

105 canoes try Molokai crossing

By Dayton Morinaga
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The good news is the popularity of canoe racing is booming. In a way, it might also be bad news.

A record 105 crews are registered to paddle in Sunday's Bankoh Molokai Hoe — considered the world championship of long-distance outrigger canoe racing for men.

On one hand, the color, camaraderie and competition will be at an all-time high. On the other, questions of safety, fairness and quality are being raised.

"When you have that many crews, you have to ask, 'How many are really prepared for the race?'" said John Foti, a member of the defending

champion Lanikai Canoe Club. "It's good to have all these people willing and interested, but if there's going to be a three- to four-hour gap between crews, I think you might have to start thinking of other ways to do it."

Race director Joan Malama said her committee will discuss possibilities of entry limitation for future races. Much of that will depend on how Sunday's event goes.

One of the main concerns among paddlers is the start for the 41-mile race off Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai. By 7:30 a.m. Sunday, all 105 canoes must line up side by side behind a rope that will serve as the starting line. Three official boats — one will be positioned in the middle, the



Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association

other two on opposite ends of the starting line — will synchronize starting horns to assure as fair a start as possible.

"We're concerned, but I think we've addressed the issue and I think it will go all right," said Malama.

To avoid any mix-up, Foti said his crew will probably find a spot in between experienced crews on the starting line. Positions at the line are on a first-come, first-served basis.

"You want to go in between crews you know," said Foti. "You don't want to be in between inexperienced crews who might bump into you

right at the start and throw off your whole race."

Last year, 90 canoes entered the Molokai Hoe. Controversy arose in the first 30 minutes when some crews started relieving paddlers before the mandatory 30-minute mark.

Among local clubs, Lanikai, Outrigger, Waikiki Surf Club and Hui Nalu are considered contenders for this year's race. The 1993 and '94 champion, Faa'a from Tahiti, is back after a second-place finish last year. Tui Tonga, an all-star crew of local and Mainland paddlers, is considered a dark-horse contender.