

# Outrigger breaks long Dad Center drought

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August 28, 2017



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**Outrigger Canoe Club paddlers (front to back) Hoku Keala, Kahala Schneider, Tracy Phillips, Jenn Fratzke, Angie Dolan and Amy Woodward caught a wave on their way to the finish line in the Dad Center Race.**

In spite of Sunday's sweltering heat, veteran outrigger canoe paddler Mary Smolenski managed to have a shiver-inducing "chicken-skin" moment after helping Outrigger Canoe Club achieve the victory it had pursued for years.

Outrigger ended a 14-year drought via a convincing triumph in the 43rd edition of the Dad Center Race, which the club last won in 2003. Smolenski and Tracy Phillips were part of the winning crew in 2003, and hoisted the trophy again Sunday along with current crewmates Amy Woodward, Angie

Dolan, Anella Borges, Jennifer Fratzke, Shannon O'Neill, Kahala Schneider, Hoku Keala and Julie Aio.

The race marked the first full-field competition of the women's long-distance paddling season and featured 48 crews that traversed a 25-mile course spanning from Kailua Beach, wrapping around Makapuu and Diamond Head and finishing in the waters fronting Kaimana Beach and the Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki.

Outrigger notched the win in three hours, 24 minutes and 25 seconds and fended off runner-up Team Bradley (3:26:49). Lanikai (3:30:44) took third, while Hui Nalu (3:33:58) also battled in the open division's lead pack.

"We knew the competition was super strong, including Team Bradley, so we were running scared because they weren't dropping back," Smolenski said. "It comes down to luck because there's so much back-and-forth with other teams. It makes things really exciting."

Paddlers endured strong currents that provided resistance throughout the race and manageable but sloshing surf while approaching and rounding Makapu'u that gave way to smoother water and fun bumps down the home stretch. Clear, cloudless skies made for a hot day on the water, and the nuances of paddling including paddler hydration, bailing excess water from the canoe and efficient crew changes were magnified.

"This race tells me that we're in the game, and we're a lot better than last year, but so are the other crews out there," said Outrigger coach Johnny Puakea. "We used this as a training race, and really learned a lot. This is a young team, and we lack the experience of a Team Bradley, who I've coached (previously) for a long time. Lanikai has been training hard, too, so I feel like we're the greenest crew (amongst the elite contenders)."

Team Bradley won this event in 2009 and again in 2013 before reclaiming the title last year. The crew features an experienced group of paddlers from across the state and bears the name of outrigger canoe maker Sonny Bradley.

The Bradley squad has won nine of the last 11 Na Wahine O Ke Kai events, including a streak of six straight titles from 2005 to 2010. The Waikiki Beach Boys women dethroned Bradley in the 2011 Na Wahine and won the prestigious title again in 2014; the Molokai-to-Oahu race was cancelled in 2015 due to dangerous ocean conditions.

Sunday's race was named after George David "Dad" Center, a premier waterman in the same era as Duke Kahanamoku who headed the Outrigger Canoe Club's water programs.

In 1943, Outrigger fielded its first women's crew, and in 1974, the first women's long-distance race sanctioned by the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association was held in memory of Center and his work in advancing women's paddling. At the time, the course spanned 8 miles from Maunalua Bay to Outrigger, and was expanded to its current distance in 1979.

Outrigger's victory netted the crew the Thomas H. Richert trophy, which is awarded to the race's open division winner each year. The cup was donated by Outrigger paddler Tiare Richert Finney, whose mother Loretta Turnbull won what was originally dubbed the Conte Theo Rossi Cup in 1932 as reward for victory in Italian speedboat racing.

"We have a lot of fine-tuning to do, there are so many different aspects that go in to races like this ... and Molokai is less than a month away," Smolenski said. "All the top teams will continue to get faster, so we need to keep training hard and fix the little things that really add up."

The long-distance season consists of four races on Oahu — two men's and two women's events — followed by the Na Wahine O Ke Kai (Sept. 24) and Molokai Hoe (Oct. 8): the women's and men's versions of the 41-mile Molokai-to-Oahu race considered the sport's world championships. In distance races, crews are accompanied by motored escort boats and are allowed to substitute paddlers along the way to provide athletes with breaks.

After this weekend's Queen Liliuokalani Race held in the waters off Kona on Hawaii island, the women return to action on Sept. 10 for the E Lau Hoe race, which follows a course from Maunalua Bay to Nanakuli Beach Park. The men will complete the same trek on Sept. 17 in the Henry Ayau Memorial Race.