

PADDLING

OCC remembers, vividly, how to win

By Dave Reardon

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According to Outrigger Canoe Club coach John Finney, "It is easy to forget how to win."

But his paddlers remembered yesterday and blew away the competition at Keehi Lagoon as Outrigger won its fifth consecutive Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association championship.

OCC scored 96 points, followed distantly by Kailua with 69 and Hui Nalu with 53. Surfsports scored 18 points to capture the A Division title (for clubs with 15 crews or less).

Outrigger got four of its nine first places consecutively around mid-morning. The Men's Novice B, Girls 16, Boys 16 and Girls 18 crews set the tone early.

"The older kids really performed," former head coach Walter Guild said. "And that won the regatta for us."

The OHCRA title wasn't the only good news for Outrigger yesterday: the club finished the day with 29 of its crews qualified for the state regatta on Maui a week from Saturday. Since there are 30 events, Outrigger will be in very good position to win its sixth consecutive state title.

Finney seemed more relieved

than excited yesterday when the final numbers came in. It has been a trying season for him, to say the least. Normally dominant Outrigger won only two regular-season regattas and was second in point standings to Kailua.

Finney said that early on Outrigger suffered from complacency and a lack of participation — at all experience levels ("All of these kids go to Disneyland every year," he said). It translated into a lack of regular season regatta victories.

"It looked pretty dismal," Finney said. "It looked like I was picked to be the goat of the year. It got to the point

where I put my foot down and said, 'Don't do this now. You can do it next year when someone else is coach. I'm not going to let Outrigger lose its winning tradition.' Watching the Senior Men lose a couple of races was a good slap in the face."

Losses — or the threat of future losses — helped revive interest and pride. Toward the end of the season the club turned out in force again. The red-and-white checkered tent is crowded to capacity once more.

Finney said Outrigger's slump probably helped the league as a whole.

"Actually, it was a great season (for the association) — be-

cause so many different clubs won," he said. "And it's fun to race in a situation that isn't one-sided."

"Hui Nalu's win had to be as much fun as anything this season. It went right down to the wire. When you lose like that it's not so bad."

Of course, it's better to win, and if there is one crew Finney hasn't had to worry about all season, it's the four-time state champion Women's Senior Masters. It is Outrigger's only unbeaten crew after the Junior Men were outraced by Kailua yesterday. Healani's Boys 14 is the only other undefeated OHCRA crew.