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By BEVERLY BOWEN

The waves on Lake Ontario were so strong Saturday that even the more experienced competitors overturned. In the kayak races, the paddlers abandoned their boats — the wind tunnel between the waves could break a kayak in half — and competed in four-man canoes.

The paddlers, however, were calling the West Rouge regatta a "fun" event.

"It's the last regatta and no one is taking this too seriously," said Larry Cain of the Oakville Canoe and Racing Club. "I was supposed to paddle in the war canoe, but I took it easy and coxed instead. It's the big races at the Canadian championships (Aug. 16 to 18 in Welland) that count now."

Ten races remained when the choppy waters forced an end to the regatta. Mississauga Canoe Club finished first with 201 points; Oakville was second with 62 and West Rouge third with 54.

The win gave Mississauga, the 1978 Canadian champion, a sweep of all six Western Ontario Division races, but the club's coach is worried about "the big races."

"It's going to be hard for us to repeat," said Rob

Sleeth. "It's going to be very difficult for us with five people away at the world championships who are worth 50 points. Last year, we were well in front; then there was a dogfight and we won by 40 points. Having those paddlers (Martin Fraser, Gregg Smith and Dean, Scott and Reed Oldershaw) is the difference between a safe margin and another fight. We have to get some unexpected performances from the juniors we are counting on, people like Mike Hurley and Jim Wallace."

Mississauga has dominated the Canadian championships the past 15 years — "winning maybe six or eight times," according to Sleeth — but only when the club was at full force.

In 1977, when its top senior paddlers were away winning medals at international regattas, the club lost to Cheema of Nova Scotia. The world championships in Duisburg, West Germany, end Aug. 19, the day after the Canadian championships.

"Our girls are not strong," said Sleeth, calculating the finishes at Welland. "If we get 15 points from them, we'll be happy. But Sue Holloway (and other female paddlers) will be away for Rideau (of Ottawa), so that will lose them about 40 points. Cartierville has lost paddlers, but not as many as us. The

clubs we expect to be right in the battle are Cheema from Nova Scotia and Lachine and Cartierville from Quebec."

Cartierville was second last year and Rideau was third.

"It will be the way it was at the trials," said Hurley, who paddles singles and doubles canoe. "The clubs that dominated the trials but didn't make it to the worlds will dominate the championships. Cheema will be up front.

"I'm not going to think about winning. I had one medal last year, but I wasn't training as hard. If you think about winning, it doesn't come out the way you plan.

Sleeth already has planned the strategy to give Mississauga the edge over the eastern clubs. "There is going to be a lot of hard work in the next week. We'll be working for seven days on speed work, pacing and race tactics for the less experienced people who will make a difference for us."

The Western Ontario Division trials for the midget, juvenile and junior paddlers will take place Aug. 4 and 5 at Toronto's Centre Island. Senior paddlers have direct entry into the Canadian championships.