

# It's a Real State Canoe Championship Tomorrow

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For the first time in four years, members of the Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association and the Hui Wa'a & Surfing Association will come together for the State HCRA championships tomorrow at Keehi Lagoon. Thousands of paddlers representing 39 clubs from Oahu, the Big Island, Maui and Kauai will churn into competition at 8:30 a.m.

Crews in the state regatta will race in 12 lanes — four lanes have been allotted to qualifiers from the Oahu HCRA, three to Hui Wa'a and five to Neighbor Island associations.

"It's good," Lokahi Canoe Club Coach Mike Cushnie said of the once-again inclusive state race, which resulted after Hui Wa'a joined HCRA in July, 1982. "It (the competition) kinda lets us

know where we stand."

TWO WEEKS AGO, Cushnie coached Lokahi's 190 members to the Hui Wa'a championship — the first crown in the club's four-year history. But, he said, "We know we're not going to win (the state championship)."

Nevertheless, Lokahi is aiming for a divisional title. "We're in the 7-to-15 category as far as crews go," Cushnie noted. "That's our goal right now, to win our (AA) division."

Hui Wa'a clubs, which race in fiberglass canoes, faced the HCRA requirement that crews must compete in koa crafts. "You want to race in what you practice in . . . in your own equipment," Cushnie said, referring to the fact that Hui Wa'a teams will be using borrowed koa canoes. "It's not the same as racing in our own canoe.

"We're a young club in a young association," Cushnie added. "Maybe we won't win . . . not this year. But sometime down the line, we'll be very competitive with the top clubs in the other association (OHCRA)."

A TOP CLUB is defending state champion Hanalei Canoe Club of Kauai, whose 80 members pulled a hat trick in upsetting Oahu clubs twice its size for all the marbles last year.

However, Hanalei found out six weeks ago about HCRA's new "step up rule," which states that only one person per crew — instead of an entire crew — can step up and race in a higher category.

As a result, Hanalei Coach Nick Beck said his club has been beating the bushes from one end of the Garden Isle to the other trying to fill every seat in his

crews, which qualified for all 30 of tomorrow's events.

"We're up against the wall," Beck said. "We'll go up (to Oahu) and give all the kids a chance to paddle. We told our people, 'You get us somebody in shape and we'll teach them how to paddle.'"

"We're still moving paddlers around (from crew to crew). No race we're entering doesn't have someone who's moving up. We just gotta do it. That's the numbers game."

Given the numbers, can Hanalei repeat as state champion? "Yeah," Beck responded slowly. "But we're at the point where if one person gets sick or misses the plane, we'll be right down to the wire." He said 155-160 paddlers will defend Hanalei's title.

COACH KALA KUKA of Hui Nalu, the two-time reigning OHCRA champion, has the numbers to fill the 25 crews that

qualified from his club. The veteran coach just hopes that they will blend to perfection on race day.

For example, take the long-standing rivalry between Hui Nalu and Outrigger Canoe Club in the prestigious senior men's and women's events that climax each regatta. Said Kukea: "We're not going to give 'em the race. You can tell 'em that."

"It's a race where all my coaches are seniors, so we're coaching and paddling at the same time. We won it last year (in Oahu competition; Hanalei's senior men took the state title). Between Outrigger and us, it bounces back and forth. This year they've got a real strong crew, and we didn't quite get our act together soon enough. So we've been chasing them all season.

"By the time you get to the senior races, the caliber of paddlers is pretty high," Kukea added. "It's just who's gonna get their crew blended for that particular race day or season. Once a crew starts winning, the crew starts getting blended. I think all (senior) crews — man for man — are pretty equal. It's just who's got the blend on that day."

One of the most eye-catching blends come race day will be Hanalei's "360s" — a senior masters crew of six men whose aggregate age totals more than 360 years.

"They all have white hair," Beck said. "But they're tough as nails, the 360s are, and they have a lot of pride. They train every day.

"Last year they placed fifth. They're gonna beat a bunch of guys (this year). They're the pride of our club."