

# Fear of failure fuels Phillips

## Olympian says winning came with a price

By Ann Miller  
Advertiser Staff Writer

It's appropriate that Traci Phillips, America's premier female kayaker, has a seat in the Outrigger Canoe Club's boat for Sunday's Bankoh Na Wahine O Ke Kai, the 15th annual women's Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race.

Few have her endurance and drive, fewer still her skill. Hardly anyone is as tenacious or, at times, flat-out stubborn. What better traits to possess in a 41-mile race across one of the world's roughest channels?



Phillips

There are other emotions, as well. Phillips, brought up in Hawaii in the waves off OCC, is still upset about coming back from Barcelona last summer without an Olympic medal.

Traci Phillips with an attitude is a force, even as far back as age 2. She remembers her mother, then a ski instructor at Squaw Valley, Calif., placing her on top of the mountain to learn the sport.

"Every time I fell I was so mad," Phillips recalls.

The temper remained, through all her water sports, a volleyball career at Hawaii School for Girls, four state racquetball championships and, since 1986, her kayaking career.

"Our coach said the other day you have to hate losing more than you want to win," Phillips says. "I've always been like that. I hated to lose. It was awful for me. I put so much pressure on myself and took it personally. It could be just a stupid game, but I took it personally."

It's not a quality of which she's proud. After the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta she is pondering getting married "and raising kids that don't have such a bad temper as me — tell 'em not to take it so hard, they'll probably go farther."

But the attitude is probably one of



Olympian Traci Phillips (front seat) trains with Outrigger Canoe Club crew in preparation for Sunday's race.

Advertiser photo by Rich Ambo

the most compelling reasons for her kayaking success — sixth- and seventh-place Olympic finishes in 1988 and '92, national championships and the U.S. Canoe/Kayaking Team Female Athlete of the Year in 1987 and '90.

She says she knew "instantly" that flatwater kayaking was her "wave" to the Olympics. "I don't know how I knew," Phillips said. "The same way you know the person you're going to marry, I guess. I just knew. It's easy to say now; who is going to believe me? But I just did. I knew watching the Olympics as a kid that I'd be there."

That she hasn't yet earned a medal carried few regrets in 1988 but many last year. Phillips still has trouble talking about Barcelona, admitting that two months before the Games she lost her edge. She had trained without a significant break since starting the sport and "wanted a medal so bad I just lost my steam."

After Barcelona she didn't look at a paddle until March, contemplated retirement, then came back sooner than she'd expected.

She insists the next three years will be different than those leading up to Barcelona. Her offseason plans include paddleboard and surf ski workouts, using the same muscle groups as kayaking but "more fun." She wants to concentrate on the K-2 event with partner Sheila Conover, here to paddle for California's Offshore Canoe Club this weekend.

There are no more thoughts of retiring before Atlanta. She's in the prime of her career and the allure of ending it in the U.S. is too tantalizing. And then there's that missing medallion that haunts her.

"I still have a goal," Phillips says. "I haven't gotten my medal. There's a medal there with my name on it."

**WHAT:** Bankoh Na Wahine O Ke Kai, 15th annual women's Molokai-to-Oahu canoe race.

**WHEN:** Sunday.

**WHERE:** 7 a.m. start at Hale O Lono Harbor, Molokai, 41 miles to finish at Hilton Hawaiian Village.

**WHO:** Approximately 40 crews from Australia, California, Canada, New Zealand and Hawaii.

**DEFENDING CHAMPION:** Outrigger Canoe Club (5:49:02).

**COURSE RECORD:** 5:44:13, Offshore Canoe Club of California in 1990.