

Bradley breaks record

By

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If redemption were possible for a crew that had already won three straight Na Wahine O Ke Kai world championship paddling races, consider Team Bradley's salvation at hand.

Team Bradley earned its fourth consecutive victory across an unusually calm Kaiwi Channel by posting a record time of 5 hours, 22 minutes, 7 seconds on the 41-mile course from Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach at Waikiki in the 30th year of the race.

Team Bradley let up somewhat near the finish in its third win last year and fell 2 seconds short of Mooloolaba's 2004 record of 5:22:12.

"It's pretty sweet," said stroker Dane Ward. "Redemption. We were so close to the record and to get it. ..." She grinned.

"I never thought it would happen again. I never thought we would have that chance," said steersman Noelani Auger.

The 10-person team returned in its entirety from last year and is made up of nine elite paddlers from across the state - Ward, Kelly Fey, Lauren Bartlett, Mahealani Batlik-Lum, Margie Kawaiaea, Andrea Moller, Theresa Felgate, Auger, Cherisse Agorastos - and an Australian, Shelley Oates-Wilding.

Part of Auger's disbelief came from the beatings that yesterday's runner-up, Hui Lanakila (5:27:09) handed Team Bradley in the Dad's Center and E Lau Hoe distance races in the weeks leading up to the world championship. As Bradley hails from different islands, it can be difficult to find practice time together and they only met a handful of times in preparation.

"It was like, 'Whoa, we got a lot of homework to do,' " said Agorastos, who split time between the two and four seats.

But coach John Puakea thought the team's turning point came at a practice two weeks ago.

"It's killer because this year we weren't even sure if we were gonna do it together. It was a late start, and there was no pressure," said Puakea, who came on board with the team at the start of their four-year run.

"Going into this, we just said remember how we were two weeks ago, we gotta be there. Our whole goal was to be faster the second half of this race than the first."

Mission accomplished. Things were tight in the early going as Team Bradley, Hui Lanakila and third place Waikiki Beach Boys (5:32:39) were neck-and-neck until La'au Point on the western tip of Molokai.

There, Team Bradley smoothly made its first change and built a buffer zone it never relinquished, and withstood a final charge from Hui Lanakila at around Diamond Head.

"We made one charge at them, but they answered the charge and I have to say we just got out-paddled today," said Hui Lanakila two-seat Sarah VanDeVanter. We put our best on the line and it wasn't our day. But second isn't something to be upset about."

She estimated their canoe drew to within an eighth of a mile before Bradley extended back to a half-mile. It was Hui Lanakila's third runner-up finish in the past four years.

"Throughout the whole race (they were visible)," Hui Lanakila coach Raven Aipa said. "We fell back just a little bit too much. To come back on a team like that is almost impossible."

After all the victories, it shouldn't come as a surprise that Bradley has developed a certain mystique.

"It's a pretty good magic. There's a really good aura about the group," said Puakea.

Outrigger Canoe Club's 40-and-up crew impressively took fourth overall in 5:34:43, while Niumalu won the 50-and-up division in 5:48:11. Hui Lanakila's koa crew was the best of four in that class, winning in 5:45:37.

PADDLING

Na Wahine O Ke Kai

Molokai to Oahu

Yesterday

Overall-1. Team Bradley, 5:22:05; 2. Hui Lanakila, 5:27:09; 3. Waikiki Beach Boys, 5:32:39; 4. Outrigger, 5:34:43; 5. N.A.C., 5:37:49; 6. Kai Opua, 5:41:57; 7. Namolokama, 5:43:26; 8. False Creek, 5:43:34; 9. Casco Bay Outrigger, 5:43:38. 10. Hawaiian, 5:46:07.

Open glass-1. Team Bradley, 5:22:05; 2. Hui Lanakila, 5:27:09; 3. Waikiki Beach Boys, 5:34:39; 4. N.A.C., 5:37:49; 5. Kai Opua, 5:41:57.

Masters 40-1. Outrigger, 5:34:43; 2. Casco Bay Outrigger, 5:43:38; 3. Puuwai, 6:11:19; 4. Laeula O Kai, 6:17:15; 5. New Hope, 6:44:42.

Masters 50-1. Niumalu, 5:50:11; 2. Kailua, 5:56:22; 3. Keauhou, 6:12:14; 4. Hawaiian, 6:26:55; 5. North Shore, 6:33:43.

All Koa-1. Hui Lanakila, 5:47:37; 2. Lanikai, 5:59:42; 3. Outrigger, 6:04:12; 4. Puakea Foundation, 6:54:00.