

Paddlers' old record left astern

Offshore Club wins fourth straight

By Dayton Morinaga
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In record-shattering fashion, the OffShore Canoe Club won the Na Wahine O Ke Kai yesterday for the fourth consecutive year.

OffShore, a club based in Newport Beach, Calif., paddled in an outrigger canoe from Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, to Waikiki — a distance of 41 miles — in 5 hours, 24 minutes, 32 seconds. That smashed the record time it set five years ago by nearly 20 minutes.

"The conditions were a major factor," said OffShore paddler Jojo Toepfner. "There was a tail-wind and following seas."

The rest of the 49-crew, all-women's field also had to follow OffShore. Outrigger Canoe Club finished second with a time of 5:31:09 and Kailua was third (5:36:00).

"We had all the stars aligned or something," said OffShore's Vicki Mills. "There was a good wind push, a good current ... just everything was there for us."

However, the start for the all-women's race wasn't quite so smooth.

Several boats got tangled when the starter's gun went off. Outrigger actually had to wait for another club to reverse because the front ends of the canoes got hooked together.

Kailua's canoe spun 180 degrees after another crew bumped it from the back.

"Just a terrible start," said Outrigger's Kisi Haine. "Crazy. It didn't affect the finish so much, but it plays a role on you mentally. It was so stressful. Everybody was screaming."

Eventually, the pack spread out. True to form, the three strongest crews — OffShore, Outrigger and Kailua — moved ahead. OffShore took the early lead, with Outrigger and Kailua directly behind.

About two hours into the race, Outrigger and Kailua decided to try their luck against Mother Nature rather than the defending champions. While OffShore continued on a southerly course, Outrigger headed north. Kailua was somewhere in between.

"If we followed them, we would have followed them all the way to the finish," said Kailua's Kathy Colin. "We had to take the chance."

Outrigger shared the same theory.

"If we had stayed on the same course (as OffShore), we wouldn't have caught them," said Haine, who steered for Outrigger the entire way. "We thought maybe we could go north then ride down. But while we were paddling back down, (OffShore) must have found a good course because they were pulling ahead."

Yes, they were. Mindy Clark, who steered for OffShore the entire race, kept her crew on the south side of the course. When Outrigger first veered off, the OffShore paddlers said they could spot them to the



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Offshore Canoe Club team members celebrate victory (from left): Vicki Mills, Sharon Attlesley, Gina Aubrey, Cathy Whitford, JoJo Toeppner, Sheila Conover and Mindy Clark.

side.

"It looked like they were making a run at us," said Toeppner, who has paddled in all 16 Na Wahine O Ke Kai races. "So we knew it was time to tuck our tails and start running. We started jamming right after that."

By the time OffShore reached Portlock Point, Outrigger had dropped about a half-mile behind. Kailua was even farther back. From there, OffShore coasted to victory by riding the swells off Diamond Head.

"When it's flat, sometimes you get into a lull," said Offshore's Sharon Attlesley. "But it wasn't like that ... The waves made us work real hard. We would see a little wave and we'd paddle hard to catch it. And it was like that the whole way. There was a point when it was like paddling downhill."

That might explain the re-

cord time. Five years ago, OffShore set the record when 12 paddlers were allowed on each team. Last year, the rule was changed. Only 10 paddlers are allowed, with six in the canoe at a time and four in an escort boat for relief changes.

"When we set that mark (in 1990), I didn't think it would be broken for a long time," said Attlesley. "I knew we were going fast, but I had no idea we would break it."

NOTES: Lanakila (5:41:04) and Kai Opua (5:41:54) rounded out the top five. Lokahi (5:42:54) and Umbi Gumbi (5:43:22) also finished ahead of the previous record time. ... Waikiki Surf's No. 1 crew was the first koa canoe to finish (5:51:43, ninth overall). ... Maui Master topped the masters division (5:53:51, 10th overall). ... Koa Kai was the first senior masters crew (6:24:01, 42nd overall). ... Hana Hou, a crew made up of women from the first two all-female crews to cross the Molokai Channel in 1975, finished with a time of 6:37:58.

All 18 paddlers who came back for yesterday's event paddled for Hana Hou. Because only 12 paddlers are allowed in the senior masters division, Hana Hou was not awarded an official placing. ... Members of the winning OffShore crew: Mindy Clark, Sheila Conover, Sharon Attlesley, Gina Aubrey, Dru Van Hengal, Cathy Ho Whitford, Anna Olsson, Agneta Anderssen, Vicki Mills and Jojo Toeppner.

Final Results

1, OffShore-1, 5:24:32. 2, Outrigger-1, 5:31:09. 3, Kailua-1, 5:36:00. 4, Lanakila-1, 5:41:04. 5, Kai Opua-1, 5:41:54. 6, Lokahi-1, 5:42:54. 7, Umbi Gumbi, 5:43:22. 8, Outrigger-2, 5:48:18. 9, Waikiki Surf-1 (koa), 5:51:43. 10, Maui Master, 5:53:51. 11, Hawaiian-1, 5:54:32. 12, Koa Kai-1, 5:54:51. 13, Kailua-2 (koa), 5:57:37. 14, Kai Opua, 5:58:10. 15, Hanalei, 5:58:34. 16, Waikiki Surf-2, 5:59:25. 17, Maui Jim, 5:59:33. 18, Lanikai-1, 5:59:53. 19, Koloa, 6:00:00. 20, Lokahi Masters, 6:01:30. 21, OffShore-2 (koa), 6:02:28. 22, Dana Point, 6:02:55. 23, Puna, 6:03:30. 24, Outrigger Australia, 6:04:26. 25, Anuenue, 6:05:29. 26, Lokahi-2, 6:08:12. 27, Kaheka (masters), 6:09:20. 28, Keaouhou Masters, 6:12:33. 29, Puuawai, 6:12:46. 30, Lae Ula O Kai, 6:13:58. 31, Kai Opua Masters, 6:14:30. 32, Waikiki Surf-3, 6:16:43. 33, North Shore Masters, 6:18:17. 34, Kamehameha-Hilo, 6:18:20. 35, Napili, 6:19:18. 36, Lanakila-2 (koa), 6:19:30. 37, Na Kai Ewahu, 6:20:09. 38, Lokahi-3, 6:20:34. 39, Manu O Ke Kai, 6:20:58. 40, Central Oregon, 6:21:35. 41, Lanikai-2 (koa), 6:21:37. 42, Koa Kai Senior Masters, 6:24:01. 43, Honolulu (koa), 6:24:13. 44, Hawaiian-2, 6:28:36. 45, Koa Kai-2, 6:30:55. 46, Hui Nalu, 6:33:40. 47, Kihei (koa), 6:37:58. 48, Kai Poha, 6:38:03.