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Emotional ride ahead for a Moloka'i Hoe team

By [Dayton Morinaga](#)
Advertiser Staff Writer

Team New Zealand/ Hawai'i is certainly capable of winning Sunday's Bank of Hawaii/Hinano Moloka'i Hoe.

Runner-up finishes in each of the past two years is proof enough.

But this year, all they really want to do is have fun.

That's because Chrissy Herbert would have wanted it that way.

In June, Herbert died of complications associated with a brain hemorrhage she suffered while paddling in a race in New Zealand. Her husband, Bo, will paddle with Team New Zealand/Hawai'i on Sunday.

"You kind of realize that life is really short and you have to get your priorities right," said Rob Kaiwai, one of Bo's teammates and best friends. "I think we all had a hard time with it, but Chrissy would have wanted us to keep paddling."

The team is comprised of five paddlers from New Zealand (Herbert, Kaiwai, Maui Kjeldsen, Eugene Marsh and Andrew Penny) and four from Hawai'i (Raven Aipa, Kea Paiaina, Bill Pratt and Karel Tresnak Jr.).

Most of those same paddlers were competing with Bo Herbert at a race in Australia when he received news of Chrissy's hemorrhage.



Team New Zealand/Hawai'i will dedicate Sunday's race to Chrissy Herbert, the wife of a team member who passed away in June.

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Moloka'i Hoe

- What: 41-mile outrigger canoe race for men
- When: Sunday, 7:30 a.m. start; first finishers around 12:30 p.m.
- Where: The race starts at Hale O Lono Harbor, Moloka'i; it finishes at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki
- Who: Approximately 110 crews from around the world competing in various divisions (Open, Masters 35-older,

"We were all worried, but it seemed like she was going to be OK at the time," Marsh said. "Then two weeks later, she died. It was a shock to all of us."

Chrissy was "around 40, but looked like 25," according to Kaiwai, and "an incredibly fit athlete."

More than 1,000 people attended her funeral, most of them paddlers.

"The (paddling) community back home is like a big family," Marsh said. "So it was a loss for all of us."

The Herberts have three teen-aged sons and a private dairy farm with more than 300 cows.

As recently as a week ago, Herbert did not want to paddle with the crew. In addition to caring for his sons and the farm, he had to endure his wedding anniversary without Chrissy last week. What's more, 10 cows were recently stolen from the farm.

"He's a real tough guy, mentally and physically," Kjeldsen said. "So when he said he was feeling down, I knew how difficult it was for him."

Eventually, his teammates convinced him to participate.

"Basically, I didn't want him to look back and wonder why he didn't paddle," Kaiwai said. "And I told him that I could picture his wife saying, 'Why aren't you on Moloka'i with your friends?'"

Herbert will join the team tomorrow. On Sunday, the crew will dedicate its race to Chrissy.

"It's just another motivating factor to help us go faster," Marsh said.

The crew has also made some physical adjustments to increase its speed. Three of the nine paddlers are new to the team. Most notable, they added Tresnak as its steersman.

Tresnak is the three-time defending Moloka'i-to-O'ahu champion for solo canoe paddlers. He was also a member of last year's Lanikai crew that set a course record en route to winning the Moloka'i Hoe.

Because he started college at the University of Colorado this fall, he could not attend the Lanikai practices. Team New Zealand/Hawai'i, which does not hold regular practices because of its unique blend of paddlers, agreed to accept Tresnak about a month ago.

"This crew has been in the hunt every year, so I was happy for the opportunity," he said. "A lot of these guys haven't won the (Moloka'i Hoe), so they bring a lot of hunger. And power-wise, they have it."

Outrigger-Australia returns

• **Back from Down Under:** After a two-year hiatus, Outrigger-Australia will enter this year's race.

Outrigger-Australia won the Moloka'i Hoe in 1991 and '97, and had six other top-five finishes in the 1990s. It placed fourth in '98, but did not make the trip the past two years.

"Some of it was cost," said paddler Matt Carter, noting the poor exchange rate between Australian and American dollars. "But we also felt like we needed to regroup and put ourselves in a position to win it again."

Senior Masters 45-older, Golden Masters 55-older, Koa canoe)

- Format: Each team will paddle a six-person canoe, and can rotate nine paddlers in the six seats throughout the race (Golden Masters crews can rotate 12 paddlers)

Three paddlers from the '97 championship crew are back — Chris Maynard, Rob Dorrough and Todd Murray. The rest of the crew is comprised of top lifeguards from various areas of Australia.

The team will use a new Mirage canoe courtesy of Kailua canoe-builder Karel Tresnak.

"When the Australian crews have won in the past, (the Kaiwi Channel's) been flat," Carter said. "But we had some good results in rough races back home, so we feel like we're prepared for anything."

Earlier this year, Outrigger-Australia defeated an all-star crew from Hawai'i during the Hamilton Island Cup in Australia.

Who's the favorite?

• **Tough call:** Lanikai might be the defending Moloka'i Hoe champion, but it is hardly considering itself a favorite this year.

"We've been beat so many times this year, we feel like we're the underdogs," said Lanikai steersman Jim Foti.

In truth, Lanikai is one of about 10 teams that can be considered leading contenders.

Among the Hawai'i entries, Lanikai, Kai 'Opuia and Team New Zealand/Hawai'i have traded victories in the races leading up to the Moloka'i Hoe. Other Hawai'i contenders include Hui Lanakila, Waikiki Surf Club, 'Anuenue and Hui Nalu.

Top foreign entries include Pirae (Tahiti), Tapaetia (Tahiti) and Outrigger-Australia.

"Who is the favorite?" Foti said. "Who knows."