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CANOE_PADDLING

Sometimes the older guys show younger guys the way

By Jason Genegabus
Special to the Star-Bulletin

WHEN Vance Collins arrives in Honolulu tomorrow, the 46-year old father of two will not be loading up his family into a rental car and checking in at a hotel.

Instead, Collins will be heading to Molokai to meet up with four Hawaii residents and prepare for Sunday's 49th annual Bank of Hawaii Hinano Molokai Hoe. For them, Sunday morning will be an extraordinary day.

"It's going to be a circus," said Collins via telephone from California earlier this week. "Everyone is running around, rigging their boats, getting their stuff loaded up. It's really a madhouse.

"But at the same time, there's a lot of excitement on top of that. Everyone is focused on the race."

Bankoh Molokai Hoe

49th annual men's race Sunday.
41 miles across Kaiwi Channel.

<http://www.hawaiianh2o.com/molokai>

COURSE

- ▶ **Start:** 7:30 a.m., Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai.
- ▶ **Finish:** Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki. First crews expected around 12:30 p.m.
- ▶ **Record:** Lanikai Canoe Club (Oahu), 1995, 4:53:03.

CREWS

- ▶ **Entries:** Some 100 teams of nine paddlers each representing Hawaii, the U.S. mainland, Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Canada, Hong Kong, Germany, Hungary and Tahiti.
- ▶ **Defending champion:** Outrigger Canoe Club (Oahu) won its second straight race and 16th overall.

BROADCASTS

- ▶ **Radio:** Live updates KCCN 1420-AM, 100-FM
- ▶ **TV:** KHON-TV airs race special at 9 p.m. on Oct. 20, and at 5 p.m. on Oct. 21.

Gaylord Wilcox, Nick Beck, Chris Crabb and Lance Laney will be joining five members of the Newport Aquatic Center for some last minute training and race preparation. Their entry in the senior masters (45-older) division will mark the first time the men have paddled together in a race.

"I think we'll do OK," said Beck. "There are some real competitive crews. But there's a lot of things that could happen out there.

"With a good course like this, making good changes, picking up a few extra waves -- the race isn't over until we hit the beach."

The five Californians are not new to the islands -- or to paddling. The Newport Aquatic Center teammates have a combined total of 22 Molokai channel crossings.

"With the caliber of guys in the boat, we should have a good race," said Jirka Batlik, a 47-year old member of the Newport crew. "We're really excited to go out there and be in the boat with them. They know (Newport) won senior masters last year," he added. "They know that's the intention this time."

Beck, a 60-year old Kauai resident, is glad to be of service. Since retiring two years ago, he has spent equal amounts of time in both Hawaii and Lake Tahoe. Although time commitments have kept Beck from competing for his home club, Hanalei Canoe Club, he says the channel crossing is something he just can't miss.

"Hanalei has a crew that's been training all summer long and I haven't been around much," said Beck. "If they had been short (on crew members), then I'd have been glad to help. But they knew I was going to do the challenge."

For Wilcox, just being able to get into a canoe and compete is enough motivation for him to make yet another journey from Hale O Lono Harbor to Duke Kahanamoku Beach. After making over 20 crossings in the past 35 years, the 55-year-old Oahu resident is happy to help.

"A lot of times you'll see the senior master guys racing. It adds more boats to the race," he said. "It makes it fun to have more guys competing."

While Wilcox is a member of Anuenue Canoe Club, he says his teammates understand the situation for this year's crossing. Initially, his home team didn't think they'd be participating.

"At first they said there wasn't going to be a crew," Wilcox said. "So Newport approached me about helping them out. They're a talented group. It looked like a good opportunity for me, so I took it."

Beck and Wilcox are also recognized throughout the paddling community as important contributors.

Wilcox is a past president of the Hanalei Canoe Club, also spending time as a coach there. Beck is known by many as a legend among steersmen in the sport.

Fred Atkins, a 48-year old Kauai resident, will be competing this weekend for the Kaiola Canoe Club. He thinks that the two will bring a wealth of experience and lend support to the Newport crew.

"Nick's a legend and Gaylord's been competing for years," Atkins said.

"They've done a lot for paddling on Kauai. If I could have joined them, it would have been an honor for me.

"They've been through almost every condition that can be thrown at paddlers," he added. "The guys are mentors. Guys like them set a standard for me. It shows that they've got plenty of time left."

Batlik agrees.

"The older guys are important," he said. "The Molokai race is very, very unpredictable. They're the ones who can show the younger guys the way. They know the ocean and the tricks of the sport. It's great that they're sticking with it."

Beck says he'll paddle the race as long as he can.

"I wouldn't do this if it wasn't great," he said. "It's a lot of fun. We're all good buddies."

But Beck won't forget about the younger men of Lanikai, Outrigger, and all the other crews competing for the overall title.

"Go for it and enjoy every minute," he said. "Don't forget, you'll be up in the senior masters someday too."

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