

Dad Center Lives On in Canoe Race

By Barbara Del Piano



It was back in 1974 when Mark Buck, Archie Kaaua and Tom Conner came up with the idea of a long-distance canoe race for women. Quite a revolutionary idea at the time, but one that the wahine had been advocating for several years.

There were some who opposed it as being too dangerous and arduous for women, despite the fact that a random wahine crew had already made an unauthorized crossing of the Molokai Channel.

The trio was determined and finally managed to get Board approval and a new era in women's paddling began. Tom offered to serve as coach. Named after Dad Center, one of the most celebrated watermen in the Club's history, August 25 will mark the 39th anniversary of the race.

It's one of two paddling events sponsored by the Outrigger Canoe Club and authorized by HCRA. (The other is the Macfarlane Regatta.)

Over the years, the Dad Center has undergone several dramatic changes. The original course from Hawaii Kai to the Outrigger covered a distance of 10 miles. The race was completed in a little over one hour.

In 1979 the starting point was moved to Kailua, and the distance more than doubled to 22 miles. In 2001, the course was extended to 27 miles when turns around two Magic Island buoys were added and the time increased to over three and a half

hours. In addition, the size of the crews changed from nine to ten.

The number of competitors increased from the original six in 1974 to 47 teams in 2012, including teams from the Neighbor Islands and California.

There are many Outrigger wahine who have paddled in the race for more than 20 consecutive years; some, like Genie Kincaid, have paddled the race for 30. Without exception, they enthusiastically claim that the Dad Center is their favorite long distance race. Relative newcomer, Anella Borges, who has paddled eight times feels the same way.

Because of the many challenges presented by the varying ocean conditions, changes in tide, wind and surf, there is never a dull moment. They agree that the change in scenery, as the race wraps around the coastline from Kailua, past the Mokulua, Waimanalo, Makapuu, Black Point and Diamond Head, is truly inspiring.

Michele St. John, who has both steered and paddled, says that "Every aspect of paddling will be thrown at you in this race." She chuckles when she remembers the early 10 mile races from Hawaii Kai, recalling how the paddlers climbed into the Club van, stopped for breakfast, "and we would shake in our boots before the race and be done in an hour. Boy! Times have changed."

Stephany Sofos paddled in the first race in 1974, and recalls that she and Moira Scully were quite fearful of the open ocean. During training one day, Coach Tom Conner dumped the two girls overboard from the escort boat and told them to wait for the canoe to pick them up. Although the ocean was calm with no predators in sight, Stephany claims that waiting for the canoe was the longest 10 minutes of her life, but it did help to allay their fears.

Genie Kincaid gives a vivid description of the course, explaining how the conditions change as the race progresses. "From Kailua Bay to Makapuu Point, crews have to pick their way through huge coral heads without damaging their canoe hulls and avoid swamping in outside swells.

"Once you get to Makapuu Point, the mayhem starts, with swells roaring steeply up and down the cliffs. Then when you turn the point, the race becomes a downhill run to Waikiki. Here the trick is to catch a wave and ride the surf in a 40-foot, 400-pound canoe."

Mary Smolenski has paddled 22 Dad Center Races and claims that "It can be one of the most challenging, interesting and beautiful courses-encountering a variety of ocean conditions-sidewind, upwind, wild water around Makapuu, and downwind surfing to Diamond Head."

Another stalwart paddler, Lisa Livingston, can't remember how many times she has participated in the race, but, she says, "The butterflies are always there. You just have to keep them in formation." Sometimes, she says, "We get so close to the rocks that we get teased for opihi picking.

Karin Hansen Del Rey describes the race as "Simply thrilling!" She says, "The waves around Portlock are always challenging, exciting and invigorating, and somewhat scary. One year we hulled very close to the rocks and I thought our boat would be smashed, but we persevered and finished the race."

Steve Scott coached the wahine from 1992 to 1997 and praised the gals highly for their dedication. He says that no matter how hard he worked them, they never complained.

The paddlers agree that the race is also special and unique because it is sponsored by the Club and ends at its doorstep. They feel also that it is a privilege and pleasure to honor Dad Center, not to mention the hot shower and ono plate lunch supplied by the Club after the race is over as they enjoy a post-race gathering on the Hau Terrace.

Come join us at the finish line for this year's Dad Center race.

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