

Outrigger favored in state meet

By Dave Reardon
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Although he is Burger King's chief executive in Hawaii, Outrigger Canoe Club head coach John Finney doesn't always have it his way.

Finney, like the rest of Outrigger's nearly 200 paddlers, had to fight for his crew seat in today's state championship regatta at Hanakao'o Beach on Maui. Outrigger is a heavy favorite to win its sixth consecutive title.

"We had seven guys battling for six spots," Finney said of his junior masters crew. "I've been sitting out for two weeks because I had to go away for a trip and fell behind. It's almost the same situation on every crew."

Outrigger's practices and battles for crew seats are as intense — if not more so — than the actual regattas.

"Yeah, that's one of the things we've always laughed about," former head coach Walter Guild



Advertiser photo by Greg Yamamoto

Dana Rupey, Tom McTigue, Steve Van Ribbink, Greg Rudin, Kala Judd and Tom Conner of the Outrigger Canoe Club's junior men's team take a spin during practice Thursday in the Ala Wai Canal.

said. "Certainly, winning the regatta is more important. But you don't want to lose to friends and people you have to look at every day (in practice). There is more verbal and emotional stuff in practice. Probably because it's day-in and day-out."

If Outrigger gets an early lead today (not a guarantee, since several other clubs have strong youth crews which race in the morning) no one will have to worry about not paddling. But if

the regatta is close, Finney said he will use the "step-up rule," which allows some of the stronger paddlers to race twice in late races.

"My preference would be to have everyone paddle," Finney said.

Outrigger has qualified 29 crews in the 30-event regatta, and all of them have a chance to place. The club is on a roll after a slow start in the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association.

Two weeks ago Outrigger won the OHCRA championship meet very easily.

Finney does not agree that his team is an overwhelming favorite.

If Outrigger is upset, this could be a factor: "We are not peaking for the state championship," said upper men's coach Steve Scott. "Many of our paddlers are getting ready for long-distance season."