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Carrying on family tradition

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Everything brothers, from left, Sean, Conan and Chase Herbert know about paddling they learned from their late parents. Conan and Chase will paddle for Team New Zealand/Hawai'i in Sunday's race.

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WHAT: 41-mile outrigger canoe race for men.

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

WHERE: Start at Hale O Lono Harbor, Moloka'i; finish at Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki.

WHO: More than 100 crews from around the world competing in various divisions (open, masters 40-older, masters 50-older, masters 55-older, koa canoe).

FORMAT: Crews can rotate nine paddlers into the six seats of the canoe throughout the race (while

Sunday's Moloka'i Hoe outrigger canoe race should be a memorable ride for the Herbert brothers.

Never mind that they flew in from New Zealand for the race. And ignore the fact that Conan and Chase Herbert will be crossing the Kaiwi Channel for the first time.

This is for their late parents, Bo and Chrissy Herbert.

"We don't know what to expect, really," Conan said. "There's so many emotions now. I can't imagine what it might be like on Sunday."

The Moloka'i Hoe is a 41-mile race from Hale O Lono Harbor, Moloka'i, to Duke Kahanamoku Beach, Waikiki. It is considered the world championship of long-distance outrigger canoe paddling.

Conan, 21, and Chase, 19, will paddle with Team New Zealand/Hawai'i on Sunday. Younger brother Sean, 16, will follow the team on an escort boat (paddlers must be at least 18 to participate).

In June 2001, their mother Chrissy died of complications associated with a brain hemorrhage. Four months after that, their father Bo paddled to a memorable victory with Team New Zealand/Hawai'i in the Moloka'i Hoe.

"I remember him being really happy, but at the same time, he was a little sad because he couldn't share it with Mom," Conan said.

In March of this year, Bo died in an accident at his home in New Zealand.

"We can't be upset about it," Chase said. "We know where our dad went ... he's with our mom."

Bo and Chrissy were well-known paddlers and coaches in New Zealand. Everything their sons learned in the sport came from them.

"We kind of look after each other now," Conan said. "But we don't forget what our parents taught us."

Team New Zealand/Hawai'i is a mix of paddlers from New Zealand and Hawai'i that has been an annual contender in the Moloka'i Hoe since 1998. They won the Moloka'i Hoe in 2001 and 2003.

They placed sixth last year and decided after the race to disband the team.

"We were going to take a break so everybody could relax and do their own thing," said Bill Pratt, one of the Hawai'i paddlers on the team.

Bo's death changed that plan.

Rob Kaiwai, one of the New Zealand paddlers, came up with the idea of reforming the team with Bo's two oldest sons.

six paddle, four follow in an escort boat; changes are made throughout the course); in the masters 55-older division, crews can rotate 12 paddlers.



Team New Zealand, with Conan Herbert, third from left, and brother Chase, second from right, practice Tuesday at Kailua Beach.

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Team New Zealand puts the paddle to the water during a practice run at Kailua Beach.

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Team New Zealand wheels out a canoe at Kailua Beach.

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"Rob basically didn't give us an option," Pratt said. "He said we're going to do this for Bo."

Sunday's crew will feature six paddlers from New Zealand and three from Hawai'i. Conan, Chase, Kaiwai, Andrew Penny, Maui Kjeldsen and Eugene "Woogie" Marsh are from New Zealand; Pratt, Raven Aipa and Heath Hemmings are from Hawai'i.

"There's a different perspective this year," Penny said. "The race in 2001 was emotional because we did it with Bo for Chrissy. But this one is entirely different. For me personally, each stroke will be for Bo and Chrissy."

In preparation for Sunday's race, Conan and Chase have been training together in the cold New Zealand waters for the past four months.

"We'll go for two hours a day, just the two of us," Conan said. "Having never done this race, I'm a little nervous about it."

The rest of the team is trying to help them relax this week. In addition to paddling practice, the team will have golf and surf sessions.

"When their dad would come over for this race, there were so many fun antics that we shared together," Pratt said. "We want his boys to experience all of that, not just the paddling."

Penny added: "I think one of our goals as uncles and brothers is to let the boys know that everything will be OK. If they ever need a helping hand, or just someone to talk to, we're here."

It is also a much-needed break for the Herbert brothers. Their parents owned a private dairy farm in New Zealand.

Since Bo's death, the three boys and a few older relatives have taken over care of the farm and livestock.

"There's still a lot of legal work that needs to be done, so for now we all do what we can to help out," Conan said. "I have another job and so does Chase, so we come over on the weekends and do what we can. It's a lot of work."

Even with the two rookies, Team New Zealand/Hawai'i is considered one of the top contenders for Sunday's race.

Not that it seems to matter to them. Not this year.

"This is a special race for us for obvious reasons," Penny said. "Bo will be watching down on us, and I'm sure he'll appreciate that his two boys are paddling in his place. It'll be a great day, no matter what happens."