

# Molokai Hoe: A Good Beginning



The Kakina races across the Molokai Channel – Byron Ho, John Eveleth, Craig Gamble, Bret Chuckovich, Will Estes and Billy Philpotts.

By Bill Danford

In reality an entire long distance season comes down to one weekend in October. The season starts for those who have their sights on winning the world championship the day after the last Molokai. It takes a well-focused program with mature minded competitors dedicated to do what it takes to win a championship and willing to make some sacrifices.

For the Outrigger it is only a matter of time.

This year, those planning on paddling the regatta and long distance races were just getting out of college, still attending college, or trying to establish themselves in the business sector. Most of them really had no idea what it meant to dedicate five months to paddling. For those who had paddled previously, they still wanted the fun factor and for two or three veterans like Tom Damon, Byron Ho, and John Eveleth it became a balancing act with work schedules.

The Open Men's program started out with 30 plus paddlers, 98% of whom qualified for the freshmen crew.

Mike Mason, assistant coach, and I both knew that we had the numbers for both the regatta and long distance seasons, but we were missing a few primary factors such as leadership and experience. Inexperience can be a positive in melding a new program but the lack of leadership, coupled with inexperience, sets your program apart from other successful programs. You need those one or two experienced veterans to instill a positive attitude and raise the confidence level of the program.

Still confident that this year's program could be special based solely on physical strength, youth, and numbers, we started the program on May 7. We had a lot of raw material to sift through and

eventually meld together into a competitive team.

By the time we got into the long distance season in August it was obvious that we would have two open men's crews, but by the smallest of margins. We were expecting some of the novice men to flow into the program, but that did not happen and they ended up as a novice long distance crew for Molokai.

Late in July, I decided that if our koa canoe, the *Kakina*, which was going through extensive renovations by Joe Quigg and Domie Gose could be finished in time, I would enter our first open men's crew in the koa division. That meant that our second crew would race the *Helumoa*, our new fiberglass Mirage canoe. Both crews would be racing in Outrigger's best equipment.

By the beginning of September it became apparent that we had progressed enough to waterline the *Kakina*. When you change the structural integrity of the canoe you must have the canoe in question tested to see if it qualifies under the association's guidelines. The *Kakina* was water tested on the morning of the 10th and passed. Wednesday, September 12 we had the *Kakina* formally blessed and the following Sunday the open men's crew won the koa division of the Skippy Kamakawiwoole Race.

The Catalina race enables a program to bond together and accomplish the fine tuning or getting as close to your final nine for Molokai. During the actual race I knew that I had the best nine with Will Estes, Byron Ho, Bret Chuckovich, Craig Gamble, John Eveleth, Jeff Brown, David Stackhouse, Tommy Damon, and steersman Billy Philpotts for the open men's crew and the *Kakina*.

The Skippy race confirmed my decision to go

with the younger group that was beginning to evolve into a crew with good surfing capabilities. As it turned out the *Kakina* performed better than expected in the surf as well as the flat water parts of the Skippy course.

Mike and I now had two weeks to work with refining both the first and second teams' skills and work on each crew's attitude and willingness to go beyond each individual's limitations.

Brant Ackerman sat out this long distance season as the senior masters steersman because he aggravated his left shoulder. So, as designated coach and escort driver Brant, Don Isaac, and I left Friday morning at 5 a.m. from the OCC for Laau Point.

All in all it was not a bad crossing and we were able to make the crossing in four hours. Our second escort boat with Eddie Fraser and Dean Hayward made the crossing on Saturday morning.

Eventually, we met up with our advance rigging gang headed by Mike Mason. Veterans John Finney and Henry Ayau took rookies Craig Gamble, Will and Luke Estes, Mike Pietsch, Ryan MacLaughlin, Jeff Brown, and Zach Payne in tow. Everyone knew what was expected of them and they were able to rig the *Helumoa*, *Iwalani* and *Kakina* in a short time.

Then we waited patiently for the race officials to verify the canoes and place the race numbers on each canoe. Finally finished we all jumped on the bus with rigging bags, fluids for two days and headed for our accommodations at Molokai Ranch's "Tent City" mauka of the harbor. The setting is definitely a cross between an African savannah and possibly the Serengeti. Once you get off the bus you are out there!

By Saturday all 18 OCC open men paddlers



# for a Young Crew



Placing first in Koa in the Kakina and 12th overall in 5:34:50, were, front, coach Bill Danford; David Stackhouse, Will Estes, Craig Gamble, Byron Ho, Jeff Brown, Billy Philpotts, John Eveleth, Bret Chuckovich, Tom Damon.

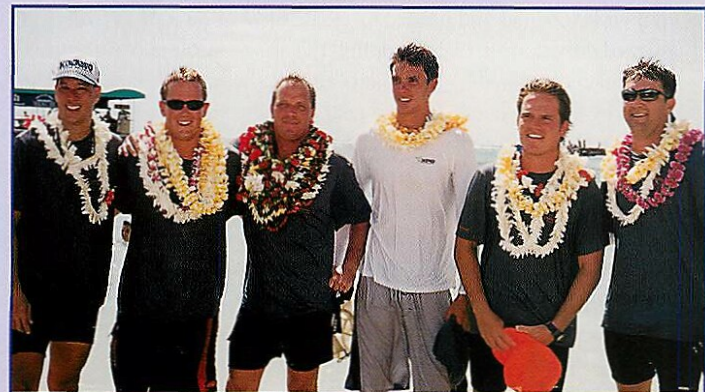
had arrived. Winds were now gusting up to 35 mph and the channel conditions did not look promising. At 5:30 p.m. Saturday, Race Director Mike Tongg reported that five to six escort boats had turned back to Oahu. Although the crossing was still a go, the final decision would not be made until later that evening or possibly in the morning. I went back and reported to our crews that there was a possibility of the race being canceled. If it were canceled it would be the first time in the 50 years that a crossing had been called off because of unsafe channel conditions.

Saul Kalama had prayed for moderate conditions in the channel for the safety of everyone involved for the following day. His prayers were answered. You still had to be extremely aware of what was happening around you and always be watching for those big swells coming out of nowhere.

On Sunday morning, the canoes lined up in what could be considered orderly fashion while some of the 107 still lagged behind the starting line. Unexpectedly, the official starting horn blared out for the start at 7:25 a.m. and not 7:30. The fiftieth starting of the Hinano Bankoh Hoe was on.

Mike Mason, along with Keoni Kino had our second open crew in the *Helumoa* with Luke Estes, Chris Siegfried, Billy Foytich, Paki Vaughan, Jon Bryan, Mike Pietsch, Ryan MacLaughlin, Rick Hobson, and steersman Zach Payne.

John Rader ran the crew chart with Eddie Fraser and me on his 24-foot skipjack. Eddie paddled for both Blazing Paddles and Offshore so I was very comfortable with him at the helm. He did a great job of escorting and pumping up the crew of the *Kakina* throughout the crossing. Also in the escort boat was



The OCC second crew which finished 32nd overall in 6:05:27 in the *Helumoa*, was Jon Bryan, Luke Estes, Billy Foytich, Zach Payne, Mike Pietsch, Chris Siegfried. Not pictured: Paki Vaughan, Ryan MacLaughlin, Rick Hobson.

OCC member Ikaika Anderson, and our designated race official along with our three crew members waiting to make the first change.

Dave Stackhouse would go into one seat along with Jeff Brown in four and Tom Damon in five for the first change at Upolu Point. Will Estes, Byron Ho, Bret Chuckovich, Craig Gamble, John Eveleth, and steersman Billy Philpotts were in the starting crew racing down the coast of Molokai.

John Eveleth was in five to help Billy at the start of the race because conditions necessitated that five seat paddle mostly on the left. You really needed a vet in this seat all the way across the channel. Placing John, Tom Damon, and Byron Ho back in five seat really helped Billy across the channel.

This also took a lot of the pressure off the rookie paddlers Craig Gamble, Will Estes, and Jeff Brown. The stroking assignments were divided between Will, Dave Stackhouse, Tom Damon, Craig Gamble and Byron Ho so as to take advantage of all five instead of making two or three do all the stroking.

With Big Bret in three and four seats and John Eveleth as his back up, I was confident that all the other paddlers could sit just about anywhere in the canoe. They surfed their hearts out all the way across the channel.

Other canoe clubs such as Surf Club, Kai Opuu, Hui Lanakila, Mooloolababa Australia and Team California crossed behind and in front of our stem and bow from the north and the south, but we maintained our course right across the entire channel to approximately one mile or the 50-70 fathom drop-off right outside of Portlock Point.

Half way across the channel a dogfight developed between Hui Lanakila and Kawaihae, which would later include Hui Nalu. All four crews battled across Moanalua Bay right to the finish line.

In the end Hui Lanakila finished in tenth place with Hui Nalu and OCC right on each other's tail. Our crew held off Kawaihae of the Big Island and Waikiki Surf. Both crews had defeated our open men the entire long distance season.

Our goal was to finish in the top 10, but to finish first place in Koa and place 12th overall, is very respectful for a new program. I was very proud of our accomplishment as an entire effort from all four crews racing under our OCC colors.

## Special thanks to:

- Joe and Domie for completing the Kakina and providing our crew with such a magnificent state of the art koa canoe.
- Keoni Kino and John Rader for being there when we needed their support.
- To the entire membership, Board of Directors and Outrigger Staff that made the season so memorable for all of us. Thank You

## Other OCC Crews

OCC's novice crew finished the Molokai Hoe course in 39th place overall in a time of 6:14:17. They raced in the *Iwalani*. Crew members were: Tommy Damon, Luke Estes, Bill Danford, Byron Ho, Bret Chuckovich, Luke Estes, Jeff Brown, Nat Smith.

OCC's Masters 45 crew finished 4th in its division in the Molokai Hoe in a time of 6:33:42. They were 61st overall. Crew members were Henry Ayau, John Finney, Glenn Perry, Doug Bechert, John Mounts, Pokii Vaughan, Jeff Metzger, Chris Crabb, Tom Arnott.