



NA WAHINE O KE KAI



WOMEN'S DISTANCE SEASON WRAPS UP

Story by Genie Kincaid. Pictures courtesy of Jennifer Thayer and Malia Kamisugi.

After a runner-up finish in the Dad Center Race on August 29, it was clear Outrigger's women were going to be challenged by local powerhouses, Hui Lanakila and Team Bradley. And then of course there were the Australians of Mooloolaba Canoe Club, who are the defending Molokai champions. With just four weeks before the Molokai race, the women had a lot of work to do.

Coach John Puakea kept his paddlers focused on preparing for the Molokai race, while trying to build on the future of the Club's prodigious program. Unlike Outrigger, many other canoe clubs pull together a crew with paddlers from different clubs, sort of like free agency ho'e wa'a style, and it has been going on for years in part to break up dominance in the sport by strong clubs like Outrigger and Offshore. But Puakea understands the return value of investing in a program, and he would deftly balance that goal with the other goal of being competitive at the end of September.

Outrigger sent four crews of six to Kona over the Labor Day weekend. The 18 mile Queen Liliuokalani Race from Kona Bay to Honaunau is the most popular of the long distance races with over 100 crews entered in the women's division. Outrigger raced iron meaning the crews made no open ocean changes for the entire race. The women finished second in the open division about a minute behind Hui Lanakila, and won the masters iron koa. The two other crews finished well placing 10th and 22nd overall. Since this year's Catalina Race was scheduled too close to the Molokai race, Outrigger's women skipped it and raced the 31-mile E Lau Hoe from Magic Island to Pokai Bay on September 12. Outrigger successfully defended its 2003 title with two strong crews of 10 paddlers in each crew, and finished 1st and 4th overall.

Outrigger Red crushed local rival, Hui Lanakila, by nearly 4 minutes with a time of 4:05:38. Proving smooth can be fast were Mahealani Batlik, Megan Clark, Paula Crabb, Kisi Haine, Jenni Horner, Malia Kamisugi, Traci Phillips, Mary Smolenski, Jane Stevens, and Jen Thayer.

For Outrigger White, Puakea ensured that a few rookies would gain some valuable racing experience by surrounding them with a core of experienced veterans, and they almost pulled off a third place finish. Included in the crew were Diana Allen, Linda Fernandez, Pam Jenkins, Kristin Lee, Lisa Livingston, Missy Mowat, Vaima Philpotts, Jennifer Raams, Anne Rosa, and Sara Rosa.

The Na Wahine O Ke Kai, considered the women's world championship of outrigger canoe paddling, was

held on September 26. Puakea had peaked the crews well, and trained them as hard as they could go. The strategy had been to stay with Australia, and match their strength with Outrigger's speed.

Conditions were marked by a favorable incoming tide and 4-6-foot swells, which contributed to a sloppy but fast crossing. 60 crews participated in the race sponsored again by Hawaii Modular Space. With seven of Mooloolaba's 2003 crew returning, only Outrigger appeared to have had a chance to beat Australia once the race started.

Last year, Australia pulled away from the field right from the start, but this year, Outrigger stayed within striking distance for most of the race. "We had them worried for a while," said Jenni Horner.

But Australia was just too strong, and won in record-breaking time of 5:22:12. OffShore had set the previous mark of 5:24:32 in 1995. Outrigger Red was the runner up for the second year in a row with a time of 5:26:36. But Puakea's women were optimistic. "Overall, we paddled a really good race," said Kisi Haine. "Australia just paddled a better one."

Outrigger Red was comprised of the same crew that won in Pokai. Outrigger White also had a solid race finishing 9th overall in a time of 5:46:09, and was not passed by any other "second" crew nor any masters crews. Paddling for the white crew were Diana Allen, Jen Bossert, Linda Fernandez, Pam Jenkins, Paa Kincaid, Kristin Lee, Lisa Livingston, Missy Mowat, Jennifer Raams, and Laurie Seto.

Racing for Outrigger is a tremendous time commitment for all the paddlers and the coaches. Moreover, it is an honor and privilege to race for a world class organization like the Outrigger Canoe Club. Sincere appreciation and gratitude to the Outrigger ohana - the Board of Directors, Courtney Seto and the Canoe Racing Committee, the Club's staff and employees, and every Club member - for their unwavering support.

The women in the upper division program also extend their mahalo to their partners in the program, Coach Kala Judd and the men of the upper division, for their moral support and help with the racing equipment. And a very special mahalo to Lindsey Styan who provided invaluable assistance with travel accommodations throughout the summer.

As the paddling season comes to a close, Puakea's women vow to return next summer. There's still work to do, and they're not done yet.