

SEP 27 1982

Molokai conquerers

Cheryl Grimm raises her paddle in triumph as Hui Nalu crosses the Waikiki finish line first in yesterday's Na Wahine O Ke Kai. The paddlers are, left to right: Marian Lyman-Mersereau, Lindsey Styan, Trish Gallagher, Grimm, Sharon Bourke and Lita Blankenfeld. Six other women, who were in an escort boat at the finish, paddled in Hui Nalu's winning effort.

Advertiser photo by Roy Ito



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Hui Nalu Women Tame the Channel

By Jack Wyatt
Special to the Star-Bulletin

How steep were the seas in yesterday's third annual Na Wahine O Ke Kai Molokai-to-Oahu to Oahu outrigger canoe race for women?

The channel waves were so-o-o big that one koa canoe broke apart after swamping; a crew of San Diego paddlers was heard screaming each time they surfed wildly down a comb, and because of the thrills of wave-riding in tippy outrigger canoes, most crews finished at Waikiki higher than a Las Vegas gambler striking it rich.

Fifteen women crews, including three teams from California, four from the Neighbor Islands and eight from Oahu, entered the 38-mile race which began at West Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor and finished at Waikiki's Duke Kahanamoku Beach near Ft. DeRussy. Each team consisted of 12 paddlers—six paddling and six serving as alternates.

"What big waves? I thought channel conditions were just perfect—eight to 12-foot swells at their biggest and surfable," remarked Denise Darval, Hui Nalu Canoe Club's talented co-steersman. With her Hui Nalu crew winning the race in a breeze, it

was only natural that Darval would think the crossing was a piece of cake.

BY PLACING THIRD in 1979 and second last year (the 1980 women's race was cancelled due to hazardous wind and sea conditions), Hui Nalu was ready to win it this time. "We took the lead at the start and kept it to the finish," the 21-year-old Darval said. Lita Blankenfeld shared steering chores with Darval.

The Hawaii Kai-based Hui Nalu, which turned the course in six hours, 43 minutes and 38.3 seconds, topped second place Outrigger Canoe Club by a comfortable 14 minutes and 43 seconds. San Diego's upset-minded Hanohano Canoe Club placed third overall, while Maui's surprising Napili Canoe Club came in fourth followed in fifth by Lanikai Canoe Club of Oahu.

Were the Hui Nalu women, who were decked out in attractive matching orange-striped bathing suits and loaded with flowered leis, pleased with their efforts? Kala Kukea, the club's head coach, best answered that. "You can bet that there'll be a knock-down and drag-out victory celebration tonight, one that our

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Winning wasn't everything for the Hawaii Warriors' women crew which found finishing the Molokai-to-Oahu race enjoyable enough.

Molokai-Oahu Crown to Hui Nalu Women

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club has never seen before."

ACCORDING TO ONE Outrigger paddler, OCC's disappointing performance may have been partly due to its inexperienced offshore steersmen. Hui Nalu won overall with a koa canoe, while its arch-rival Outrigger placed second with a canoe constructed of fiberglass.

The meet's tough-luck award went to California's Offshore Canoe Club, whose borrowed koa outrigger boat broke in two parts as they neared Koko Head. "To come this far and have that happen is sad indeed," remarked fellow Californian Matt Hingman, hearing of the bad news.

Fortunately, Offshore's uninjured but visibly shaken and disappointed crew was picked up by its escort boat and deposited safely ashore at Hawaii Kai. Meanwhile, the shattered canoe, which is owned by Hawaii's Kape-

na Whitford, was towed to Oahu where it is hoped to be repaired in time for the men's Molokai-Oahu race on Oct. 10.

Because local canoe-race followers have come to expect Hui Nalu and Outrigger to battle it out for first place no matter what the regatta, the fine third place finish of Hanohano brought cheers from the thousands of sun-worshipping spectators lining the beach.

"Our crew wasn't used to your big channel seas and we ended up using the first part of the race as practice," admitted steersman Rena Horcajos, a Molokai-born California resident. What the young Hanohano crew lacked in big-wave riding experience, they more than made up for with enthusiasm. "Our crew may have screamed and shouted while coming off some waves but they were cries of excitement and not fear," Horcajos said.

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Finishing: It's What Counts

By Cindy Luis
Star-Bulletin Writer

Challenging and channel—the words are interchangeable when describing Kaiwi, the body of water separating Molokai from Oahu.

Unpredictable is also fitting, as evidenced by the different conditions the women in the Na Wahine O Ke Kai outrigger canoe race have faced the last four years. The second race was canceled because of high surf and winds; last year's was almost called off for the same reasons.

The surf at Hale O Lono Harbor, the starting point on Molokai, looked threatening Saturday but when the Hawaii Warriors Canoe Club van pulled up to harbor's edge at 6 yesterday morning, the seas were nearly flat and the winds of the prior day had died down.

"What do you think, Coach?" I asked Babe Bell when the van stopped. "It's been worse," he said.

Hardly comforting words to the 11 Warrior women. But most of them had paddled the channel before. Flo Apa had gone every year, including 1975 when a crew from Healanai Canoe Club and a combined crew from various clubs pioneered the women's race with a successful crossing.

THREE WARRIORS WERE making their first attempt—Nancy Crosby, Ellen Komatsu and myself—and we represented the club at the opening ceremonies while the rest of the crew stowed the gear aboard our auxiliary boat Nani-Kai, and our escort boat Hawaiian Warrior.

wonder if UCLA beat Michigan . . . The boat is feeling good . . . eleven, twelve, hup, hoe."

What do you think about for 20 minutes at a time? Anything, nothing. The thoughts float in and out, mostly related to paddling. Eye on the blade in front. Relax on the recovery. Pull it all the way back. Power! You can't drift mentally for long without losing the timing.

Sitting in the second seat, it's easier to concentrate on the stroke—counting silently until the twelfth stroke, calling out "hup" on the thirteenth, and switching sides on the fourteenth.

The minutes fly by and Babe's voice booms out over the megaphone, "Change coming up.

Fifteen 12-women crews left Hale O Lono at 7 yesterday morning. All finished except Off Shore of San Francisco, whose borrowed koa canoe was badly cracked by a large wave in Kaiwi Channel. No injuries were reported.

The fleet played follow-the-leader early in the race, following the south shore of Molokai. But once past Laau Point, the westernmost tip of Molokai, the canoes scattered like buckshot.

Most of the fleet veered slightly north, hoping to hit Oahu near Makapuu and then ride the swells south to Koko Head.

But Hui Nalu's women, deck-

ed out in new killer-bee, striped swimsuits, made a beeline for Koko Head.

"That's the best line, really, the shortest course," Hui Nalu coach Bruce Blankenfeld said. "Lots of people like to go north, and start surfing earlier."

"But the current was pulling north so strong today that they got pulled too high up. And by then they were out of it."

Outrigger and Hanohano followed Hui Nalu's lead, but they couldn't catch the charged-up Hawaii Kai paddlers.

"We felt better and better the further along we got," Hui Nalu's Trish Gallagher said. "We tried something new this

year, putting music in the boat (the escort boat that carries the six reserve paddlers and follows the canoe).

"We played some punk, a little Devo for when somebody came on board and needed motivation," she said. They also brought along some middle-of-the-road music, such as Hawaiian and, of course, the inescapable Chariots of Fire theme.

"We trained harder this year, and it paid off," said Denise Darval, one of Hui Nalu's steersmen. They averaged 64 strokes a minute. Hui Nalu had two platoons of six paddlers

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each, changing all six at a time every 20 minutes instead of breaking it up as most clubs do.

Hui Nalu also had a mother-daughter act: Lanakila Spencer, a trim and striking woman who has seven children paddling for the club, and her 16-year-old daughter Shavonn, a junior at Kaiser High.

"She said she didn't know if she wanted to go for it, but I kinda encouraged her," Lanakila said. "I like to see young kids in paddling. Us old futs gotta get out. Nah, nah."

Race officials said Kaiwi Channel had swells of 20-25 feet, but most of the paddlers said it was more like eight. Blankenfeld said the conditions were ideal.

"It was rough," he said, "but it was good 'cause you could surf on it. You couldn't ask for better conditions."

But the high seas might have posed a problem for the three California crews, which race on flat water at home. "I didn't know how to ride the waves—it was on-the-job training," Newport's Rae Jamison said.

A big wave caught Hanohano's escort boat and pinned it against the canoe, sandwiching a paddler in the process. She was shaken up but later resumed paddling, race director Hannie Anderson said.

More serious was the mishap to Off Shore, which was among the leaders when it cracked up in the middle of the channel.

"The girls got on a wave, but weren't able to hold it straight enough and curved to the

right," Off Shore coach Billy Whitford said.

The wave picked up momentum and the ama (outrigger) plowed under the water, flipping the canoe named Malama. In the process of righting the canoe, its deck cracked near the bow, letting water in.

The canoe, owned by Kapena Whitford of Maui, was towed to Hawaii Kai. It is expected to be back in commission for the men's Molokai to Oahu race in two weeks.

Third Na Wahine O Ke Kai Yesterday
1. Hui Nalu (Lita Blankenfeld, Sharon Bourke, Denise Darval, Trish Gallagher, Cheryl Grimm, Michelle Kapana, Marian Lyman-Mersereau, Kehau Puhi, Lanakila Spencer, Shavonn Spencer, Lindsey Styan, Renee Yong) 6:43:38.3. 2. Outrigger 6:58:21.9. 3. Hanohano (San Diego) 7:08:53.3. 4. Na Pili 7:14:00.7. 5. Lanikai 7:20:23.5. 6. Waikiki Beach Boys 7:22:16.1. 7. Hanalei 7:27:47.8. 8. Kailua 7:42:38.7. 9. Waikiki Surf Club 7:45:18.4. 10. Molokai 7:48:00.5. 11. Kamehameha (Oahu) 7:49:30.6. 12. Kihui 7:53:18.8. 13. Newport Beach 7:55:05.4. 14. Hawaiian Warriors 7:56:46.9. Off Shore (San Francisco) sustained damaged canoe, did not finish.



Hui Nalu crew whoops it up after winning the Molokai-to-Oahu race yesterday.

The sun was breaking through mist hiding Lanai Island as Rev. Wilson said the *pule* (prayer) in Hawaiian. Paddlers and coaches from the 15 participating clubs joined hands to sing "Hawaii Aloha" at the close of the ceremonies; then shouts of "See you in Honolulu" accompanied the crews as they launched the canoes from the beach.

Little did we know, as the three of us jogged back to our canoe, that it would be nearly eight hours before we would see the rest of the "women of the sea" in Waikiki.

It had been decided that the senior women's crew from regatta season would start the race. Uilani Bell, Kim Yoshimatsu, sitting through a double change. We were only switching four at a time, which meant someone had to paddle for 40-50 minutes at a time.

I was sitting No. 3 and just couldn't get the timing down after the new crew climbed in. It was frustrating, which was compounded by my tiring body. It was time to start asking, "Why am I doing this?" Babe's "Change coming up" was never more welcome.

It must have been right off Sandy Beach when my body said it had had enough. If anyone had asked, I would have said, "No more. I'm not going back in the canoe." No one asked, but I was tempted to tell someone anyway.

Fortunately, no one was seasick, but a few

Desi Ku, Flo Apa, Lehua Solomon and Kathy "Bozo" Bell were already in the red-and-black canoe *Kai Iwa* as the rest of us climbed aboard the escort boat.

We three first-timers, the other two relief paddlers Terry Catelago and Judy Parish, coaches Babe Bell and Nappy Napoleon, boat captain George Downing and a race official headed out of the harbor to await the start of the race.

The lull provided an opportunity to reflect on the diverse group that would be paddling this race together. The oldest was a grandmother of 53; the youngest, just turned 19.

As I walked back to the car, some people sitting on a table near the Hilton Lagoon called out, "How'd you do?"

"Last."

"Eh, you made it. Dat's what's important."

Hey, they're right.