

Paddle power prevails

By SIMON EARLE

Three Rotorua paddlers have returned home with gold medals from the World Va'a Outrigger Canoe Sprint Championships on Lake Natoma in California.

Rotorua Girls' High students Latoya Bennett-Collier, Te Whaeoranga Smallman and Dale Thomas were in crews which defied strong opposition from Tahiti to win both the Junior V6 and V12 500m sprint events. The longer 1000m event produced a silver medal for the Te Au Rere Waka Ama Club trio in their V6 crew.

Smallman completed a memorable championships by winning the Junior 19 VI 500m sprint.

The championships were also successful for their club coach George Thomas, who was the only Kiwi male to win gold when taking out the Adaptive Men V1 500m sprint.

Latoya Bennett-Collier described their gold medal winning campaign in California as "an awesome experience".

"It is something I'll never forget. All that hard work really paid off and having every one back home so proud of us made it really special too."

Crews from more than 35 countries entered the 13th World Championships.

Other Rotorua paddlers to win medals included – **Junior 16 Men:** Silver medallists, Adrian Ashmore, Kahu Hohepa, Tamati Marr, Timoti Marr, Kaipara Marr, Shawn Thwaites, Patu Whata, and Te Wehi Wright. Bronze medallists, Tuwharetoa Hapi, Apanui Poihipi-Tiraha, and Tommy Tuaru. **Junior 19 Men:** Bronze medallists, Sam Baker, Wiri Hohepa, and Haimona Te Nahu. **Golden Masters Womens:** Silver medallist, Cathy Dewes.



GOLD: Front, Te Whaeoranga Smallman and Latoya Bennett-Collier; back, Dale Thomas (standing) and George Thomas.