

Thirty-Seven Canoes Ready for Gruelling Molokai Test

By Jack Wyatt

Special to Star-Bulletin

To the sun-baked tourist from Iowa, Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor is "nowhere"—a kind of Polynesian pits.

But to the 350 paddlers, their afterward and the officials participating in tomorrow's Molokai-to-Oahu Canoe Race, the hot, dusty and desolate harbor becomes a tropical paradise—the beginning of Hawaii's biggest canoe racing show.

"All of the months of rigorous training and detailed preparation comes together at 7:30 tomorrow morning when the starter signals for the race to begin," said race chairman John Kaupiko.

"IT PROMISES to be an exciting moment, not only for the 37 crews stroking their way across the channel, but for anyone connected with the race."

According to Kaupiko, this year's 26th annual race, with entries from California, Tahiti and Canada, is the

most competitive ever. "It's impossible to predict a winner," he said.

"In addition to the defending champ—the Outrigger Canoe Club—there must be a dozen teams which could win. But being a long-standing Hui Nalu member, I kind of lean toward my own crew to finish first."

Kaupiko does predict, however, that weather permitting, the first canoe should arrive at Waikiki's Ft. DeRussy Beach by 1:15 tomorrow afternoon. And, after a quick check with the Honolulu forecaster, there appears to be nothing but fair paddling weather on the horizon for the weekend.

KAUPIKO REPORTS that the primitive harbor of Hale O Lono is no longer the instant "tent city" of past years when most of the crews stayed at the race site in shelters furnished by various organizations.

"This race has become so large and so sophisticated that we've had to cut down on expenses," Kaupiko explained. "The committee still provides fresh water for drinking and

bathing, plus restroom facilities. But this year it's up to the teams to furnish their own housing and food.

"Last year there were not more than four teams that stayed at the harbor. Most crews now realize the importance of a restful sleep before the race and stay in private homes or hotels."

Canada's entry—the Hyack team from Vancouver Island—has discovered, the hard way, that paddling a 40-foot Hawaiian outrigger canoe can be hazardous.

"OUR CREW recently won an 85-mile race down Canada's rugged Fraser River without mishap," said Joy Metcalfe, a team official.

"But last week, while practicing in one of your outriggers, one of our crewmen strained his shoulder muscle, another cut his face, requiring four stitches, and the rest of the crew wound up with bumps and bruises. All this happened in practice. What injuries will the race bring?"

Each team is authorized nine crew members—six paddlers in the boat at one time, plus three alternates. After the first 30 minutes of the race, the paddlers may rotate at will.

Also, because of safety and crew needs, each canoe will have an escort boat, which in some cases, is used in rescues.

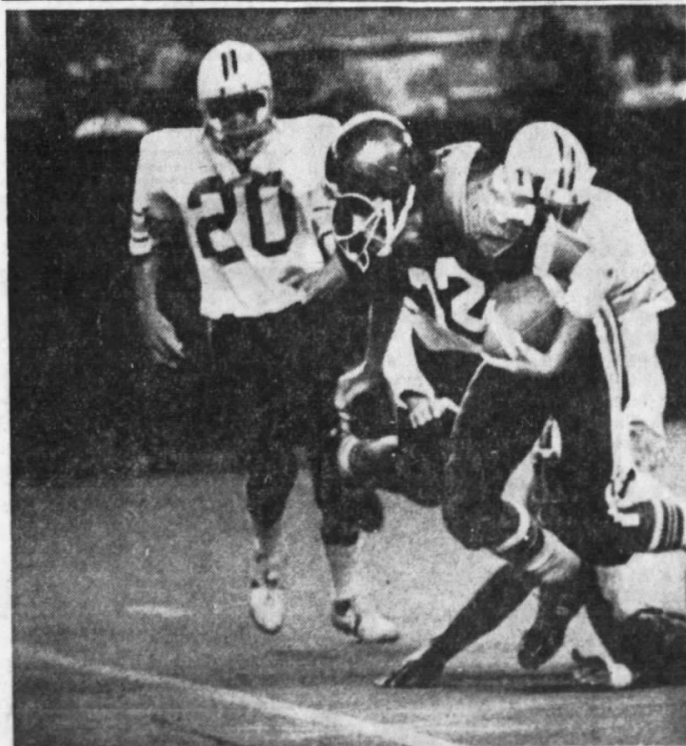
"IN MOST CONDITIONS, the venerable koa canoe is fastest and perhaps strongest," said Outrigger Canoe Club's Brant Ackerman, "but you never know when the glue holding old patches will let go.

"I can remember in the race four years ago when we were battling with Lanikai Canoe Club for the lead, a crack opened up in our koa boat.

"Water poured in until one crewman had to stop paddling and bail. We finally plugged up the hole and limped in third. In mid-channel, it was sure a relief to see our escort boat nearby in the event we swamped."

The 37 canoes representing 31 clubs come from Hawaii's two canoe racing organizations—the Hawaii Canoe Racing Association and the Hui Wa'a Association.

Scoring will be in two divisions—koa and the open class (canoes made from material other than a koa log). Spectators may view the canoes as they finish at Waikiki's Ft. DeRussy Beach from 1 p.m. tomorrow.



TUG OF WAR—Waianae's Watson Mahaulu tries to pull away from an unidentified Campbell tackler as Rhinehart Numazu (20) of the Sabers closes in. Story on Page B-2.—Star-Bulletin Photo by Alexis Higdon.