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Lady Knights paddling to title

By Chip Davey
Special to Windward People

The Lady Knights of Castle, just off a paddling win in the OIA Championships, are now taking aim at the States.

"We're leaving to go to Hilo tomorrow," says Coach Stan Dickson. "Anything can happen there. The regular season really doesn't matter."

More than 24 schools will participate in the HHSAA extravaganza on Hilo Bay all day Friday. The sky — or disaster — is the limit. The Knights have competed every year since paddling was introduced to the high schools back in 2000. Two years ago the mixed girls-boys crew won the whole thing.

"You have to keep a calm intensity," laughs Dickson. "You've got to focus. You can't go crazy; you just have to be under control."

Last weekend the girls had enough intensity — behind captain Ui Heimuli, who sits in the #2 seat and is the only senior on the team — to win the OIA title with a 4.53 half-mile win.

For the record, freshman April Nakayama (the stroker at #1 seat), sophomores Sipola Fakatoka (#4), Kristal Choy (#5), Sara Hamel (#6) and Aulani Saizon (#5) join juniors Chawna Mahelona (#3) and Shyla Pakele (#6) to make up the rest of the crew. Hamel and Pakele also paddle at # 5; the #6 seat is the steersman. The crew has been constantly evolving.

"The girls have really come a long way," adds the coach. "They really made something out of this season. But it didn't start out that way."

Only three young ladies showed up for early-season conditioning and both Dickson and the crew coach Kamuela Lau were scratching their heads. But eventually more girls joined in, and they improved as the season went along. Two weeks ago they finished second in the OIA East runoffs.

They may be peaking at the right time.

"It all depends on who is in tune that day (Friday)," adds Dickson. "Who has the most focus. The states are a whole different ball game."

From such meager beginnings, the Castle girls have a bright future; if not this year, then next. There's only one senior on board.



Castle High School's Lady Knights (left to right) Aulani Saizon, April Nakayama, Kristal Choy, Sipola Fakatoka, U'i Heimuli (front center), Chawna Mahelona and Keisha Yim are ready to take on the state at the HHSAA State Championships in Hilo, Friday.

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