

Troubled waters await canoes

Titles will be decided at 'raunchy' site

By Stephen Tsai
Advertiser Staff Writer

Here's a well-told dirty joke that is no longer a laughing matter:

Keehi Lagoon, the Klum Gym of ocean sports, will be the grimy stage for two outrigger canoe championships this weekend: The Hui Wa'a Association Championships on Saturday and the Oahu Hawaiian Canoe Racing Association (OHCRA) Championship Regatta on Sunday.

Once again, the reasons for choosing Keehi are as clear as the water in Lane No. 1.

True, Keehi is centrally located and the flat conditions are the fairest on the circuit.

But, as Kailua assistant coach Kamao Kalama said, "It's a raunchy place."

There are no bleachers for spectators and not nearly enough restrooms. The water is so dirty you can't see the broken glass you're stepping on.

"You don't see too many people jump out of the boat and into the water after a race," Kalama said. "They tend to step out of the boat slowly and look for a hose."

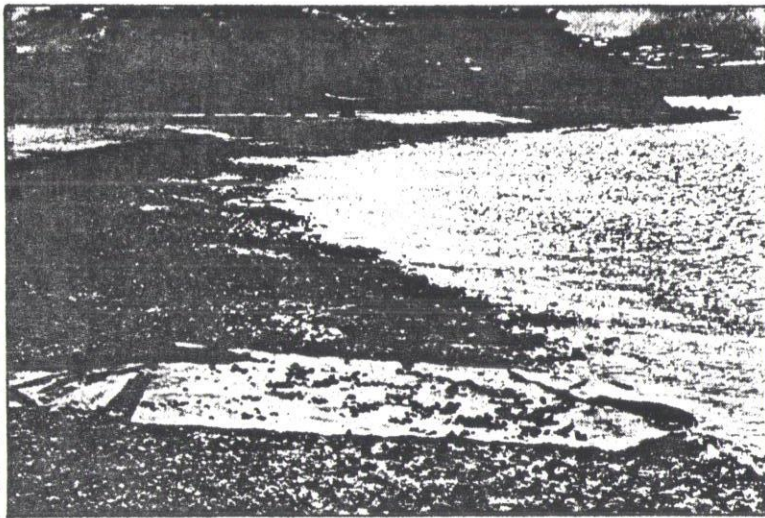
That's another problem: There are no showers. As a remedy, some competitors hook up hoses to the sprinklers.

Don't look for a quick fix. The slime won't go away as long as streams from Kalihi and Moanalua continue to drain their filth into the lagoon.

"When you add it up," Lokahi coach Mike Cushnie said, "it's a terrible place."

Said Outrigger coach John Finney: "It's a miserable place to spend a day at the beach. I'm not sure how much we can improve it. Maybe we can pave the beach or something."

The most annoying aspect is that there isn't a clear-cut villain. The beach is under the jurisdiction of the city and the



Advertiser photo by Carl Vill

Does this look like a site for a championship regatta? Well, it is. Keehi Lagoon will be the site for both association's title regattas. The mat on the shore is where the canoes are placed after each race.

very exciting."

Last week, Hui Nalu edged Outrigger by one point, with third-place Kailua just four points behind.

Hui Nalu and Kailua have made the most of a rule change implemented late last season.

In the past, movement in the upper division was a one-way street. For example, if a crew paddled in the sophomore and junior races, the following week it would not be allowed to compete in a race lower than the junior event.

The rule change turns the senior race into an open event. That means crews are allowed to paddle in the senior race and one other race without the fear of being frozen at a level. In effect, the same crew can compete in two races every week, as long as one of the races is the senior event.

"It's made a chess game out of upper-division crews," Kalama

said.

Hui Nalu has juggled its crews with impressive results. George Kissner, Kala Kukea and Bob Rocheleau paddled on the winning senior and junior master crews last week.

Coach Darryl Hara, Harold Akeo, Nainoa Thompson and Wayne Fujihara also have filled in on several other crews.

"They've been very effective," Kalama said.

Hui Nalu also has received a boost from its younger crews. The girls' 12 and boys' 18 crews each have won five of six races this year.

Kailua also has played musical boats. In the second week of the season, Kailua used the same crew in the sophomore and senior races, and ended up with two victories.

Since then it has been conservative in its switches, but Kalama said that will change this week.

"We're going to pull out all of the stops," Kalama said.

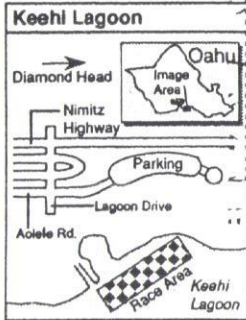
In the past, the Oahu championships were regarded as a last-chance effort for a crew to claim a berth in the state regatta. (OHCRA is allowed four lanes in each event for the state race. Berths are determined by performances in regular-season regattas and the Oahu championships.)

To that end, clubs have stacked crews in certain races in order to qualify them for the state regatta. For example, Hui Nalu must earn victories this week to qualify in the freshman women, freshman men, open-four men and mixed adults.

"You know they'll be loaded," Hara said.

Kailua and Outrigger also have several crews that need to qualify.

Still, the importance of this week's race isn't being overlooked.



Advertiser graphic by Earl Yoshii

Undeclared Crews

OAHU HAWAII CANOE RACING ASSOCIATION

Female

Senior Masters—Outrigger.

Male

14—Heelani.

Junior—Outrigger.

NA 'OHANA O NA HUI WA'A ASSOCIATION

Male

18—Kaneohe.

Sophomore—Lokahi.

Senior—Koa Kai.

Senior Masters—Lokahi.

Mixed

12—Windward Kai.

"The Oahu championship is a worthy goal in itself," Finney said. "We're going to play to win."

The Lokahi Canoe Club has ruled the Hui Wa'a Association this season, winning all six regular-season regattas by an average margin of 34 points. In other words, a second-place club would have to win seven more races each regatta to beat Lokahi.

But don't expect Lokahi to win the state regatta. Lokahi's strength is rooted in its kids and novices.

"We have long-range goals," coach Mike Cushnie said. "We're not close to Outrigger or Kailua or Hui Nalu, but nobody else is. We can compete with the rest."

of the state: meaning blame shifts with the ebb and flow of the tide.

Still, there is a glimmer of hope. Two years ago, city workers spread coral on the beaches, helping to reduce dust storms. This year, the state's Harbors Division began the process of removing the 45 or so derelict and abandoned boats in the lagoon.

Also, the legislature appropriated \$3.885 million to develop Keehi Lagoon into a canoe-racing complex. The state and city are expected to collaborate on the plans.

Construction won't begin until next spring, meaning the complex probably wouldn't be ready for use until 1991.

For now, Oahu canoe associations could best serve their paddlers by staging championships at a more pleasant site, such as Kaneohe Bay.

"It's way safer than Keehi," Finney said.

However, unlike at Keehi, clubs aren't allowed to sell souvenirs at the Marine Corps-run Kaneohe Bay.

Still, that loss of revenue would be a small price to pay for moving the championships to a more conducive environment.

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In recent years, the Outrigger Canoe Club's dominance in championship regattas was as sure a thing as death, taxes and Joe Moore signing off with a Will Rogers anecdote.

Outrigger has won the last four OHCRA Oahu Championships and when it finished second in 1984, it went on to win the state championship the following week.

But times have changed, and Outrigger is in a slump. Its women's crews won but one of 14 events at last week's regatta and a few of OCC's crews were no-shows. Outrigger also has been purchasing retirement watches at bulk rates this year.

Meanwhile, Kailua has paddled well, winning three of six regattas, and Hui Nalu has emerged as a force.

"This is a good year for paddling," Kailua's Kalama said. "The quality of competition has really come up."

When asked about the tilt in power, Outrigger's Finney mused: "It's probably been my coaching."

Then, he added: "I think it's good for the sport. It's been