

Beach Volleyball Still Popular a Century Later

By Barbara Del Piano

As our Club's name implies, our main sport is outrigger canoeing, with surfing not far behind. In fact, the Club was founded for the express purpose of perpetuating ancient Hawaiian water sports.

Although Outrigger has remained true to its founder's goal, over the years it has sponsored teams from practically every sport including swimming, football, baseball, tennis, basketball, motorcycling, mountain ball and soccer, which have come and gone after enjoying a period of popularity.

But the one and only sport, actually invented at the Outrigger Canoe Club that has continued to be a vital part of its activities is beach volleyball. This year the Club celebrates the 100th anniversary of the game which in 1996 became a regular Olympic event.

No one knows the date for sure, but according to an oral history of Ron Higgins, who joined the Club in 1911, "There was no volleyball here when I became a member, and it really didn't start, as I recollect, until early in 1915 when Dad Center went down and bought a couple of volleyballs and a net and they put the net up temporarily between the surfboard lockers and the canoe shed there parallel to the beach."

The game caught on and in no time, it outgrew the space so the court was relocated to a larger area in front of the Hau Tree Lanai where it continued to attract both males and females of all ages.

Before long the game, which started as something to do when the waves were down, became not only a sport for fun and recreation, but a competitive sport for doubles, and four and six-man teams.

The next step was finding other teams to play against. Ron remembers going to Oahu Prison to play the inmates there.

"It's the only time I was ever in prison," he says. Palama Settlement also had a team but they were used to playing on a hard court, rather than sand.

Consequently, the intracub competitions prevailed. At a doubles tournament held in 1925, Dad Center and Sam Fuller won the two-man championship; the tournament continues to this day.

In the early 1920s, beach volleyball hit California where it was an over-night success and soon spread around the world to places like Latvia, Bulgaria, and Czechoslovakia.

At the Outrigger, the sport continued to grow in popularity. One advantage was that the volleyball courts were located in plain view of the members, which sparked interest in the sport: everyone wanted to get into the game. Chalk boards were set up at the courts and those waiting to play signed up.

Volleyball became an after-work pastime for business men who arrived shortly after four p.m. in coats and ties, heading for the men's locker room. They soon emerged in bathing attire and headed for the courts. Duke Kahanamoku was one of the "regulars" and was noted for his vertical jump of five or six feet.

When the new Outrigger Canoe Club opened in Waikiki in 1941, the volleyball courts were situated to the left of the walkway which led from the entrance down the center of the Club with a spacious lawn on the other side. The courts were packed with players and the lawn was filled with those watching or waiting their turn.

On Sunday mornings, for several weeks each year, an Open Doubles tournament was held and hundreds of people gathered to cheer on their favorite players. For three consecutive years, Pat Wyman and Billy Cross won.



Outrigger Canoe Club's championship 1923 volleyball team. If you can identify any of the players, please leave a note for the Historical Committee at the Front Desk.



Dr. Jim Beardmore and Pat Wyman are congratulated on winning the Club Doubles Championship in 1955 by runners up Billy Cross and Pat O'Connor.



Pat Wyman and Tom Haine paired up for many Club sand titles.



George "Dad" Center started beach volleyball.



OCC's Kevin Wong played pro beach volleyball and was a member of the 2000 U.S. Olympic Beach Volleyball team.

During the fifties, each Wednesday night as many as eight teams played against each other in the Six Man Open Tournament. Afterwards, a table in the dining room was reserved for the players who were offered a special dinner for a dollar and fifty cents. Gil Carr, Kenneth Chaney, Thad Ekstrand, Bill Baird, Bill Morris, and Bill Barnhart were among the dozens of players who participated.

There was even a kane-wahine tournament where husband and wife duos, as well as other mixed partners competed. Regulars were Jim and Cissy Beardmore, Bill and Billie Baird, Ron and Carol Sorrell.

A four-man Business Man's tournament also attracted crowds, with Wilford Godbold, Duke Kahanamoku, and "Dad Center" as some of the top players.

When a wahine league was formed in the fifties, they played both on sand and hard courts, often practicing at the courts located behind the Waikiki Fire Station. Among the outstanding players were Ruth Campbell, Billie Baird, Cynthia Hemmings, Alice "Baby" Cross, May Balding and Aggie Quigg.

As the venue for beach volleyball was limited, in order to participate in city and territorial competitions the teams played on hard courts, winning challenging tournaments such as the Open City-wide Championship and the Hawaii AAU Championship. The Club team then ventured to the mainland where it took top honors in the USVBA.

Outrigger produced many outstanding players includ-

ing Olympian Tom Haine, who learned to play the game at the Club as a young boy on the sand courts. He went on to compete on national teams amassing many honors. In 1968 he captained the U.S. Olympic team and was considered one of the outstanding players in the United States. After starring on the courts for nearly five decades, he was inducted into the Hall of Fame in Holyoke, Massachusetts.

When Tommy passed away in 1994, an annual Outrigger beach volleyball tournament in his honor was initiated... the Daddy Haine tournament, held each year in early September.

After the move from Waikiki to our present Club site, despite the courts being located out of sight, the game has continued to be a star attraction for men, women and children and the tournaments continue.

A number of our younger players, who grew up playing on our sand courts, have gone on to play professional sand volleyball, and two were selected to play on the U.S. Sand Volleyball team in the Olympics. Kevin Wong was on the 2000 Olympic team and Stein Metzger on the 2004 team.

It's been one hundred years since that day when the surf was flat and Dad Center came up with the idea of playing volleyball on the beach. Little did he imagine that he was instigating a variation of a sport that would not only spread around the world, but remain a top activity at the Club to which he contributed so much.