

Outrigger Women Paddle Hard in Tahiti

By Angie Dolan Giancaterino

In late October, six members of the Outrigger Open Women's Canoe Racing Program were fortunate to have the opportunity to travel to Tahiti to race and watch the infamous Hawaiki Nui Va'a Paddling Race under the banner of the Outrigger Canoe Club.

While internationally known for the three consecutive days of racing for the men, the women's race is a one-day, 16 mile lagoon course, similar to the Queen Liliuokalani Race in Kona.

The trip was a huge success for our crew in many ways. Our goal was not only to race, but to immerse ourselves in the lifestyle that is "Tahitian paddling" and learn what it takes to get to that level.

In the days leading up to our race, we got to paddle three times, including a two-hour intensive session with Gerard, the coach who developed the technique we are trying to replicate. Having both him and Johnny Puakea coaching us on both technique and feel was invaluable to our journey as a team.

Then came the men's races. Having spent the last two years obsessed with EDT, Shell Va'a and Paddling Connection technique videos, we were ecstatic to spend three days following the men's race live.

We were immediately mesmerized watching EDT and Shell Va'a calmly but intently battle for three to four hours with effortless cohesion as a team, as well as their ability to remain calm when under intense pressure. We absorbed everything we could in hopes it would permeate through in our race the next day.

While we knew racing Teva, the top

Tahitian women's team, would be a challenge, we didn't realize an even bigger challenge would come from within our own boat. After a solid start in second place behind Teva, we started to settle and got quickly passed by four or five boats.

We realized as a team that we needed to remain calm but increase our intensity to stay with them. Trying to channel the race demeanor of Shell Va'a, in 45 minutes we were able to walk past four boats and started to make a little ground on Teva, the first place boat.

At that point, the heat and exhaustion from neck and neck racing depleted me and for the first time in my paddling career, I started to have debilitating full body cramps. I remember thinking I didn't know if I could physically finish the race. However, using my perspective in five seat as motivation, watching the rest of the team hammering, I took it stroke by stroke and kept going for the team.

After the race, I was surprised to hear everyone shared similar mental and physical obstacles we faced, with each of us questioning at some point, whether we could finish.

However, collectively we had found the strength we needed in each other to move past our mental barriers and physical limits to complete what we came here to do—and in my mind had made it to that "next level".

A big Mahalo to Outrigger Athletic Committee, the Canoe Racing Committee and Art Mallet for not only help to fund this trip but believing in the potential of our program.



Representing Outrigger in Tahiti were Amy Lawson, Jennifer Fratzke, Nahoku Keala, Kahala Schneider, Angie Dolan Giancaterino and Shannon O'Neill.

