



Sports

CANOE PADDLING

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By Kathryn Bender, Star-Bulletin
*Panamuna of Australia put up the second-fastest time
in the history of Na Wahine O Ke Kai.*

Wizards of Oz

Australian crew Panamuna outmuscles the field to capture Na Wahine O Ke Kai race

By Jack Wyatt
Special to the Star-Bulletin



A beginning of a "Down Under" dynasty?

Could be, if Panamuna Canoe Club's upset victory in yesterday's Bankoh Na Wahine O Ke Kai is an indication.

"This was a muscle race all the way," said former U.S. Olympic kayak paddler Traci Phillips, a key Outrigger Canoe Club crewmember.

"The Aussie paddlers were big and strong -- several even world-class. No local club of part-time athletes is going to win a muscle race against this powerful crew," she said.

Charging into the lead from the Molokai start, Panamuna never let up until arriving at the Waikiki Beach finish, 41 miles and 5 hours, 35 minutes and 17 seconds later. It was the second-fastest time in the history of the race. OffShore set the record of 5:24:32 in 1995.

OffShore Canoe Club of California, Na Wahine's four-time defending champ and winner of 10 of the past 11 events, finished second in 5:40:34. This lofty finish came despite a near-devastating mid-channel capsize.

Outrigger Canoe Club, team No. 1, won local honors with its third place finish (5:42:11). Outrigger, a five-time winner, has finished in the top three of every race.

Outrigger No. 3 topped the masters division for women 35 years and over by finishing eighth overall in 5:56:47. Big Island's Kai O Pua won the senior masters (45-and-over) in 6:37:55.

A record 63 crews took part.

"To break the mark we needed bigger, more frequent swells and a stronger wind," said Lisa Curry of Panamuna.

Panamuna's Katrin Borchert was stoked about her team's first Molokai win.

"I was a member of Panamuna's second-place crew last year," said Borchert, an Olympic kayak medalist. "And that was pretty cool. But to win? Trust me, coming in first beats placing second any day."

Said Aussie Yanda Nossiter, also an Olympic kayaker: "Leading this prestigious race from start to finish in my first try? A huge rush!"

"We knew the level of paddling talent necessary to win the Molokai," Curry said, "and we went out and recruited the best. Today's win was that result."

The Aussie crew, in addition to kayak Olympians Borchert and Nossiter, included Ironman Series (water sports) champions, top surfers, swimming medalists and Jane Hall, three-time women's winner of the Molokai-Oahu kayak race.

Will the Aussies return to defend their title? You bet.

"Winning the Molokai race is every canoe paddler's dream. We'll be back next year, and probably for years after that," said Curry, a three-time Olympic swimmer.

OffShore's capsize couldn't have come at a worse time. "Here we were, chasing down Australia, and then during an easy change of crew we huli (capsize)," steerswoman Mindy Clark said.

Though OffShore made a quick recovery, winning was out of reach.

"We could catch Outrigger but no way were we going to pull in Australia. Panamuna was simply the best crew today," Clark said.

OffShore's capsize allowed Outrigger to pass, but on the approach to Oahu's Black Point, OffShore regained second place.

"No excuses," Outrigger coach Steve Scott said. "The mild channel conditions simply favored the bigger and stronger paddlers of Australia and OffShore."

Oahu's Healani passed Wailua Kayak of the Big Island just short of the turn marking the run to the finish.

"A fantastic comeback," said Healani paddler Laurie Seto. "We must have been eighth or ninth before making our late race surge."

Healani finished second among local entries in 5:49:00.

Other race highlights: Outrigger No. 3 easily defeated Outrigger No. 2, made up of younger, supposedly faster open division paddlers.

Hui Nalu's Diane Stowell, at 63 and among the event's oldest competitors, escaped her 6:42 paddling ordeal without a blister or bruise.

Lanikai No. 2, with a fine 20th overall 6:15 finish, won the Na Wahine koa canoe division.