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The KONA RACES

It's a Big Day On the Big Island When Territory's Best Paddlers Meet In Canoe Contests

By EZ CRANE

Next week-end, Kona comes into her own.

New Orleans may have her Mardi Gras; Louisville her Derby; Pasadena her Tournament of Roses.

But Kona has her Canoe Championships and to Kona folk this event is the high spot of the year, the grand climax to twelve months of preparation and anticipation, and on next Saturday Kona folds business, politics and coffee up in moth balls and goes to the races.

As a matter of fact Kona has been going to the races theoretically at least, for the last two or three months and before that, Kona has been thinking about going to the races for nine months.

This canoe Regatta had its inception only two years ago, in 1933, when Lorrin Thurston had a little spare time on his hands and thought it might be a good idea to revive the royal and ancient sport of Hawaii, canoe racing. So with the help of Julian Yates, Louie Macfarlane, Dad Center, John D. Kaupiko, Charlie Amoke and a lot of other enthusiasts, he put the first championships over back there in 1933.

Now, Kona has taken the races into her own bosom; the races are hers and she is proud of the part which she plays in the annual Territorial sports program.

In fact, in three brief years, the Kona championships have become a tradition, a heritage for the youngsters of the West Hawaii Coast to look forward to as representatives in the big contests, and for oldsters to sit by the hour and plot and plan how to put one over on the visitors from across the channels.

Talk to a Kona resident in town for a few days and first thing you know he is inviting you to come to Kona. But there is always, inevitably a stipulation: come to Kona during the races. In fact, the races have become an obsession with Kona people from the staid, grey-haired veterans to the tots along the beach who view the crews with the homage that only childhood can pay and hope someday to be able to "make" one of those sixes or fours or twos out there on the bay.

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For a century the Kona Coast has been cherished by a few who knew the charm that rested along the ragged sea beaten line. But they were few in numbers.

Today the Kona Coast is famous from one end of the Territory to the other and all because of the big championships which next Saturday will be contested once more. Today Kona sits by and smiles at attempts to lure tourists to other parts of the Islands during the latter part of August. Kona knows that tourists as well as kamaainas and a lot in between the two designations, will be packing up and starting for the little grass shack next week. And not a few will remain there longer, to enjoy the wonders and the pleasures of one of the finest spots in all Hawaii.

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As for the races, they form the high spot of the week-end but by no means are they the only event on the program. Kona Inn's famous dance and entertainment, where Old Hawaii comes down to greet the present era; Kona's grand luau to the crews and guests served as only a luau can be served by past masters at the art; Kona's hospitality, in the home, along the highway, along the coast, anywhere, help to provide a week-end such as the staid city dweller cannot even comprehend.

All this will be exemplified next week-end when hundreds of pale city dwellers will invade the Kona Coast—this designation does not include the tanned crews from Waikiki who will be well primed to challenge the best from along that famous Kona Coast—and arrive for the big event. They will learn just what the true meaning of Hawaiian hospitality is and they will return as hundreds of others have, singing "Little Grass Shack" and swearing that no other place in all Hawaii Nei knows how to do it like Kona.

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The Kona championships opened in 1933 with an event that will long be remembered by those who attended. Outrigger walked off with honors, chiefly because Outrigger invaded with trim, fast boats and fine, well trained paddlers. Kona's gallant crews from Honaunau, Miloli, Kailua, Hookena and other little bays of the coast, fought valiantly and gained honors for themselves, but they were novices at a game that Outrigger, Hui Nalu and Queen's Surfers had been practicing for years.

Kona's stalwart paddlers could have taken any of them on that year in a long, long race, over a course that started from one of those bays leading far out to sea, there to sight a school of mahimahi and then on to the chase for perhaps two or three hours. But this sprint racing was something new to Kona.

Kona bowed in defeat, honorably and cheerfully, but there was a warning glint in the eyes of such men as Julian Yates who had trained their lads for this big test.

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Came 1934 and the second big regatta.

This time Kona was ready. The same lads who throughout the year paddled steadily and patiently in the wake of the mahimahi, were conditioned for a fast, choppy stroke over a mile and three quarters course.

Some of the Kona boys laughed at first at this short course race, but they soon steadied and settled into the theme song of Kona, that of saving for their beloved Coast the reputation and honor of having the greatest paddlers in all Hawaii. So they trained for this sprint. And they were ready when Outrigger, Hui Nalu and Queen's invaded a second time.

This time perhaps it was the surfers from Waikiki who were a wee bit awed. For Kona, almost overnight, at least in just 12 months, had transformed long distance paddlers into speed racers and Kona was supreme.

Kailua triumphed in the big Regatta. In fact the only race that Honolulu was able to win was the "Whims" event where Outrigger won with Kona's fair lassies more or less at a loss at what to do with that swell that inevitably turned their boat around and started it back to the starting point.

But, they pointed out, they were used to staying at home waiting for the boys to come home from a 20 mile paddle out to the deep. Because if they didn't stay at home, just who would start the fire and get things ready for the mahimahi steaks and all that goes with a feed such as Kona men demand?

But, this year Kona has gone modern. We have it on good authority that the men folk have come to an understanding with their fair ones and instead of losing one race out of the entire program, they are going out after a clean sweep. In fact a large order for brooms has been placed by Kona enthusiasts, for the occasion and those brooms will be wielded if Kona's ambition is realized Saturday.

Cause racing is perhaps Hawaii's oldest sport. At least King Kamehameha would never have crossed the channels to unite the Islands into one, unless the ancient Hawaiians had not mastered the art of wielding a paddle. And since then, the Hawaiian youths have inherited the ability to hold their own in the boats that today, instead of setting out on trips requiring days on end, ask only a speedy run over a comparatively short course.

And it is unique and to the credit of the Hawaiians that in the boats that will race next Saturday a heavy majority of the paddle wielders will be boys who trace their ancestry back to the days when the lands was the rarity and the Hawaiian the rule.

Therefore the Kona races bring forth the one Hawaiian sport that is a true, Hawaiian sport. It is one that is not only enjoyed by the lads with the blood of the Islands coursing through their veins, but it is one in which they have successfully maintained their supremacy.

This is Kona's big moment. Therefore this article is devoted to Kona's ambitions, hopes, crews and all that. Waikiki will be there with three clubs to contest Kona's right in the sun, but today this belongs to Kona.

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But this, perhaps, is the best place in this article to warn Kona that Waikiki will be there with a lot of fine crews. The Honolulu regatta two weeks ago more or less demonstrated that and since Hui Nalu swept the harbor clean, much has happened along the Beach front.

Outrigger and Queen's Surf-

(Continued on Page 3)

1. It's always a big day in Kona when Waikiki's best paddlers invade the West Coast of the Big Isle for the annual championships. Here are canoe scenes that are now a part of Island racing history. 1—They're off. Start of a race in the big Kona classic, five crews bending to the paddles as the starter's gun cracks. 2—Kona's beaches present a colorful sight as thousands swarm down to the water's edge to witness the battle going on off shore. 3—Grandstand seats are provided by Kona's rocky, jagged coastline. 4—The paddlers overlook nothing in rigging and preparing their fine craft for the big event. Here a last minute change in the rigging of an outrigger to produce just that added burst of speed. 5—Kona's palm-lined shore forms an ideal spot for the housing of the many dozens of canoes which compete in the races and man's the argument and story spun under the shade of the coconut groves. 6—Kona's kids come into their own at race time, for they are the lads who put the final polish on the canoes, again to add just that much more speed to the boat in the final crisis. —(Advertiser photos except No. 4 by Midpacific.)

Honaunau Sounds Canoe Challenge: Typical Big Island Scene

READY FOR THE RACES—These Honaunau Juniors have been trained to the minute by Julian E. Yates in preparation for the big Regatta next Saturday morning in Kailua Bay. They are shown here with the Honaunau village in the background just before going out on a time trial last week.