

Kayaking pair pack their paddles for Europe

By Jack Wyatt

Special to the Star-Bulletin

For island kayakers Malia Kamisugi and Nalu Kukea, the plunge from murky Keehi Lagoon to West Germany's historic Rhine is a quantum leap.

But someone has to test European waters. So why not Hawaii's best junior paddlers?

Last Sunday at Keehi, Kamisugi, paddling for Outrigger, and Kukea, stroking for Hui Nalu, were part of their respective winning 18's crews.

"With luck, maybe we'll continue our (winning) streak in Europe," Kamisugi said after OCC's victory.

Sunday's outrigger canoe regatta was the first and last of the season for the young Hawaii products. On Friday, Kamisugi, 16, and Kukea, 18, leave for 2½ months of junior and open kayak competition — at Bochum and Duisburg, West Germany; in Nova Scotia, and at Lake Placid, N.Y.

"Excited about the trip? You'd better believe I am," said Kukea, a recent Kamehameha Schools graduate who enrolls at UC-Irvine this fall. Kamisugi will be a senior at Punahou School.

The U.S. Olympic Committee isn't funding a trip abroad for sightseeing. This is an investment in Olympic future.

According to Olympic developmental coach Billy Whitford, Malia and Nalu might have the stuff to make the U.S. kayak team at the 1992 Olympics at Barcelona. And he'd like to see them log some international experience.



By Dean Sensul, Star-Bulletin

Nalu Kukea, left, and Malia Kamisugi will take different strokes on different waters when they trade paddling on the Ala Wai for kayaking in Europe.

(Michael Harbold and Traci Phillips became Hawaii's first U.S. Olympic team kayakers when they paddled at Seoul last fall.)

Kukea, the top U.S. junior kayaker, is a member of the U.S. National "B" team. Kamisugi is the best among U.S. junior women and ranked among the leaders in open competition.

"Great experience. A grand opportunity," Kukea said of the upcoming trip.

Added Kamisugi, who began serious kayaking just a year ago: "Never imagined that I'd pick up a sport so quickly."

At last summer's U.S. National Junior Kayak Championships at North Carolina the two paddlers won seven

gold medals between them. Kamisugi and Kukea were also last season's ILH individual paddling champs.

Both youngsters are products of local outrigger canoe paddling, Malia at Outrigger and Nalu at Hui Nalu. But their successful transition, from canoes to kayaking, came with the arrival of coach Whitford from California a year ago.

"A friend remarked that Mr. Whitford was looking for women paddlers. I said why not," Malia recalled. In addition to paddling, Kamisugi is a standout snow skier, board sailor and volleyball player.

"I hope to play volleyball for Puna-

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Malia Kamisugi
Junior Kayaker

hou next season but kayaking is my real joy," she said.

Kukea, a standout Warrior water polo player and academic honor student grew up paddling canoes.

"With my dad (Kala) coaching Hui Nalu crews, I was strongly influenced," Kukea said.

Although Kamisugi and Kukea are Hawaii's only junior kayakers competing in Europe, several local Whitford-coach paddlers are expected to race at next month's World Junior Championships at Nova Scotia and at U.S. Nationals at Indianapolis in August.