

PADDLING



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Team Bradley won the Na Wahine O Ke Kai for the third year in a row yesterday.

Team Bradley gets third in a row

STORY SUMMARY »

Team Bradley won its third straight Na Wahine O Ke Kai yesterday, joining two other clubs that have turned the trick.

Team Bradley won the race from Molokai to Oahu in 5 hours, 22 minutes and 14 seconds yesterday just 2 seconds off Mooloolaba's race record set in 2004.

By winning its third straight, Team Bradley did something Mooloolaba couldn't. Mooloolaba won the race in 2003 and 2004 before Bradley began its run of dominance.

Offshore of California holds the record with six straight wins from 1986 to '91.

STAR-BULLETIN

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By Brandon Lee
Special to the Star-Bulletin

If there was any lingering doubt about the championship mettle and worthiness of Team Bradley, it was eliminated yesterday.

Competing among a record 82 other crews and with all the top teams from around the world represented for the first time during its run of championships, Team Bradley captured the Na Wahine O Ke Kai for a third straight year and was only 2 seconds off the course record, finishing the 41-mile race in 5 hours, 22 minutes and 14 seconds.

In its 29th year, the Na Wahine is a race from Molokai to Oahu across the grueling Kaiwi Channel that is considered the women's world championship of long-distance, outrigger-canoe racing.

Team Bradley received \$5,000 from sponsor Bud Light for the victory.

"I don't think we really had any mistakes today, and that's what it takes," Team Bradley steerswoman Noelani Auger said. "The level is raised every year, and this was the most competitive field ever. I didn't expect to win today, so this is a bonus."



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The women of Team Bradley muscled their way toward the Na Wahine O Ke Kai finish line at Duke Kahanamoku Beach.

Team Bradley is composed of nine elite paddlers from across Hawaii and one -- Shelley Oates-Wilding -- from Australia. Besides Kauai's Auger, the local paddlers are Dane Ward, Margie Kawaiaea, Lauren Bartlett, Andrea Moller and Theresa Felgate of Maui; Kelly Fey and Mahealani Batlik-Lum of Oahu; and Cherisse Agorastis of the Big Island.

Six women at a time paddled in each team's canoe, with relief traveling alongside in an escort boat and changes made with open-ocean rotations.

The race began at Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, and finished at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki. The stacked field also included teams from the U.S. mainland, Australia, New Zealand, Tahiti and Canada.

The Kaiwi Channel, which is one of the toughest stretches of ocean to cross anywhere, wasn't in a particularly foul mood, dealing moderate and favorable swell action and winds.

After a two-year break from the Na Wahine, Team Australia -- the 2003 and 2004 race winners -- led for most of yesterday's championship.

But as Team Australia and Team Bradley converged on Oahu, the latter took a line closer to shore and was able to gain considerable ground in the surf and then pass the Aussies.

"It was our day," Auger said. "Like a choo-choo train, we just slowly caught up. And then it was a battle."

Added Moller, "It was tough out there. It took us more than half the (race) to get the lead, and then it was hard to hold it. We know how strong the Australians are and we have a lot of respect for them, so this means a lot."



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Team Bradley celebrated its Na Wahine O Ke Kai victory in front of a big crowd at the beach.

Team Australia tried to chase down Team Bradley in the flat water heading into the finish, but ended as a close runner-up at 5:24:27. In 2004, Team Australia established the course record of 5:22:12.

"It was probably the toughest race we've ever done over here -- real dog-eat-dog from the word, 'Go,' " Team Australia's Kirsty Holmes said. "We didn't make any mistakes (either), we did our best, and (Team Bradley) was just a better team. It really did come down to the wire, so we're happy with our race."

Team Bradley is only the third team in Na Wahine history to win the race at least three straight times. Offshore of California and Kai Opua of the Big Island are the others. Racing as Wailua Kayak & Canoe, it also won the Na Wahine in 1999.

Team Bradley went undefeated all of 2005 and 2006 en route to winning the Na Wahine -- sans Team Australia. This year the crew at first seemed a bit out of rhythm, with only two wins in four races heading into the championship, but then managed a thrilling come-from-behind victory over the team many predicted would win.

"We had a slow start to our season, so we're stoked to be doing good at the end," Team Bradley coach John Puakea said. "And having all the top teams here, including Australia, it just feels great. I was skeptical that we were gonna pull (the three-peat) off, but this is huge."

A mix of top paddlers from Hawaii, New Zealand and the Cook Islands, Team Wahoo's finished third overall at 5:28:34. The runner-up the previous two years, Oahu club Hui Lanakila (5:29:01) finished fourth.

The Waikiki Beach Boys (5:38:29) placed fifth. Tahiti's top club, Venus Vaa (5:46:54) was eighth.

The Molokai Hoe, the men's world championship of the sport that travels the same course, is set for Oct. 7.

No Results Posted