

PADDLING



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Members of Hawaiian Canoe Club celebrated as they crossed the finish line to place first in the 25-mile race yesterday.

Hawaiian Canoe Club wins Dad Center Memorial race

Three Hawaii paddlers join seven from Team Bradley to command the 25-mile course

By Brandon Lee
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Paddling together for the first time all year and under a different name, their combination still proved to be a winning one.

Seven members from Team Bradley -- last year's winning Na Wahine O Ke Kai crew -- were joined by three other local paddlers and, as Hawaiian Canoe Club, won the George "Dad" Center Memorial Canoe Race yesterday.

Hawaiian crossed the 25-mile course from Kailua Beach to Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki in 3 hours, 13 minutes and 28.7 seconds, a little more than 2 minutes faster than second place Hui Lanakila (3:15:52.1) of Oahu.

"We just kept it tenacious the whole way," said Hawaiian crew member Cherisse Kelii, who is from the Big Island. "Our mission is to paddle hard (when) together, and make sure we're having fun while we're doing it."

A record 47 women's crews entered the race, which was the first true long-distance test in preparation for the 41-mile Na Wahine, set for the end of next month.

Hawaiian's crew members live on different islands, and often train in solo canoes. Yesterday was their first chance to paddle together this season.

Because of sanctioning issues involved with the Dad Center Race, the group decided to go with the Hawaiian name -- the Maui club four of them regularly paddle for -- rather than Team Bradley.

With six in the canoe at a time, and the others rotating in with open-ocean changes, Hawaiian's crew also included: Lauren Bartlett, Dane Ward, Margie Kawaiaea and Theresa Felgate of Maui; Mahea Lum, Denise Darval-Chang and Kelly Fey of Oahu; and Darcie Gray of Kauai and Michelle Arnold of the Big Island.

Lum, Darval-Chang and Arnold were not with the crew last year, but appeared to fit in very well yesterday, as Hawaiian took the lead right from the start of the race and never gave it up.

It received its biggest challenge from Hui Lanakila around the Alan Davis surf break at Oahu's southeastern tip, but steerswoman Darval-Chang was able to successfully cover Hui Lanakila's moves and keep her crew in front.

"This gives us confidence," Ward said. "I think everyone went out there wondering where we were going to stand. ... But we've all been paddling for a long time, and everyone does their homework because we're (basically training) on our own."

Conditions included flat water and little wind, and made for a relatively tough race.

Outrigger (3:18:50.9) finished about 5 minutes behind Hawaiian and in third place. The Waikiki Beach Boys (3:20:50.8) took fourth, and Lanakila of California (3:25:00.9), fifth.

The next race most of the teams will compete in is the Queen Liliuokalani Race on the Big Island this coming weekend.

Regardless of the name they choose to use in it, or any race in the near future, the women of Hawaiian now know they still stack up favorably with some of the other elite teams out there this year.

"Now we have one (win) under our belts, and it's like, 'OK, we can do this,' " Ward said.

Added Kelii: "This shows we have what it takes. We just have to keep the focus."