

# Open Men Paddlers Making the Transition

By Genie Kincaid

Outrigger's upper division men's canoe racing program is decidedly lean this year, and the strength of Outrigger's competition from other local clubs confounds the men's own aspirations for success this year. But coach Mike Mason isn't pushing any panic buttons.

"This year, we're working hard and having more fun than last year. The guys who are here want to be here. The numbers aren't good but the energy is way higher."

As regatta season got underway, the paltry numbers revealed an exodus of Outrigger's younger talent. But Mason, seeing the cup half full, not half empty, is nonchalant. "We have a fine group of younger guys coming from our freshmen and novice groups." In fact, the Club could depend on these crews for points in OH CRA's six regattas this summer. "And I've never seen a senior crew put in as much time with the younger guys as this year's senior men."

That senior group of paddlers Mason relies upon has 17 Molokai Hoe wins among them. With that comes years of valuable experience and knowing what it takes to win the big races. Mason doesn't hesitate to utilize his resources and defends his practice of coaching by committee. "The senior paddlers have lots of knowledge. It's good to get input. Besides it's better than one mind trying to run everything. Why not use the resources?"

Though 1996 is a lean year, Mason's goals for the men are no different from any other Outrigger coach—win Molokai. "If you set as a goal anything lower than winning Molokai, why even bother?" True, but are the men's chances of winning realistic, "You have to go with what you got. If I get a couple bonus

babies (translation, ringers) to add to the mix, great. But I can't depend on that. Right now, I'm looking to fine tune the elite paddlers, and get the nine fastest guys for Molokai."

The men have been experimenting with different ideas to improve themselves. Most notable of these is incorporating one-man canoe work outs into the training regimen. Lanikai's success notwithstanding, Mason was already a believer in the benefits of training on the one-man.

"From a strength and conditioning aspect, the one-man keeps you in unreal shape. And if you're not effective in a one-man, it shows. It teaches you efficiency in the water, and how to read the ocean."

The pay off is the conditioning of his paddlers is excellent. Just in time to execute during the distance season which begins after the HCRA State Championships.

Mason would like to see the men enter three open crews for Molokai, including a competitive koa crew and a younger group of paddlers, "just to keep the younger guys excited. As a young paddler, guys like me used to put up with the regatta grind just to paddle distance."

He recognizes that the men's program is in transition, but with quiet determination, embraces the challenge

to move the men's place in paddling history to the next chapter. A difficult course to navigate, but as Mason puts it, "I'm definitely a rough water sailor."

He is aware that comparisons to previous coaches and their successes are inevitable, but doesn't feel he has to match up. With all due respect to

all other men's coaches in Outrigger's history, his job today is turn the men's program around. It is his personal goal, and his temperament is suited to the task. ☐

*Outrigger's Upper Division Men—Marc Haine, Todd Bradley, Mark Rigg, Courtney Seto, Walter Guild, Coach Mike Mason and Chris Kincaid.*



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