

PADDLING

Outrigger women conquer Offshore

By Michael Tsai

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The Outrigger Canoe Club overcame a personal devil in the deep blue sea between Molokai and Oahu yesterday to win the Bankoh Na Wahine O Ke Kai world championship canoe race, ending the Offshore Canoe Club's string of six consecutive victories since 1986.

Outrigger completed the 40.8-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor in Molokai to Waiki Ki Beach in 5 hours, 49 minutes, 2 seconds. California's Offshore finished second in 5:53:48, followed by the Badger Paddlers of Wisconsin in 6:10:31. Outrigger finished the race just under five minutes off the course record set by Offshore in 1990.

The race featured 27 teams representing Hawaii, the Mainland, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Tahiti.

"This is a very emotional win for us," said veteran Outrigger paddler Cathy Ho. "Offshore's hold on the championship was very frustrating but we were able to finally come together this year and win it."

Strong northeasterly trades, steady surf and a powerful northerly current provided ideal conditions for the paddlers as they navigated Kaiwi Channel. Outrigger surged to a five-boat-length lead over Offshore as the two canoes approached Laau Point 30 minutes into the race.

"We knew where we wanted to go. We wanted to make sure that we got a good start so we



Outrigger Canoe Club celebrates its victory on the sands of Waikiki after making the 40.8-mile crossing from Molokai to Oahu yesterday in 5 hours, 49 minutes and 2 seconds — less than five minutes short of a new race record.

Advertiser photo by Greg Yamamoto

wouldn't be paddling somebody else's race," said Outrigger coach Steve Scott. "We followed a straight course until we hit the current going north. All of Oahu is north of Molokai so we rode (the current) as far as it would take us."

Offshore managed to stay within a half-mile of the Outrigger canoe for the first 20 miles, according to Offshore

steersman Leslie Davis. The canoes parted during the second leg with Offshore opting for a northerly approach that would allow it to take advantage of swells as it approached Diamond Head. Outrigger continued on its straight line toward Diamond Head, gravitating northward just enough to surf on the four- to six-foot waves breaking toward Waiki

ki.

"It's difficult to come back in the open ocean," Davis said. "We had a good line coming in. We caught some good swells that brought us close and it looked like we could get even but they pulled away after we passed Diamond Head."

Outrigger completed the final two miles of the race with a commanding four-minute lead

over their California rivals. Still, the ease of the victory couldn't diminish its impact on Outrigger's veterans.

"When we hit Waikiki and I realized what we had done, I couldn't stop crying," steersman Paula Crabb said. "I keep saying I want to go out a winner ... this might be time to quit."

Ho traced Outrigger's strong

performance to a close second-place finish at the Bacardi Catalina Channel Race in California two months ago.

"That race was a real confidence boost for us. We lost to Offshore by only a minute-and-a-half and that showed us how close we were to beating them," Ho said.

Said Offshore's Davis:

"Winning here has put a lot of pressure on us. It's hard to stay focused and to motivate the team. Losses like this keep us honest. We know that we need to paddle together to win again."

In the masters division, the Big Island's Kai O Pua staged a dramatic come-from-behind victory over Healani and Outrigger. Kai O Pua finished 15th overall in the standings. Healani and Outrigger finished 17th and 18th, two seconds apart.

Kai O Pua trailed both canoes by half a mile throughout most of the race but was able to ride a series of fortuitous swells off Diamond Head to catch up. As the three converged for the final two-mile leg, Kai O Pua took to the outside and pulled ahead, outstriking Healani by about four boat lengths.

1. Outrigger #1, 5 hours, 49 minutes, 2 seconds. 2. Off Shore, 5:53:38. 3. Badger Paddlers #1, 6:10:31. 4. Off Shore #2, 6:16:19. 5. Badger Paddlers #2, 6:20:50. 6. Kailua, 6:22:19. 7. Dana Outrigger, 6:25:25. 8. Waikiki Surf Club, 6:27:05. 9. Outrigger Off Shore, 6:28:03. 10. Kai O Pua, 6:29:19. 11. Napili, 6:29:57. 12. Lanikai #1, 6:30:18. 13. Panunua, 6:33:35. 14. Hawaiiian, 6:34:24. 15. Kai O Pua, 6:37:51. 16. Hui Nalu, 6:38:25. 17. Hui Nalu, 6:39:16. 18. Outrigger, 6:39:35. 19. Lanikai #2, 6:42:05. 20. Waikiki Yacht Club, 6:47:45. 21. Hanalei, 6:50:25. 22. Lae'ua O Kai, 6:52:18. 23. Kai E Hui, 6:57:25. 24. Lanikai #2, 7:01:31. 25. Koa Kai, 7:01:48. 26. Kanehameha, 7:09:25. 27. Hawaiiian, 7:09:30.