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[PADDLING]



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Lokahi Canoe Club's Iwa Bush, left, and Bozo Vierra, right, formed a tunnel for Mary Carney, front, and Sue Lutfy after their victory in the sophomore women's event yesterday.

Kaneohe escapes with win

**Manu O Ke Kai presents
a challenge before losing by 10**

By Paul Honda
Special to the Star-Bulletin

Once again, upstart Manu O Ke Kai Canoe Club had nemesis Kaneohe on the

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ropes.

Again, Kaneohe escaped, pulling out a wider-than-expected victory yesterday in the seventh regatta of the Hui Wa'a canoe racing season.

A formidable current greeted paddlers at Maili Beach Park. Manu O Ke Kai, which lost to unbeaten Kaneohe by just two points a week ago, positioned itself for victory, only to lose by 10 points, 73-63, in the AAA Division.

Kaneohe, with its plethora of talented youth paddlers, stormed to an early lead. Manu bounced back with wins in the freshmen, sophomore and senior races to pull within striking distance. Down the stretch, however, Manu was not able to pull out wins in key senior races, and Kaneohe prevailed for the seventh week in a row.

Koa Kai and Waikiki Beachboys also continued their dominance. Koa Kai accumulated 37 points, outlasting Waikiki Yacht Club (25) to win the AA Division (13-24 events) for a seventh consecutive week.

Powered by their wahine crews, the Beachboys triumphed in the A Division (12 events or less) with 37 points. Host Na Keiki O Ka Mo'i placed second with 30 points.

More interesting was the status of 12 crews that came to the Leeward Coast on a blistering day with unbeaten records this season. Of the 12, one fell in a most gracious manner.

Host Ka Mo'i, third in overall season points for men's senior races, upset previously unbeaten Manu. Ka Mo'i crossed the finish line with a time of 11 minutes, 34.89 seconds in the 1.5-mile race. Manu finished at 11:41.6, followed by Koa Kai (11:42.95).

A combination of factors vaulted Ka Mo'i to victory, and possibly to a pivotal turnaround midway through the season. Crew members Chris Gibson and Danny Sanchez hesitated to call the win a turning point.

"Today, it was nice. We had the remainder of a west swell," said steersman Gibson, 36. "And our crew was strong."

Ka Mo'i's seniors welcomed three Open 4 paddlers: Jason Bellefeuille, Hartwell Afong and Sanchez.

"They were our secret weapon. They were our engine room," said Gibson, who has paddled with Ka Mo'i for three years.

Ka Mo'i practices at Pokai Bay, which is a stone's throw from Maili and its unique conditions.

"But Manu paddles in similar waters at Haleiwa," said Sanchez, 36, now in his 24th year as a Ka Mo'i paddler.

The two clubs are competitive and brotherly. They combine forces when the long-distance season begins.

"If it was meant to be, I'd rather lose to them," Manu steersman Moku Sanborn said. "They were around fifth early in the season, then their old-timers came back and they were finishing third. Usually, they fade after the first half-mile.

Everyone on our team was worried about Koa Kai, but I was watching Manu. When we made our turn, they were already coming out."

After battling the current out to seas, Ka Mo'i turned and finished strong, enjoying the wind at its back.

"They all came over and congratulated us," Gibson said. "They're pretty cool guys."

Sanchez agreed.

"We just like the friendly rivalry," he said.

The list of the remaining 11 undefeated crews reads like a cross-section of Hui Wa'a powerhouses, along with a few small clubs that have dominated their niche. The unbeaten after yesterday's regatta: Kaneohe girls 12, girls 13, girls 15, boys 13, boys 18; Manu O Ke Kai women's golden 55, men's golden 55; Koa Kai men's novice A; North Shore women's masters 40; Waikiki Beachboys women's freshmen and women's open 6.

Kaneohe's youth brigade continues to impress, not just with victories, but with sheer domination. The girls 15 set a course record with a time of 4:27.98, more than three seconds ahead of runner-up Kumulokahi Elks.

"All of our races have been close. Last year, we were always first or second, always close with Manu O Ke Kai," third-year paddler Heidi Jones said. "Our crew this year works together really good. We push each other. When you're neck-and-neck, it makes you go faster. One of the differences is we paddle all the way through the flag."

North Shore, with the exception of one disqualification, has not lost a Hui Wa'a race in four years. The fickle waters of Maili were not a problem for a crew that has the combined experience of more than 60 years in paddling.

"It's kind of like Haleiwa. You can feel the run line," North Shore women's masters 40 steersman Donna Moore said. Her crew finished with a time of 8:57.23, more than 35 seconds ahead of runner-up Waikiki Yacht Club.

North Shore, which practices in Haleiwa, is clearly thirsting for an established identity after years under the mantle of established clubs. For one year, the club was actually a satellite of Koa Kai. After a year of inactivity came seven years under Kalihi Kai, where the women set records in 1999 and 2001.

"That's why we want to do well, and hopefully break a record as North Shore," Moore said of the club, which established independence in recent years. "We try and remain humble. There are never any guarantees. But we've been winning because we like each other. That's the key. We can also critique our paddling and handle constructive criticism."

Koa Kai set a course record in the men's novice A race with a time of 7:38. With four second-year and two third-year paddlers, the crew is still getting used to its unbeaten string this summer.

"We don't really bachi ourselves," steersman James Oleole III said. "Until we win the big one, we don't really want to celebrate. Our crew is really tight. We camp together and hang out a lot."

Padding clubs

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