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Different strokes, different folks key to OCC's success

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Staff

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Mixed plate of paddlers hungry for a repeat

By Dayton Morinaga, ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

The Outrigger Canoe Club has found success paddling with diversity and through adversity.

With paddlers of various ages, sizes and backgrounds, Outrigger has one of the most unlikely collections of paddlers in the state.

It is also one of the most successful.

As defending champion, Outrigger enters Sunday's Bankoh/Hinano **Molokai Hoe** as one of the leading contenders. The 41-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor, **Molokai**, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki, is

considered the world championship of long-distance outrigger canoe paddling.

"We were proud to win last year, but believe me, everybody has their ego in check," said Outrigger coach Kala Judd. "We know the competition is going to be harder this year because we know that people are going to be watching us and keying off what we do."

With that in mind, the Outrigger paddlers have persevered through a grueling five-month training program to determine its nine finalists for Sunday's race.

To assure fairness, each of the 20 or so candidates vying for a "first-team" spot was timed in weekly one-person canoe races and 3-mile runs, in addition to paddling in the standard six-person canoe.

"It's important to see what guys can do together in the canoe, but it's also important to see how they work individually," said Judd.

The chosen nine: Billy Balding, Andrew Glatzel, Walter Guild, Marc Haine, David Horner, Ikaika Kincaid, Mark Rigg, Matt Rigg and Courtney Seto. All but Mark Rigg and Seto were on last year's championship crew, but both were on previous **Molokai** Hoe winning teams at Outrigger.

"To have experienced winning this race and the feeling you get is something you can't describe unless you actually do it," said Mark Rigg. "We all want that feeling again."

And that is what unites an otherwise varied pack.

Mark Rigg, for example, is 43. Kincaid is 26.

"When you have a common goal in mind, you leave the ages behind," said Rigg. "Outside of paddling, the young guys tend to stick together with the young guys and the older guys tend to stick with the older guys. But once we're together in that boat, we're one."

One, but in various shapes, ranging from the 6-4 Rigg to the 5-7 Balding.

"The thing is we match up well with our positions in the boat," said Horner, who is 6-3. "The taller guys rotate in the seats in the middle of the boat, so we all have kind of the same stroke. Then the smaller guys rotate in the other seats."

They also gather from various occupations: Horner is an electrical engineer Matt Rigg and Seto are fire fighters Haine runs a carpeting business Kincaid is a waiter at Duke's Restaurant.

Yet, all have been dedicated to the weekday afternoon practice sessions.

"I have to be understanding to job-related situations because paddling doesn't pay the bills," said Judd. "But I can't say enough about these guys because they've all made sacrifices for this cause."

Kincaid, for instance, puts in extra practice time on his working days by paddling his one-person canoe from the Outrigger Canoe Club to the beach at Duke's and then back after work.

"To be a part of a handful of guys that can say, 'We won the **Molokai** Channel,' that's huge in Hawaii," said Kincaid. "I think it's kind of like winning the Super Bowl for a football player. You work so hard to get that first one, but after you get that one, you want another and so you work even harder."

It is why the Outrigger paddlers dismiss theories within the paddling community that they are a privileged club and should win races based on superior equipment.

"Yes, we have incredible resources at Outrigger," said Judd. "But I've seen clubs with 10 percent of the resources we have win this race or do incredibly well. You can have all the money and resources in the world, but if you don't train hard and you're not dedicated, there's no way you're going to win."

And the Outrigger paddlers feel they have trained harder than last year, when they stunned the paddling world with an unexpected **Molokai Hoe** victory.

"This is the race that brings us together as brothers," said Kincaid. "We would die for each other on race day. That's how much it means to us."

Drop-in:

Molokai Hoe

WHAT: Bankoh/Hinano **Molokai Hoe** (41-mile outrigger canoe race for men)

WHERE: Start at Hale O Lono Harbor, **Molokai** finish at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki

WHEN: Sunday, start at 7:30 a.m. first finishers expected around 1 p.m.

WHO: More than 100 crews from around the world

HOW: In either koa or fiberglass canoes teams have nine paddlers, with six in a canoe at one time, competing in either open division, masters (35-over) or senior masters (45-over)

Photo caption:

Defending champion Outrigger Canoe Club is working even harder to prepare for this year's **Molokai Hoe**

DEBORAH BOOKER - The Honolulu Advertiser