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Lanikai's senior women's crew celebrated yesterday's victory at the Walter J. Macfarlane Memorial Regatta.

Lanikai emerges from rough water regatta

Waves and action were plentiful at yesterday's 61st Macfarlane Memorial

By Brandon Lee
Special to the Star-Bulletin

With one major collision, several other very near misses and multiple canoes flipping over in the high surf, the 61st annual Walter J. Macfarlane Memorial Regatta at times more closely resembled a demolition derby than a canoe race.

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When the salt spray and excitement from the 2- to 8-foot-face waves had finally settled yesterday at Waikiki Beach, Lanikai Canoe Club emerged relatively unscathed and as the overall champion, winning the Fourth of July race that is the longest-running and only surf regatta in Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association competition.

"This is a special race," said Lanikai head coach Bob Puakea. "A lot of memorial trophies are awarded. ... And you have to paddle hard and get on a bump (wave)."

Lanikai finished second last year to host Outrigger, though the Windward-side club is no stranger to winning the prestigious regatta after taking four straight Macfarlane titles from 1998 to 2001, and also winning before that in 1996.

This time, Lanikai tallied race-high totals of 11 victories out of 37 events and 90 points to convincingly take back the overall trophy from Outrigger, which turned in its best result this season by finishing second with eight wins and 74 points. Kailua (65) finished in third and Hui Nalu (38) a distant fourth, while Healani (24) edged Leeward Kai (19) for the top spot in the A division, for clubs that enter 17 or fewer crews.

Apparently the team to beat regardless of the site or conditions, Lanikai has now won four of five OHCRA regattas this year, with only one more to go on July 13 before the association championships a week after that.

"We've been improving over the course of the year, but it's gonna really take us firing on all cylinders to beat (Lanikai)," Outrigger head coach Anthony Hunt said. "It was an interesting day with the conditions. ... (But) everyone seems positive, even with some of the other things that happened with the waves."

One such thing was the big collision that occurred when Outrigger was pushed off-course and broadsided Kailua as both were riding the same 4-foot wave and battling for the lead during the prestigious senior women's race. Neither crew finished the race, and both were disqualified. Hui Lanakila was not involved in the crash but also was unable to finish in the rough conditions.

"There was nothing we could do at that point," Outrigger stoker Mary Smolenski said of the moments before impact. "It all happened so quickly, but we all tried to stay away from Kailua."

Lanikai's women took advantage of their opponents' mistakes and logged their first win in the senior race since 1996. Its crew of Amber Kulhmann, Kimberly Robinson, Cathy Bender, Dani Gay, Judy Sangiuliano and steersman Kai Bartlett (clubs are able to choose any member -- man or woman -- to steer because of the surf)

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surfing. As they had in the women's race, Outrigger and Kailua led initially in the 1 1/2-mile race, but surfing errors knocked them from contention.

Lanikai, on the other hand, successfully rode an 8-foot wave during the second half-mile stretch, avoiding Hui Nalu angling over from the next lane. It successfully turned near shore before the final half-mile, then kept straight on a 4-footer for the final quarter-mile to finish in 10:00.28, almost two minutes ahead of second-place Hui Nalu.

"Like anything, you have to have all the motors running, or nothing is going to work," said Foti, who also claimed the race was his most exciting during about three decades of Macfarlane participation. "On the way out, we were 'bushes' (not moving well). What kept us in the game was the fact that everybody had the don't-give-up attitude. ... I was just thanking Mother Nature that we got (the large wave), and it didn't eat us up."

Note: Na Ohana O Na Hui Waa, Oahu's other canoe racing association, competes tomorrow in the Koa Kai Regatta at Keehi Lagoon.

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finished the 1 1/2-mile course in 12 minutes, 16.18 seconds, about 17 seconds faster than second-place Healani.

"It was hard going out, but we just stayed steady," said Sangiuliano, also a member of the '96 team. "Kai did an awesome job and (on the way in to the 1-mile turn) we just stayed on the wave, and then we looked around us and there were boats going down -- everywhere. Then we went to the turn and we knew, we're like, 'Oh my gosh, I can't believe we're going to win this thing. We just gotta stay steady.' "



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Waimanalo Canoe Club's women's golden masters crew surfed a wave during yesterday's regatta.

Sangiuliano and crew received one of the Macfarlane's 13 perpetual trophies -- theirs being the Senior Women's Bowl, a sterling silver piece from which the winners traditionally drink champagne.

As they did seven years ago, Lanikai's senior men joined the women by winning and toasting from their own trophy -- the Walter Macfarlane Memorial silver cup, the oldest of the awards. Before disappointments in 2000 and 2001, Lanikai had won the prestigious senior men's race for eight consecutive years.

"That silver cup is magic," Lanikai steersman John Foti said. "We're real excited about it."

But the win didn't come easy for Foti and his crew (Mike Pedersen, David Daniels, Kalani Irvine, Kekoa Bruhn and Mike Judd), as they battled for a while at the back of the pack, but weathered everyone else's mistakes and made no glaring ones of their own -- especially