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MOLOKAI HOE CANOE RACE



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The men of Shell Vaa approached Diamond Head during the 56th annual Molokai Hoe, a 41-mile race from Molokai to Oahu across the Kaiwi Channel.

Molokai Hoe turns into Shell game for second straight year

By Brandon Lee
Special to the Star-Bulletin

For the second year in a row, Shell Vaa won the Bud Light Molokai Hoe, taking yesterday's 41-mile race from Molokai to Oahu across the Kaiwi Channel.

And for the second year in a row, the Tahitian crew convincingly set the record in the race considered the men's world championship of long-distance outrigger-canoe paddling.

Shell Vaa finished the crossing in 4 hours, 40 minutes and 22 seconds -- nearly 6 minutes better than the previous best time (4:46:04) it established in 2006.

Shell Vaa again received \$5,000 for the victory.

"We feel so happy to win again," Shell Vaa crew member Jason Ori said. "We had a good fight up until about the middle of the race, and then we advanced. We feel we are the best from our

country, and this year we win this again. Now we can talk about next year, and (potentially winning) three times."

Said Shell Vaa head coach Gerard Teiva: "When you are engaged in this race, you are not looking for the record; only to be the first (to finish). For 25 years I have been in paddling and I dreamed somebody could give me a good team in my hands. These guys are not a dream team, but they follow all of my instructions and it's easiest."

A record international field of 111 teams began the race at Hale O Lono Harbor on Molokai, with the finish set at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki.

From the outset, Papeete-based Shell Vaa and fellow Tahitian entry, Team OPT (Tahiti's postal team), set the pace for the lead pack. The group included Team New Zealand/Hawaii, the former two-time race winner almost exclusively made up this year of Hawaii paddlers despite the name.

But after the first relief changes were made about an hour in, Shell Vaa and Team OPT pulled away from the rest of the field. The two Tahitian teams battled back and forth for the lead position for about half the race, until Shell Vaa seized it for good around Koko Head after shifting to a more favorable line to Oahu.

Still, it was yet another impressive showing for Tahiti overall, as Team OPT also broke the previous race record in its first attempt at the Molokai Hoe by finishing second at 4:43:15. Last year, Shell Vaa led a Tahitian sweep of the top three spots.

"We're tremendously proud of our race," said Team OPT organizer Jon Salvani. "This is motivation for us. This is the biggest race in the world."



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The Shell Vaa crew set the Molokai Hoe record for the second year in a row, besting last year's time by nearly 6 minutes.

Team NZ/H finished more than 15 minutes behind Shell Vaa and in third at 4:56:59.

"This is the first race (this year) where we had all our nine guys, and we just stayed positive and had a really good race," Team NZ/H's Andrew Penny said. "For us to put it together and be the first (Hawaii) crew, you can't go wrong. Today was Tahiti's day, but it was our day, too."

Unlike last year, when the ocean was about as flat as it's ever been in the 56-year history of the race, the Kaiwi Channel was dishing out 10- to 12-foot-face, open-ocean swells yesterday.

It gave the paddlers of Shell Vaa the much-desired opportunity to further validate themselves as champions and erase the popular notion that Tahitians can only win the sport's biggest races if the conditions are calm and surfing swells aren't involved.

In doing so, Shell Vaa became only the second Tahitian team to win back-to-back Molokai Hoe titles. Faaa was the first after taking the championship in 1993 and 1994.

Seven of Shell Vaa's nine members from last year's Molokai Hoe team paddled again this year. Besides Ori, they are: Roland Teahue, Karyl Maoni, Jimmy Pirato, Heiarii Mama, David Tepava and Lucien Tara.

Dehors Matatini and Mairau Hei-Moana were the new additions.

"To break the record one more time is crazy," Shell Vaa president Richel Moux said. "(But) the most important thing to remember is that we're first today in the surf. Even us, we were not sure we could win in the big waves, but we did."

Added Ori: "There was big surf. We proved (ourselves) in the flat conditions, now surfing -- I think that's all."

Maui's Hawaiian Canoe Club finished fourth overall at 4:58:44. Two more Tahitian teams, Venus Vaa (5:01:02) and Pirae Vaa (5:03:51), finished next, and were followed by two of the local pre-race favorites and former multiple-time champs, Lanikai (5:05:04.1) and Outrigger (5:05:04.8). Team Tiger was the top finisher from Australia, taking 10th place at 5:10:28.

Among the other highlights, 66-year-old Joseph "Nappy" Napoleon celebrated his record 50th consecutive Molokai Hoe by steering an all-in-the-ohana crew for Anuenue Canoe Club that included his sons and grandsons and finishing at 5:55:55 -- better than half the field.

Division winners included a different Lanikai team, which was the first to finish in a koa canoe at 5:40:21, and Mooloolaba of Australia (5:27:14), the masters 40-and-older champs.

PADDLING

2007 Molokai Hoe

OC-6 Division

Yesterday

Open--1. Shell Vaa Te Uira 4:40:22.5; 2. Team Opt A 4:43:15.5; 3. Team New Zealand/Hawaii 4:56:59.9; 4. Hawaiian 1 4:58:44.9; 5. Venus Vaa Iolana 5:01:02.7; 6. Pirae Vaa Wailea Elua 5:03:51.3; 7. Lanikai Kamehanaokala 5:05:04.1; 8. Outrigger CC 1 5:05:04.8; 9. Opt B Tahiti 5:06:26.5; 10. Team Tiger Kai Koolau 5:10:28.2; 11. Hckt Nau Ke Kai 5:10:28.2; 12. Tui Tong 5:13:33.0; 13. Lanakila Calif Red 5:15:20.3; 14. Team Pogue 5:16:01.1; 15. Herberts On Tour 5:18:19.4; 16. Leeward Kai 1 Holomama 5:19:25.7.

Masters 40-49--1. Mooloolaba Makaala 5:27:14.9; 2. Outrigger CC 40 5:30:48.0; 3. Canoa Republic 5:44:00.5; 4. Hui Lanakila 2 5:45:53.3; 5. Keauhou Iolana Big Island 5:48:43.7; 6. Casco Bay CC 5:54:13.7.

Masters 50-54--1. Kailua 50S 5:42:36.0; 2. Namolokama 50 6:21:24.4.

Masters 55 and up--1. Team Bradley Waimanalo 5:43:12.4; 2. California Gold 5:52:58.9; 3. Team Big Island 5:59:32.7; 4. Hawaiian Kanaktion 6:06:55.6; 5. Maui Gold Kihei 6:08:45.7; 6. Kaiola 55 6:21:24.8.

Koa Open--1. Lanikai 2 Hokulele 5:40:21.4; 2. Outrigger Koa 5:41:36.5; 3. Puukea Foundation 6:07:57.6.