

Aussies want paddling revenge

By Jack Wyatt

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Call it Aussie revenge or the beginning of a rivalry, the race Sunday between Outrigger Canoe Club of Honolulu and the Outrigger Canoe Club of Australia in the Molokai Hoe sparks excitement.

"We'd like to get back at Outrigger (for beating us). We know that'll be tough. But our crew has prepared long and hard for this meeting," Aussie coach John Doak said.

Last June Honolulu's Outrigger defeated the Australians in a 20-mile race at Hamilton Island off the Great Barrier Reef. And the Aussies are still smarting.

"Our crew remembers losses. They're out for 'friendly' revenge," Doak said.

The two rivals are among 52 entries in Sunday's 38th men's Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race. The 40.8-mile contest begins from Hale O Lono Harbor at 7:30 a.m. with the first boat expected to arrive at Waikiki's Fort DeRussy Beach finish before 1 p.m.

Three-time defending champ Outrigger (Honolulu) set the course record last year finishing in five hours, eight minutes and 11 seconds. Sunday marks the second crossing for Australia. Teams consist of nine men, six paddling at any one time.

"We led the Hamilton race for the first 15 minutes but that changed when the course turned downwind in following swells and the Hawaiians took off," Doak recalled. The Aussie crew consists of, in the most part, Gold Coast lifeguards with strong paddling and surfing experience.

"We lack big wave steering experience. But we'll give it a go no matter what the sea conditions," the Aussie coach said.

Outrigger (Honolulu) coach Steve Scott ranks the Aussies as the dark horse and predicts them a top five finish.

Although Outrigger (Honolulu) has won the last three Molokai races, finishing first in seven of the last 10, Scott can't understand why his club is rated the heavy favorite by almost everyone.

"There's a half-dozen clubs that



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Steve Scott, of Outrigger, and John Doak, of Australia, have a rivalry.

could win. To finish in the top 10 Sunday will be an accomplishment," he said.

Scott says visiting crews, Australia, Tahiti, IMUA (Calif.) and Offshore (Calif.), stand a good chance of winning, as do Oahu's Hui Nalu, Kailua and Lanikai and the Big Island's Kamehameha teams.

"I suppose we could be on that list," Scott said with a sheepish grin. Outrigger has won the state canoe regatta championship the past six years.

"We lost three strong paddlers from last year's crew," Scott said. But there's no feeling sorry for the defending champs. Outrigger's replacements include Gib Bintliff, Bill Bright and Geoff Graf, all strong and very experienced paddlers.

With Outrigger fielding four

nine-man crews — two open, one masters (35-44) and one senior masters (45, and over) — some say the Waikiki-based club is a paddler factory with its own farm system.

"Admittedly, we take our racing seriously. We thrive on competition. But that's an option open to all clubs," Scott said.

Outrigger trains off Waikiki four times a week, doing mostly hard short-distance workouts. "Our Molokai training works around 20-minute sprints. Much like a marathon runner in training doing a series of short 10-kilometer runs," Scott said.

If anything, Scott says, Outrigger goes into Sunday's race at a disadvantage. "All of our paddlers must be club members," the coach said.

Visiting teams have actively recruited outside talent.