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The Globe and Mail (1936-); Jul 18, 1977; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Globe and Mail

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—Globe and Mail, Erik Christensen

Referee keeps a close eye on the action as canoes begin to bunch together approaching finish line of the bantam C-4 race at the 72nd annual Balmy Beach Canoe Club regatta Saturday.

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By ANDREW KING

Brother acts are nothing new to sport, but rarely has any sport received such a total family commitment as canoeing has received from the Sleeths of the Balmy Beach Canoe Club.

Bob Sleeth has strengthened the club through his coaching and leadership and his sons Rob, Jim and Ron are three of its top competitors.

Various combinations of Sleeth leadership and Sleeth paddling accounted for much of Balmy Beach's success Saturday, although the club finished second to Mississauga in its own regatta.

Jim, with four firsts, Rob with two and Ron with one, not to mention a smattering of seconds for all three in the 43-race regatta, helped Balmy Beach to a 215-point finish. The strong Mississauga Canoe Club had 360.

Mohawk Canoe Club of Burlington was third with 95 points, Oakville fourth with 59 and West Rouge fifth with 36 points.

It was the best placing ever for Oakville, which began competitive paddling only two years ago.

Bob Sleeth said he was pleased with Balmy Beach's showing in the day-long regatta, noting that Mississauga, with its greater numbers, better training facili-

ties and international class coaching, was expected to dominate.

"I'm fairly pleased with the way everything turned out," he said. "We had excellent lake conditions for the regatta, some of the smoothest ever. The whole thing has gone really well.

"I thought maybe we could be a bit closer (to Mississauga), but the club didn't do too badly today."

Bob, who started competitive canoeing in 1943 and has been involved in Canada's international and Olympic canoeing effort since 1958, likely received some enjoyment from watching his sons win almost every race they

entered, either by themselves or in partnership with other top club canoeists.

Jim, 20, teamed with Scott Williamson to win the junior men's C-2, narrowly defeating older brother Rob, 23, and Gord McQuilham.

Mississauga's Mike Hurley and Kevin Stott were third in the event. Jim and Scott repeated in the senior men's C-2, again just beating Rob and Gord, and Jim teamed with Bill Phillips, Mark Scanlon, and younger brother Ron, 19, to win the junior C-4. Rob had his revenge with a victory in the senior C-4, paddling with Gord, Scott and John Hollins. Jim had his poorest finish of the day when

his team placed fourth in the event.

The three brothers also competed in the longest race of the day, the open-mile war canoe competition. Balmy Beach finished a length behind Mississauga in the event.

The brothers began canoeing in 1969 when the family joined the Balmy Beach Canoe Club, one year after Bob had been team manager for the Canadian canoeing entry in the Mexico Olympics. His sons became immediate devotees of the sport, sacrificing hours to the training routines of weightlifting, running and daily paddling.

"We're training at Long Pond on Centre Island now,

and we're making better progress than ever before," said Rob, a physical education graduate from York University, now working towards a masters degree at the University of Western Ontario.

"The training is a lot better there. It's sheltered, so the water's smooth, and we don't have to miss any practices for bad conditions. We train from about five in the evening till eight at night, and have supper when we get home. It's great, we all love it."

Canoeing is everything to the Sleeths. Jim took a camping trip this summer, "just to get away from the grind, to get away from the daily trip out to Centre Island," but

when he and several friends left for the north country in their rented van, four racing canoes went along.

"I wouldn't do anything that would interfere with my paddling," he said. "I would never take a job where I wouldn't be able to paddle. Once you've done this for a summer, you can't leave it."

"I've been in canoeing for 30 years," said his father, "and you've got to love it to stay that long. As far as I'm concerned there's nothing like it. The people you meet are great. Here is where you always find the best sportsmanship, the best friends."

Rob explained that the brothers set goals for the year when the season begins, "and

usually we make them. This year our goal is to qualify for the Canadian championships, and it looks like we might do it."

While his father thinks the three all stand a chance of qualifying for the North American championships, Rob said "we'll try for it, of course, but we're not holding our breath."

"It'd be great to be on the national team," agreed Jim, an undergraduate in physical education at York. And the Olympics? "Sure, we all dream about the Olympics. But that's about as far as we'll get for a while.

"We just want to do well at the nationals. I think we will. We're going great so far."