

One Paddle, Two Paddle...

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him that outrigger canoeing has a long way to go before it can attain international stature.

"When you tell guys on the Olympic team about making paddling an Olympic sport, they laugh because we have so many dumb rules," he says. "When you're in K-1s or C-1s (Olympic kayaks and canoes), there are three specifications—weight, width and length. They've got it down to a 'T.' You take your boat up there and they drop it through a slot. If it doesn't fit, you're out of the competition.

"But in the outriggers, they've got about 30 different numbers along the hull to fill in, and that's a no-no. It's Mickey Mouse. They'll never get an international thing till they get all the numbers down."

The sport's biggest obstacle, however, seems to be internal politics, a constant boiling turmoil that has been going on so long it seems normal. One local businessman, asked to organize this year's race, pulled out when the race committee starting monkeying around with a sponsor's logo.

Paddlers and the Aloha Week Committee have also wrestled over control of the race. In the latest episode, the Committee pulled out a week and a half before the race for "lack of funds, I think," says Kalahiki. He shrugs and says, "I guess we'll have to cut corners."

There are also personality differences and creative rule changes typifying the "black crab syndrome."

Ackerman explains it this way: "If you put a bunch of black crabs in a bucket of water, and one of them starts to climb up and get out, the others reach up and pull it back down. It's been going on in the canoeing association for the last 20 years, and it continues to prevail."

Ackerman says a rule was

changed at the recent state championships to keep the Hana-lei Canoe Club, last year's winner, from winning again. The rules governing scoring also were changed, preventing Outrigger from winning the title.

"The scoring rules were the same for five years and nobody complained," he said. "Then, just before the state meet, they made this arbitrary change without giving any notice. The rules used to give more points for the upper division men's and women's races, where we are stronger, but they changed them. Under the old system, we would have won, but I didn't squawk because there was nothing I could do about it."

TV coverage, which is essential to any serious effort to promote the sport, will be minimal this year. ABC is said to be interested in the race, but has been frustrated by the number of people here who claim to have the negotiation rights.

One source put the figure at "eight to 10," adding that the network's attitude is, "When you figure it out, let us know. We're only negotiating with one team."

"It's the lack of professionalism that hurts us," says Ackerman. "We need more money for expenses from more sponsors, and that will help generate international interest. The future is dependent on a sophisticated body taking charge and promoting on a bigger, broader level. We're still bush league."

Kalahiki tries to put the best face on it he can because he's in the middle. He finally took a room in a travel office downtown so he wouldn't get any more 1 a.m. phone calls. Now he gets remarks about "Mel in his ivory tower."

He smiles ruefully and says, "I try not to lose my focus. Thank goodness there are people encouraging you along."