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## **`Everyday guys' give up a lot for canoeing**

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New Zealanders away from family, work for a month

By Dayton Morinaga, ADVERTISER STAFF WRITER

Words like sacrifice and commitment are familiar in canoe paddling.

Especially when it comes to the Bank of Hawaii **Molokai Hoe**, just about every paddler sacrifices something - work time and family time are the primary responses - to commit to the annual crossing of the Kaiwi Channel.

Some sacrifice more than others.

Somewhere as proof in New Zealand, there's a dead cow, a few out-of-shape businessmen and some upset

Japanese bosses.

At least that's what some members of Team New Zealand/Hawaii said they left behind in an effort to win this year's **Molokai Hoe**, which is scheduled for Sunday. The 41-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor, **Molokai**, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki, is considered the world championship of outrigger canoe paddling.

"We're not professionals or anything," said New Zealand paddler Rob Kaiwai. "We all have regular jobs. We're every day guys trying to win this thing."

When it comes to paddling, they are a little better than everyday guys. With a second-place finish in last year's **Molokai Hoe** and victories in two long-distance races last month, Team New Zealand/Hawaii is considered one of the favorites for Sunday's race.

The crew is comprised of three paddlers from Hawaii (Raven Aipa, Todd Bradley and Kea Paiaina) and six from various parts of New Zealand (Kaiwai, Bo Herbert, Dave Kennedy, Maui Kjeldsen, Rick Nuu and Andrew Penny).

"There's a lot more pressure this year," said Bradley, the team's steersman and captain. "I think people see what we've been doing. We're not so much surprises to anybody."

To be sure, the team has been practicing together for the last month.

"Because we came so close last year, we said what can we do to try and make up the difference," Bradley said, referring to the team's 1 minute, 45 second gap behind champion Outrigger. "The first thing we thought about was getting together sooner to try and build more of a bond."

For the New Zealand paddlers, that has meant a month away from home, with no income and no family accompaniment.

"This is the greatest ocean race in the world," said Kaiwai. "If you're involved in outrigger canoe paddling anywhere in the world, you know this is the ultimate goal. You have to try and make it here no matter what it takes."

As Kennedy added: "We know this is the ultimate race. But, honestly, it hurts financially to come here."

Kennedy, for example, took a month's leave from his job as a personal trainer. While his clients are getting soft in New Zealand, he has compensated by helping to train the crew.

"I kind of take care of our workouts on the water," said Kennedy, 28. "Sort of set up a schedule of what days we go really hard and what days we go easy."

Other teammates have been left to wonder about their jobs.

Kaiwai, 43, is a manager of a Japanese-owned construction company in New Zealand. He took a month's leave without pay, and admits "I'm probably pushing it," with his employers.

The most interesting case may be Herbert, who is a private dairy farmer. While here, he has been making daily calls to his wife to check on his 300 cows. Last week alone, one cow died and a water heater broke down.

"It's not the best time for disasters," he said. "This is the busiest time of year for me, so I've been working 16-hour days. I hired someone to look after the farm while I'm away, but I'm worried about it all the time."

Though there is no prize money for first place, the New Zealand paddlers say a victory on Sunday would make the sacrifices worthwhile.

"I've come all this way for one thing," said Herbert. "And that's not to get second or third - we got that already. I want to win this race."

The crew was first formed in 1997, and was comprised entirely of New Zealand paddlers. That crew placed 22nd.

The following year, they showed up with seven paddlers, but got Bradley and Aipa to join them. That crew placed third in 1998, then second last year.

"We actually knew some of them through one-mans (solo canoe races)," said Bradley. "But we feel like we're a lot closer as a team now than we were three years ago."

This year, Paiaina joined the mix.

"I was honored," said Paiaina, a member of Healani Canoe Club. "I felt like it was a once in a lifetime opportunity."

One of the top solo paddlers in Hawaii himself, Paiaina said his first practice with the team was "unreal you could feel the power in the boat immediately."

Still, Team New Zealand/ Hawaii is only one of about a half-dozen legitimate contenders.

Tahiti has two strong entries, including one all-star crew featuring former paddlers from the Faaa team that won the **Molokai Hoe** in 1993 and '94. Lanikai and Kai `Opua are the top Hawaii entries.

"We're not taking anything for granted," said Kaiwai. "That's why we all committed to this so early this year. We realize how hard you have to work to win this race."

Photo caption:

Team New Zealand/Hawaii will carry lofty expectations and a new canoe constructed by Karel Tresnak into Sunday's Bank of Hawaii **Molokai Hoe**.

BRUCE ASATO - The Honolulu Advertiser

Photo caption:

Paddlers from Team New Zealand/Hawaii have been practicing off Oahu for the last month. The team is considered one of the favorites in Sunday's **Molokai Hoe**.

BRUCE ASATO - The Honolulu Advertiser

Drop-in:

Bank of Hawaii **Molokai Hoe**

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

WHEN: Sunday, 7:30 a.m. start first finishers expected around 12:30 p.m.

FORMAT: Each team consists of nine paddlers, with six in the canoe at one time. Paddlers rotate positions with the three "relief" paddlers throughout the race.