

Hui Nalu leaves field in dust

Controversy spices regatta

By Andy Yamaguchi
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Another year, another state canoe regatta and another controversy. This year's flap was a rule change that led to the disqualification of 10 percent of the crews.

But in the end, all the huhu was overshadowed by Hui Nalu, which dominated the 38-club field yesterday to win the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association title at Keeki Lagoon.

Hui Nalu, a Hawaii Kai club founded in 1908 by, among others, Duke Kahanamoku, wrung all suspense out of the meet by rolling up 89 points by lunchtime and a staggering 144 at the close of the 30-race program.

It was Hui Nalu's second HCRA title in four years.

Outrigger Canoe Club was second with 122 points, Healani third with 109 and defending champion Hanalet of Kaula fourth with 100 in the AAA division.

Kai Oni won the AA division and Napili of Maui won the A title. Classifications were based on the number of events each club qualified for.

About 5,000 paddlers and spectators endured a day-long dust storm to watch the regatta from the Keeki Lagoon Park shoreline.

And, as in past state regattas in Lahaina (1981) and Hilo ('82), they also had to endure a controversy.

Many paddlers felt the waters of Keeki Lagoon were virtually mined with disqualifications after officials decided to eliminate "holding" — in which a coach on a surfboard holds the bow of a canoe to keep it from drifting past the starting line — in all races but keikis and novices.

"We feel since this is the state championships, the older clubs should be able to compete without it," race co-director Mel Kalahiki said.

But the wind was strong behind the canoes and many were blown past the starting line before the gun, causing their disqualification. Others overcompensated and found themselves out of bounds — also to be disqualified.

Thirty-three of the 320 crews were



Advertiser photo by Carl Vuk

Straining at her paddle, a Na Kai Ewalu paddler leans far over the gunwale to help her crew make a turn in the freshman women's race. This crew was disqualified for hitting a flag on a turn and interfering with another canoe, but Na Kai Ewalu finished third in the overall team standings for the AA division.

disqualified for starting infractions. In all, there were 48 disqualifications — 16 percent of all crews.

Hanalet coach Nick Beck had six crews disqualified — two of which had won their races.

"This is a place where you're at a disadvantage if you're not from Oahu and used to this downwind starting," Beck said. "I think there were arbitrary rules made."

Outrigger had four crews "DQ'd" and Healani three. Hui Nalu coach Kala Kukea counted his blessings for his club's single DQ and said it was a matter of working at it.

"The downwind start is the worst start, so I was real careful to review them with each of our crews," Kukea said. "Some of the DQs really went our

way. But that's the breaks. Last year they didn't go our way."

Breaks or not, Beck said probably nothing could have stopped Hui Nalu. "Hui Nalu is on a run this year," he said.

Not with a lot of impressive victories, but by nickel-and-diming its opposition into submission. Hui Nalu won only three events — and two of those victories came after crews ahead of it were disqualified. But it took three seconds, seven thirds and a boatload of other high places.

Depth, Kukea said, was his team's trump card.

"Our upper division was good, though not overpowering, but I felt we were stronger this year in the kids and the middle (events)," Kukea said. "In

terms of overall strength, this is one of our better years."

Hui Nalu was aided by a new, inflated scoring system, which awards 12 points for first place, 10 for second, etc. instead of the old 5-3-2-1. The new system shifted the emphasis from winning races to placing high in as many as possible.

Hui Nalu also took the wraps off a new koa canoe, a needle-nosed number named Enay that performed well yesterday and is expected to prove its worth in distance races this fall.

By mid-afternoon, the biggest obstacle left for Hui Nalu was a 500-ton oil tanker double-parked at the far end of the course. Because it drifted at anchor into three of the course's 12 lanes, all races had to be run on a quarter-mile,

not half-mile, course.

Cutting the course in half meant doubling the number of turns — five in the senior women's race, nine in the senior men's.

"It hurts us," Beck said, "cause we've got a boat that's really hard to turn."

But the ping-pong course did not faze Outrigger's senior men, who won their race by a whopping 45 seconds and demonstrated they just might be the best crew in any age group or class Hawaii has seen in the last few years.

Members of that crew are Bob Riley, Bill Bright, Ed Pickering, Walter Guild, Marc Haine and Brant Ackers.

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