

Offshore wins in record time

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lokai to start the race at 7:24 a.m. The pre-race practice session was Offshore's first workout together as a team.

When they rounded La'au Point into the Kaiwi Channel, the Offshore crew was in seventh place. Still, Whitford wasn't worried.

"We're not the greatest starting team," he said. "We knew the flat conditions were to our advantage. We just had to start reeling them in one at a time."

One by one, the boats in front were eaten up by Offshore's juggernaut. Whitford, who now lives in Palolo Valley and is the National Junior Kayak/Canoe Development Coach, has finished this race 12 times and four times his crew has finished first — the last time with Offshore in 1981 and '82.

"About three hours into the race it was goodbye to Outrigger, goodbye to Australia, goodbye to Tahiti, hello open water," Whitford said.

Barton, a double gold medalist in kayaking in the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games, and his

Olympic teammate Kent were both ecstatic to win the race, billed as the world championship of distance outrigger canoe racing.

"I have been third, fifth and seventh in this race," said Barton. "I figured if I was ninth this year I was going to quit. The Olympics were obviously the highlight of my career, but this race is right up there with anything else I have ever done."

Kent, a two-time Olympian in kayaking, was in his sixth Molokai-to-Oahu race and was also ready to call this one his last with a loss.

"If we did worse than seventh this year, I was going to

quit," Kent said. "This is a very fun race. There is a lot more to it than just a canoe race. You come and learn a lot about the Hawaiian culture and meet a lot of different people."

For Hui Nalu's Kukea, the race was satisfying even though it marked his second straight second-place finish. Kukea, 46, has finished the race 17 times, but never has his boat been the first over the finish line.

"We paddled as well as we could paddle," Kukea said. "The expectation is to do as well as you can do. When another crew is better than you like Offshore was today, well, that is the way it goes."

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