



2002 Team Eliminations



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Alii Holo Kai News



The on shore winds were blowing hard on the Sunday morning of the Alii Holo Kai Team Eliminations for the U.S. Nationals. It was cold, and the sea was choppy. Not the best conditions for a dive meet. Little did the competitors know, that today was to be the day of contrasting stories. Stories about fortunes, and misfortunes. Stories to be played out in the waters off Bellow Beach Park, on the island of Oahu, as the on shore winds howled in.



Wayde Hayashi read the role call, and the rules, for 2002 Team Eliminations. Amongst the five teams was a new team from the island of Kauai competing in their first elimination (Reyton Siliado, Martin Lugo, and Sean Thomas). There was also a name on the role call not been heard since 1999, and that was the 1999 U.S. National team captain

Wendell Ko.



At 8 a.m. the whistle blew, and the competitors hit the water. The first one in the water was Wendell who sprinted straight out, unaware of what he was going to face today.

The remainder of this team, Shawn Fujimoto, and Vernon Takata, followed close behind.



The Picasso team of Jason Hijirida, Marshall Tulang, and K.B. Vitarelli were out next.



The Kauai team paddled out last. One of their kayaks overturned in the surf, an omen of things to come.



Two teams remained on the beach. Both teams were penalized for up to an hour. The team of Dayne Fujiwara, Brian Oato, and Keaka Ching, watched the others paddle out, and wondered how the penalty was going to affect their chances. When the team of Ken Lee, Steve Lee, and Kris Sakamoto hit the water, fortunes had turned for Wendell Ko.

One hour into the competition Wendell already landed six fish for a total weight of 16.4 pounds. At this rate it looked as if Wendell was going to have a great day. However, when he rose from a dive his kayak was nowhere to be found. The anchor line broke loose from its mooring. Wendell was over a mile out from shore and his kayak, and his emergency equipment, were nowhere to be found.

The other teams headed straight out. Shawn Fujimoto took a different course and paddled towards Rabbit Island. It looked as if it was going to be a bad day for Shawn since he was diving with a cold, however, on a day like today anything could happen.

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And anything did happen. Further misfortune hit the team of Wendell, Vernon, and Shawn. Vernon Takata shot a large Kala and in his attempt to subdue the fish his knife slipped and cut Vernon's wrist. Vernon ended up finishing the competition, but had to go to the emergency room immediately after.

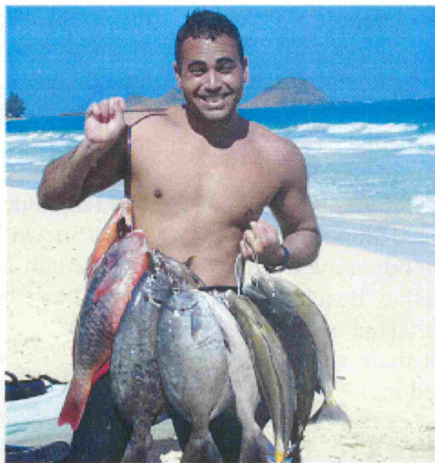
The day was going better for Ken Lee. Ken was in a gully, lying in wait. When he noticed a school of Kala rush past him. In a matter of seconds a large Ulua (Giant Trevally) appeared. Face to face with this large fish Ken shot. The fish swam straight up then fell motionless. Fortune was with him as the shaft pierced the Ulua's brain stoning it. Ken realized that this was both a blessing and a curse. The rules of the competition give one point per fish, and one point per pound with a maximum of 21 points per fish. Ken knew his Ulua was well over 50 pounds, and that the most points he would receive was 21, and he had to lug the fish around with him for the rest of the competition.



While Ken got his Ulua Wendell found his kayak. The kayak was over turned, and filled with water. Wendell righted the kayak and tried to sit on it to bale the water out. The kayak was too unstable, and the surge too strong. Every time he took water out more water went in. Wendell knew he was in trouble. At least he found his cell phone and could

call for help. If, however, he had to be rescued, or abandoned his kayak, his team would not have a chance. Wendell decided to put hope that his team mates were more fortunate than he, and decided to swim the capsized kayak back in over a mile off shore.

The Picasso Team worked the grounds in workman like fashion. Marshall and K.B. were having good days, but it was not to be Jason's day. Jason finished the day with four fish, and hoped his team mates catches would keep them in the running.



Shawn Fujimoto hoped his gamble was going to pay off as he paddled towards Rabbit Island, further than the other competitors.

Shawn scouted the area well in preparation for the contest. Fortunes were with Shawn when he dove down into a hole and found a school of 10-12 White Ulua between 10-20 pounds, the perfect competition size.

Shawn's first shot was perfect, as he stoned one of the Ulua. Any shot short of a kill shot would have spooked the school. Because of his perfect shot Shawn was able to land another White Ulua from the hole. Shawn would finish the day with 40.8 points, the fourth most of the 20 divers.



Fortunes were with the Omer team of Ken, Steve, and Kris. All three of the divers found their spots and fish. Kris Sakamoto was shooting some large Enenu'e's (Chubs) and Red Uhu (Parrotfish). Steve Lee also landed two large Uhu. The big fish were going to the Omer team. It looked as if they were a definite for first. The fight was for second.



The competitors paddled in. Fifteen kayaks were on the beach. The stories of the fortunes, and misfortunes, were told amongst the competitors, and spectators. The story that everyone was talking about was the kayak that could be seen straight out from the exit point. The swamped kayak of Wendell Ko.

Everyone watched the clock as they watched the kayak move closer and closer. There were only fifteen minutes left. If Wendell did not place his kayak on the beach beyond the cones he

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would be disqualified. Vernon and Shawn, asked whether they could help him. The answer was no. Not until Wendell got inside the surf line. Vernon, and Shawn, stood at the waters edge watching their team mate get closer as the minutes passed.



Wendell finally made it inside the surf line, and Vernon, and Shawn rushed to help him. When Wendell reached the beach he fell to his knees with a smile. He made it. The judges yelled at them to get the kayak beyond the cones. It took all three of them to get the water filled kayak up on the beach. One hour of diving, and five hours of swimming later his kayak was on the beach. Wendell made it, and their team was still in the running.



Ken Lee was one of the last to come in. When he pulled out his Ulua the crowd was amazed. There were guesses of 60 pounds, 70 pounds. There was talk that this was the largest fish to be landed in competition in Hawaii. Steve Lee landed soon after, and when he pulled

out his catch, it was obvious that the Omer team had won. Especially after everyone saw Kris Sakamoto's catch previously. Kris ended up 16 fish with a total weight of 51.12 pounds, which was the top score of the competition.

The competitors were off to Frank Farm's house for the weigh in. The camaraderie that all the competitors exhibited was admirable. Everyone was relieved that all the divers returned safely.

When the weigh-in was done, the Omer team was first, with the Picasso team in second. The two spots were chosen. There was a lot of "what-if" talk since Wendell's team was third, twenty-four points behind the Picasso team.

The weight of Ken Lee's Ulua was not determined, since the maximum weight of the scale was 60 pounds, and the Ulua easily pegged it when it was placed on the scale.

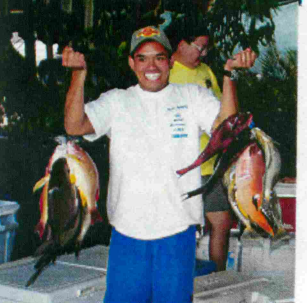
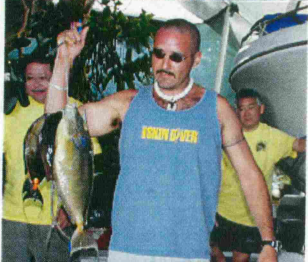
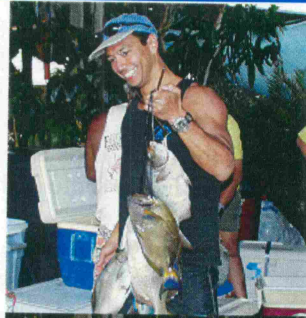


Everyone was smiling as the two teams were announced, and congratulated. Some of the other competitors were already talking about the Single Elimination meet to decide the third, and final team that would represent Hawaii in the 2002 U.S. Nationals.

Everyone hopes to see those that have qualified, and anyone else, come out to help in the single elimination meet.



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Diver	# Fish	Total Weight	Total Points	Team Points
Ken Lee	10	46.12	56.12	172.13
Steve Lee	9	39.50	48.50	
Kris Sakamoto	16	51.12	67.12	
Marshall Tulang	14	35.70	49.70	122.60
Jason Hijirida	4	15.70	19.70	
K.B. Vitarelli	10	43.80	53.80	
Wendell Ko	6	16.40	22.40	99.11
Vernon Takata	6	23.15	29.15	
Shawn Fujimoto	7	40.80	47.80	
Dayne Fujiwara	2	3.14	5.14	63.80
Bryan Oato	8	25.10	33.10	
Keaka Ching	7	17.90	24.90	
Reyton Siliado	0			6.13
Martin Lugo	1	5.13	6.13	
Sean Thomas	0			