

# OCC Crew Locals' Best Molokai Hope

Who's going to stop a visitor romp in next month's Molokai Hoe—the men's Molokai-to-Oahu outrigger canoe race? According to Mel Kalahiki, Molokai Hoe's ali'i luna (executive chairman), Honolulu's Outrigger Canoe Club appears to have the best shot. "They're (OCC) our hope," he said.

With crews from the Mainland, Canada and Tahiti, plus teams from five Hawaiian Islands, the Molokai Hoe appears to be the most competitive in its 31-year history. "I expect about 50 crews at the start," Kalahiki said. The 40.8-mile race begins Oct. 9 at

Brooks' *Blazing Saddles*) won overall honors with a group of hand-picked lifeguards and all-star Olympic kayak paddlers. "Foul!" cried one Island paddler. "Our crews are locked in (club eligibility rules). We can't compete with all-stars."

With OCC winning the next two races (one with a somewhat controversial canoe design) and other Island clubs performing well in the race, the Mainland all-star crew controversy died. That is until Off Shore, another California crew of all-stars, paddled off with two Molokai race wins in a row. "The Tahitians and Californians will be back again," Kalahiki said with a sigh.

OCC's coach and steersman Brant Ackerman expects the Californians (Off Shore and Imua) to be more competitive than ever before. "Both clubs have Olympic paddlers among their crews," he said, "and with the competition (Olympics) next year, their men are probably in peak condition."

WITH SEVERAL DIFFERENT Molokai-start and Waikiki-finish sites over the past three decades, race records varied with the distance. But over the current course, the *Blazing Paddles'* time of five hours, 43 minutes, 52 seconds for 41.01 miles in 1978 is thought to be the time to beat. "Record crossings depend a lot on the wind and sea conditions," Kalahiki said.

In recent Oahu distance races, OCC's men have been winning big—breaking course records with ease. "Rather than being the Molokai race favorite," Ackerman said, "I'd rather that OCC be rated a darkhorse—an unknown." Ackerman says that with the expected keen competition he doesn't need added pressures.

OCC's nine-man Molokai crew will be chosen from Henry Ayau, Gib Bintliff, Bill Bright, John Finney, Bill Foytich, Walter Guild, Marc Haine, Karl Heyer, Ed Pickering, Bob Riley and Ackerman. OCC leaves today for Kona and two days of racing in the Big Island's King Kamehameha Classic. And the Tahitian and Californian crews will be there waiting for them.

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## Jack Wyatt

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Molokai's Hale O Lono Harbor and it finishes at Waikiki's Duke Kahanamoku Beach.

Racing canoes all summer around buoys and flags may satisfy some people, but any paddler serious about the sport knows that crossing the Molokai is the real test—the ultimate. Says paddler Sammy Uyehara, "Until you've conquered the channel, you've just been paddling around."

What with canoe measurement problems, crew eligibility flaps and drifting course markers, outrigger canoe racing has not been without controversy. And the Molokai Hoe is no exception.

DURING THE MID-1970s, Tahitian crews broke the Hawaiian race monopoly when they won the overall and/or division titles for four straight years. "They (Tahitians) really took flap for using nonconforming canoes and crews using a radical stroke," Uyehara said. In 1976 the Tahitians came to town with 10 entries and they proceeded to sweep the boards.

And if the Tahitians didn't stir Molokai's sacred channel waters enough, in 1978 California's *Blazing Paddles* (a takeoff of Mel