

Advertiser photo by Ron Jeff

Like the legendary Lone Ranger who came out of nowhere, a California team called Blazing Paddles swept by local favorites in the 27th annual Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race yesterday. A Blazing Paddler lets his joy be known at the finish line.

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West Coast paddlers blaze to glory in Aloha canoe race

By CURTIS MURAYAMA

Advertiser Staff Writer

The Blazing Paddles, a makeshift squad from California, stunned the canoe-paddling world and Hawaiian competitors yesterday by winning the 27th annual Molokai-to-Oahu Aloha Week race.

The Mainland crew — which looked incongruous on the awards stage next to the Hawaiian delegation garbed in Hawaiian feathered crowns, cloaks and kahilis — upset the locally favored Outrigger and Tahiti's Maire Nui to capture the granddaddy of long-distance canoe races with a time of 5:43:52.

A strong Lanikai club, which won overall honors in 1974 and has established a reputation for its strength with a fiberglass canoe, placed second at 5:47.

Although their name sounds more like a Mel Brooks comedy film, the Blazing Paddles were no joke to the rest of the entrants, who started at 7:30 yesterday morning at Hale O Lono on Molokai and ended at the Fort-

DeRussy beach before an appreciative crowd.

Never before has a Mainland team conquered the entire field — 35 strong yesterday after two no-shows. A California canoe, Imua, took second in the fiberglass class in 1971.

Yesterday's race, part of the Aloha Week festivities, provided tasty revenge for Paddles coach Pete Carolan.

Earlier this year, Carolan couldn't make the Imua crew, so he formed his own: the Blazing Paddles. The Newport Beach paddler said all he was out to do was to beat Imua. Instead, he won the race... and Imua finished sixth.

But the race at sea was far different from the outcome at shore.

It was a follow-the-non-leader and a hide-and-seek game for most of the race.

For three hours of the race, all eyes, including those aboard the official escort boat Viking, were on the favor-

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Canoe crew paddlers as seen from the working level in yesterday's race.

Advertiser photos by Ron J.

Blazing Paddlers amazing Lanikai 2nd, Tahiti trails

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ites and apparent leaders — Outrigger and Maire Nui. Both aimed a course straight at Diamond Head.

They waged a one-on-one battle, thinking the winner would take the event and unaware of the competition skimming along far ahead — and out of sight.

Maire Nui, winner in 1976 and runner-up to the winning Outrigger in 1975 and last year, opened a 125-yard lead but ran into trouble when one of its canoe seats broke.

As Outrigger closed the gap each minute, it looked like the latest encounter in the Outrigger-Maire Nui rivalry for first-to-finish honors.

But at the three-hour point, another spotter boat roared up and signaled that two canoes — Blazing Saddles and Lanikai — were far ahead of the pack some five miles north.

The two canoes and their coaches had taken a more northerly route, aiming straight at Rabbit Island on the windward side of Oahu to avoid the turbulence caused by race escort boats.

Cruising far ahead and unnoticed (as it was in the pre-race predictions) was the Blazing Paddles canoe, followed by Lanikai.

The Paddles' progress was slowed when all of the trail, escort, official and Coast Guard boats approached for a look at the upstarts. But all that commotion didn't hurt as the fiberglass canoe borrowed from Hui Wa'a's Kai Ko'o club glided atop the water under the Tahitian (or Indian-style, on the Mainland) stroke.

In addition to their stroke, the Blazing Paddles used oars with T-shaped handles for better grip in the 41-mile race.

Lanikai was the only competition as the Paddles approached cloud-protected Oahu — an unmistakable sight, especial-



They're off: 35 canoes leave Molokai at 7:30 a.m.

ly with all the hotels poking up from the water lines.

Lanikai made an effort, trying to catch the shoreline current from Koko Head to Diamond Head, but could not overcome the California team's lead.

Outrigger and Maire Nui — much farther back — did the same, cutting across and heading straight for shore.

The Outrigger canoe did catch Maire Nui but was surpassed, ironically, again by the Tahitians just offshore from the Outrigger Canoe Club in Waikiki. Maire Nui, with that last effort of gusto, finished third overall and first in the koa division. Outrigger took fourth overall and second in the koa division.

"We're supposed to have won but we didn't," said a despondent Tom Conner, the Outrigger coach. "We went to challenge the best (Maire Nui) so we went south. They (Blazing Paddles) were so far north, we couldn't even see them."

"The whole time we were worried about Maire Nui. The way it ended up, we just didn't have enough to beat them either."

The Blazing Paddles crew of Gordon Reed (Newport Beach), John Van Cleave (Laguna Beach), Chuck Lyda (Squaw Valley), Carl Toepfner (Truckee), Bill Wedford (Newport Beach), Hugh Fisher (Weed), Bill Stanley (Berkeley), Colin

Shaw (Irvine) and Carolan fooled all experts in the canoe business. And they had everybody else challenging each other while they waltzed past the field.

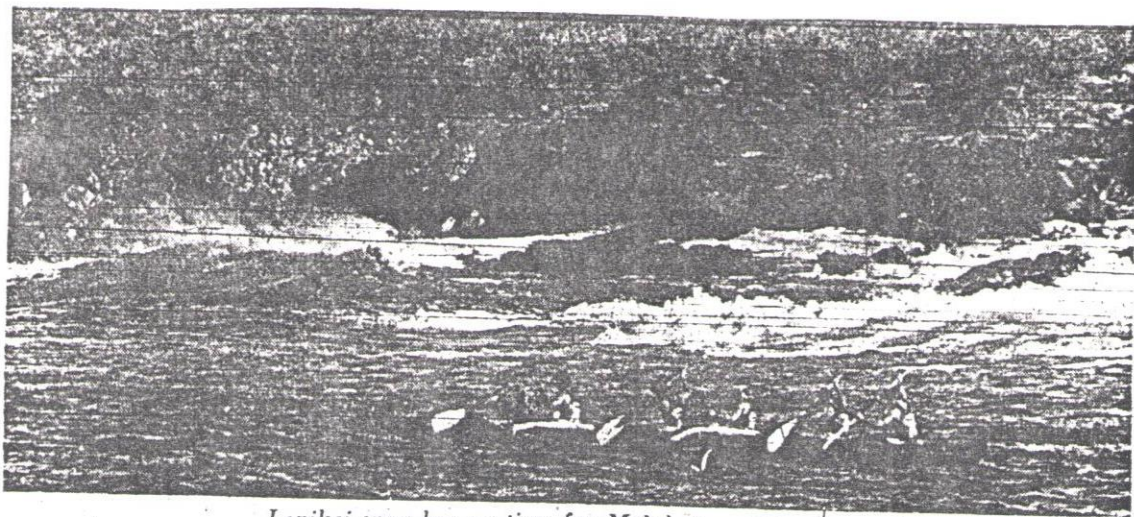
"We got a low profile and no one knew we were there," said Carolan. "We just got out in front and stayed away."

Maire Nui coach Teiki Tamarii said he also didn't see the Blazing Paddles and Lanikai, "but if they win, then they're the best."

"It's terrific because they won in a 'normal' fiberglass canoe," he added, referring to the fact that the winning — and borrowed — canoe met the conservative, and generally slower, Hawaiian Design specifications.

The night before looked as if the channel would favor the Tahitians, although Outrigger disagreed — which later turned out to be a misjudgment — and left its fiberglass canoe back in favor of a koa canoe more suited to the rough channel conditions.

Continued



Lanikai crew has no time for Molokai coast scenery.

Unfortunately, the channel was unusually calm and the skies clear.

As the light from the full moon shimmered off the ocean around Molokai in the predawn hours yesterday, exposing the serenity of the sea, many experts mumbled under their breath that the conditions were made to order for the Tahitians.

And it started out that way.

After the Rev. Abraham Akaka blessed the participants, the canoes made their way through Hale O Lono to the ocean where they would start.

The Tahitian crew named Tera Matai cruised into the opening lead with an easy, relentless stroke. They were followed by the Blazing Paddles, who would disappear from sight and interest until three hours later — with an insurmountable lead.

In the first 15 or 20 minutes, the field had spread out like broken glass on a waxed kitchen floor. The others were far behind and out of sight, lost in the glare of the rising sun behind Molokai.

At the one-hour mark, the leaders seemed to be Maire Nui, Tera Matai I and Outrigger. Where Lanikai and Blazing Paddlers went, no one knew until the end.

OVERALL FINISHERS

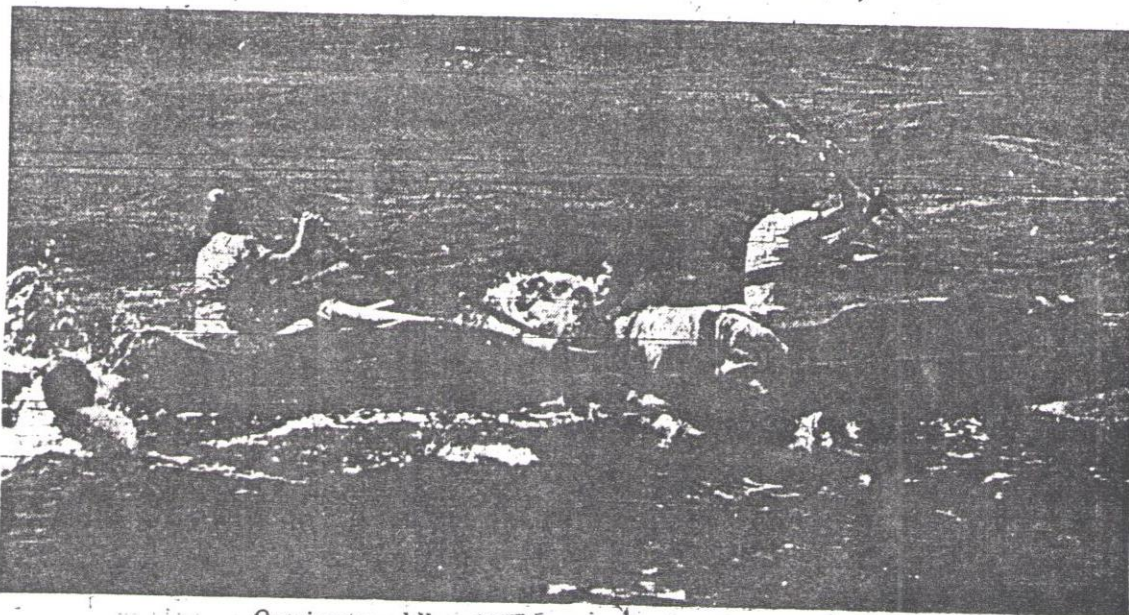
1. Blazing Paddles (fiberglass) 5:43:52; 2. Lanikai (fiberglass) 5:47; 3. Maire Nui (koa) 5:48; 4. Outrigger (koa) 5:49; 5. Outrigger (koa) 5:53; 6. Imua — California (fiberglass) 5:58; 7. Loa's (fiberglass) 5:59; 8. Hui Nalu (fiberglass) 6:00; 9. Hui Nalu (koa) 6:01; 10. Kailua (fiberglass) 6:02.

KOA DIVISION

1. Maire Nui 5:48:35; 2. Outrigger 5:49:02; 3. Hui Nalu 6:01:28; 4. Healani 6:06:06; 5. Koolau 6:09:47; 6. Kai Opua 6:11:54; 7. Hui Lanakila 6:12:02; 8. Waikiki Surf 6:12:16; 9. Tere Matai 6:14:05; 10. Lanikai 6:15:13; 11. Tiare Tahiti 6:23:39; 12. Bora Bora 6:24:04.

NON-KOA DIVISION

1. Blazing Paddles 5:43:52; 2. Lanikai 5:47:59; 3. Outrigger 5:53:15; 4. Imua 5:58:33; 5. Loa's 5:59:20; 6. Hui Nalu 6:01:30; 7. Kailua 6:02:25; 8. Hui O Kai Koa 6:05:30; 9. Tiare Tahiti 6:09:50; 10. Waikiki Beachboys 6:08:02; 11. Waikiki Surf 6:08:08; 12. Hanalei (Kauai) 6:13:12; 13. Leeward Kai 6:16:39; 14. Koolau 6:19:58; 15. Tere Matai 6:20:43; 16. Kamehameha (Oahu) 6:22; 17. Kamehameha (Hilo) 6:26:53; 18. Hyack Festival 6:28:43; 19. Moana Kai 6:34:00; 20. Molokai 6:38:38; 21. Hawaii Kai 6:52:39; 22. Hawaiian Warriors 6:57:13; 23. Hui Wao O Halewa 7:04:08.



Outrigger paddlers in the water during crew change.