

# New technique paying off for Outrigger

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The Outrigger Canoe Club team includes Natasha Haine, left, Jennifer Lyons, Mary Smolenski, Britta Bourne, Angie Dolan, Jennifer Fratzke, Shannon O'Neill, Traci Phillips, Kahala Schneider and Amy Lawson.

While the hype and hoopla surrounding the Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro have subsided, the spirit of the world-class competition still burns strong within Outrigger Canoe Club paddler Traci Phillips.

The veteran waterwoman competed in multiple kayaking events at the 1988, 1992 and 1996 Olympics, and has built on those priceless experiences while

helping paddle with and coach Outrigger's long-distance squad. Phillips, along with guidance from coaches Johnny Puakea and Bill Pratt, has helped the crew implement a new paddling technique that Tahitian paddlers use to power the canoe while eliminating wasted energy and motion.

The process appears to be paying off as Outrigger turned in a runner-up finish behind perennial power Team Bradley in the 42nd edition of the Dad Center Race held Sunday. The race marked the first full-field competition of the women's long-distance paddling season and featured 43 crews that traversed a 25-mile course spanning from Kailua Beach, around Makapuu and Diamond Head and finished in the waters fronting Kaimana Beach and the Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki.

"Luckily I have Johnny, who is coaching me to coach the crew so that next year I can take on more of that role. When he's here, I take it all in and listen," Phillips said. "I like the new stroke because it's efficient, technical and makes sense: you can't pull your paddle faster than the boat is going."

Joining Phillips in the second-place canoe were Amy Lawson, Angela Giancaterino Dolan, Britta Bourne, Jennifer Fratzke, Natasha Haine, Kahala Schneider, Mary Smolenski, Shannon O'Neill and Jennifer Lyons. Phillips noted that the crew included a host of novice paddlers, and that it will take "time and concentration" for Outrigger to continue improving.

"I've been doing this for more than 30 years...but, the competitive spirit is still alive in this old chick!" Phillips said. "Bradley and a lot of these other girls out here paddling, they're tough and know how to put the hammer down."

Team Bradley, which races under the banner of Hawaiian Canoe Club of Maui, notched the win in 3 hours, 12 minutes and 27 seconds and fended off Outrigger (3:15:19). Hui Nalu (3:18:15) took third, while Lanikai (3:19:38), Kawaihae (3:20:23) and the Waikiki Beach Boys (3:20:46) also battled in the open division. Paddlers endured a variety of ocean and weather conditions, including rain at the start and bumpy, "sloshing" surf around Makapu'u that gave way to smoother water down the home stretch.

Team Bradley also won this event in 2009 and again in 2013, beating the Beach Boys three years ago by six minutes. Team Bradley features an experienced group of paddlers from across the state and bears the name of outrigger canoe maker Sonny Bradley.

The squad has won eight of the last 10 Na Wahine O Ke Kai events, including a streak of six straight titles from 2005-2010. Waikiki dethroned Bradley in the 2011 Na Wahine and won the prestigious title again in 2014; the Molokai-to-Oahu race was canceled last year due to dangerous ocean conditions.

The winning crew from Team Bradley included: Dane Ward, Lauren Spalding, Lori Nakamura, Andrea Moller, Kaulu Lu'uwai, Kristin Foster, Noelani Auger, Cherisse Agorastos, Nicole Pedersen and Coral Gonzales.

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. Kawika Grant, a longtime member of Outrigger's paddling committee, explained that in those times, women were not included in canoe paddling because they supposedly lacked the strength and endurance to compete in the same events as men.

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 eight miles from Maunaloa Bay to Outrigger, and was expanded to its current distance in 1979.

Team Bradley'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.

The 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. 25) and Molokai Hoe (Oct. 9): 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.

"Molokai is a different animal, it's nothing like this race," Phillips said. "We have some really good paddlers and helping the youth in our crew get some more experience. We've got to tighten up our technique and smooth out the little things."

After this weekend's Queen Liliuokalani Race held in the waters off Kona on the Big Island, the women return to action on Sept. 11 for the E Lau Hoe race,

which follows a course from Maunalua Bay to Nanakuli Beach Park. The men will complete the same course on Sept. 18 in the Henry Ayau Memorial Race.