Masters always stood out because of the bright red and white singlets they traditionally wore, and the fresh flower lei all sewn by the paddlers.

As the record shows, the Masters consistently chalked up victory after victory for the Outrigger, winning nearly every event they entered.

The highlight of Di's tenure with the Women's Masters was winning the Hawaii State Championship, not once, but an unprecedented nine consecutive years, a record which still stands today.

In 1992, Di went on to become Outrigger's Head Canoe Racing Coach, overseeing the entire program, which consisted of both regatta and long distance seasons, an extremely demanding job that required a great deal of time and diligence. But despite the added workload, she continued to coach the two women's masters crews.

But wait! There's another version of this story! It goes like this. When Di returned from a semester of college on the mainland, she coached Boys 13, Girls 15 and Novice Women B and A.

Then, at barely 20 years of age, she was chosen to coach Women's Senior and Golden Masters. At their first get-together, Di looked at her paddlers and suddenly realized, "My gosh, they're all old enough to be my mother!" The crew in turn looked at Di, and although most of them had known her and her family for years, it suddenly struck them, "My gosh, she's young enough to be my daughter! And she's my coach?"

Although Di hit it off with the team from the beginning, they didn't take her too seriously, as they were already experienced paddlers and didn't think they could learn anything new from a young kid like her. But Di had some good tips to pass on, and at times, felt she was being ignored.

One rule she insisted on was no talking when paddling. Each time she brought the subject up, the women insisted that they never said a word. One day Di hid a tape recorder in the canoe, and when the crew came back, again denying any chatter among them, she removed the recorder and played it for them. They were somewhat abashed.

The final blow came one day when Di felt she wasn't getting the crew's attention. The canoe was in the Ala Wai Canal and Di was standing on the edge attempting to give them some advice. A broken paddle came floating by and she stooped down, retrieved it, and slammed it on the stone wall with all the force she could muster.

That did it! From then on, she was the coach and they were the crew. Not only did they listen to her, but they learned a lot of new techniques that improved their performance. As Gerry DeBenedetti remembers, "She spent a lot of time with us and never missed or cancelled a practice, never made us feel stupid or inept. She came at us with an attitude of having something to show us, and wanted us to succeed."

Gerri Pedesky tells of the "after-the-races-get-togethers" with the other teams, when Di was the life of the party, injecting a special humor and spirit of aloha into the gathering. Gerri was highly impressed with Di's dedication and positive attitude as well as her charismatic personality.

For Di, it was a very rewarding decade in her life. She feels that she was the lucky one, because her crew were all talented athletes, which made her look good. She and her paddling ohana look back on those days with fond memories and a special bonding still exists among them.

One of the crew's favorite sayings was, "Never say Di, unless you're calling the coach!"