

Canoe season opens in shallow water

By Jack Wyatt

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Good news, bad news for Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association clubs in search of a regatta win and tired of finishing behind Outrigger Canoe Club.

Good news: Five-time defending state champ Outrigger is entering Sunday's season opener at less than full strength.

Bad news: Outrigger's woes are symptomatic of the entire canoe racing scene.

"It's become a real struggle to get paddlers out. I don't know about the other clubs, but we're showing up at Keehi Lagoon just to support the regatta," head coach John Finney said. "We'll try to win but don't look for Outrigger to be competitive."

In past seasons, OCC's shortage would easily boost the hopes for perennial top clubs Kailua, Hui Nalu and Sunday's host Healani to take the first overall title. But other clubs are feeling the pinch as paddlers find other recreational outlets.

Kailua, a solid OHCRA performer for years, has lost paddlers to kayaking, soccer and baseball.

"Recruiting by other sports is aggressive. I'm sure most clubs will arrive at the opener short paddlers," Kailua Coach Bob Cates said.

"We're off to a slow beginning for several reasons," Finney said. According to the first-year coach, OCC lost some veterans to paddler burn-out and some juniors to kayaking, volleyball and soccer.

"The kids have many activities to choose from. It's really hard to find people who have time and

Canoe regatta schedules

■ **OHCRA (Oahu)**
(All races begin 8:30 a.m.)
June—4: Healani, Keehi Lagoon. 11: King Kamehameha, Kailua Beach. 18: Leeward, Nanakuli Beach. 25: Waimanalo, Waimanalo Beach.
July—4: W.T. MacFarlane, Waikiki Beach. 16: J.D. Kaupiko, Kaneohe Bay. 23: Oahu Championship, Keehi Lagoon.
■ **Moku O Hawaii (Big Island)**
(All races begin 9 a.m.)
June—10: Kai O Pua, Kailua-Kona. 17: Keauhou, Kailua-Kona. 24: Wailani, Hilo Bay.
July—1: Autobody, Kawaihae. 8: Kamehameha, Hilo Bay. 15: Keokaha, Hilo Bay. 22: Moku Championship, Hilo Bay.

■ **Hui Wa'a (Oahu)**
(All races begin 8:30 a.m.)
June—4: Windward Kai, Waimanalo Beach. 11: Lokahi, Keehi Lagoon. 18: Ikaika, Kailua Beach. 25: Ka Mo'i, Maili Beach.
July—2: Koa Kai, Kahana Bay. 9: Manu O Ke Kai, Haleiwa Beach. 16: Beach Boys, Waikiki Beach. 22: Oahu Championship, Keehi Lagoon.
■ **MCHCA (Maui)**
(All races begin 8 a.m.)
June—11: King Kamehameha, Kahului Harbor. 18: Keiki O Maui, Lahaina. 25: Naleieha, Lahaina.
July—2: Moki Ka Lanikau, Kihei. 9: Na Pili, Lahaina. 16: J.M. Lake (MCHCA championship), Kahului Harbor.

State Championship: Aug. 5, Lahaina.

interest to paddle," he said.

To add to OCC's problems, 15 key upper-division men are in Australia to race and are expected to miss the first two OHCRA regattas. "We'll make do with what we have," said Finney.

It doesn't take an expert to see that the sport is heading for troubled waters if changes are not made soon.

"Too many weak clubs, too many events (30 each regatta day), and lack of promotion of the sport by the top," Waianae paddler Hal Shinsato said.

"Regattas have become boring. The sport lacks the pizzazz of a few years back," Kailua's Cates added.

Finney says paddling needs a shot—some quick changes—otherwise interest is going to decline.

"Perhaps the younger divisions should race on Friday afternoons and the adults crews on Sunday mornings," he said. "Something has to be done in order to compete favorably with other sports."

The 16-club OHCRA kicks off its seven-race regatta season at Keehi Lagoon beginning at 8:30 a.m. Also

Sunday, the 13-club Hui Wa'a Association opens its year at Waimanalo Beach Park.

■ **Neighbor Islands:** With only three active clubs, the Molokai Canoe Racing Association schedule is very tentative. One race is scheduled for June 17 and the island championship on July 17, both at Kaunakakai.

On Kauai, the Garden Island Canoe Racing Association is made up of four clubs. Its schedule is also tentative with regatta dates set for June 3, July 1 and 8. The GICRA championship is scheduled for July 22.

The 12-member Moku O Hawaii Canoe Racing Association opened its Big Island season at Kawaihae last Saturday, with host Kawaihae winning the overall title and Kai Opua finishing second.

The Maui Country Hawaiian Canoe Association, with seven member clubs, opens its season with the King Kamehameha Day Regatta June 12.

MCHCA will host the state championship Aug. 5 at Lahaina.