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Dragon-boaters get that sinking feeling

FOR the first time in five years the Hongkong Dragon Boat Festival International races took place under sunny skies yesterday.

But while the rain stayed away, the currents off Tsim Sha Tsui East this year were so strong that many participants got a soaking of a different kind.

Despite warnings from health officials about pollution in the harbour, many teams ended up in the drink.

The First Battalion Black Watch and the Italian teams were just two contingents to suffer a soaking in the murky harbour waters.

Ip Kee-biu of the Mui Wo Fisher-

By SASHA NOTT

man Fraternity Society said the Asians definitely had the upper hand yesterday:

"I would say Westerners are at a disadvantage and sink more often than we do.

"Today the currents were very strong and it just depended on your lane position as to whether you got good results."

Don Irvine, who coached last year's winners in the women's section, the False Creek Racing Canoe Club from Vancouver, described the course

as wavy and turbulent.

"Western people are more likely to take a swim," he said.

Geoff Hunter, who captains the New Zealand men's team, said the conditions were a lot rougher than those they were used to.

But the New Zealanders managed to stay high and dry during the morning as they remained in their hotel rooms watching the All Blacks beat the British Lions to wrap up the three-test rugby series in Auckland.

"We're ecstatic about the rugby and we want to match that here," said Hunter.

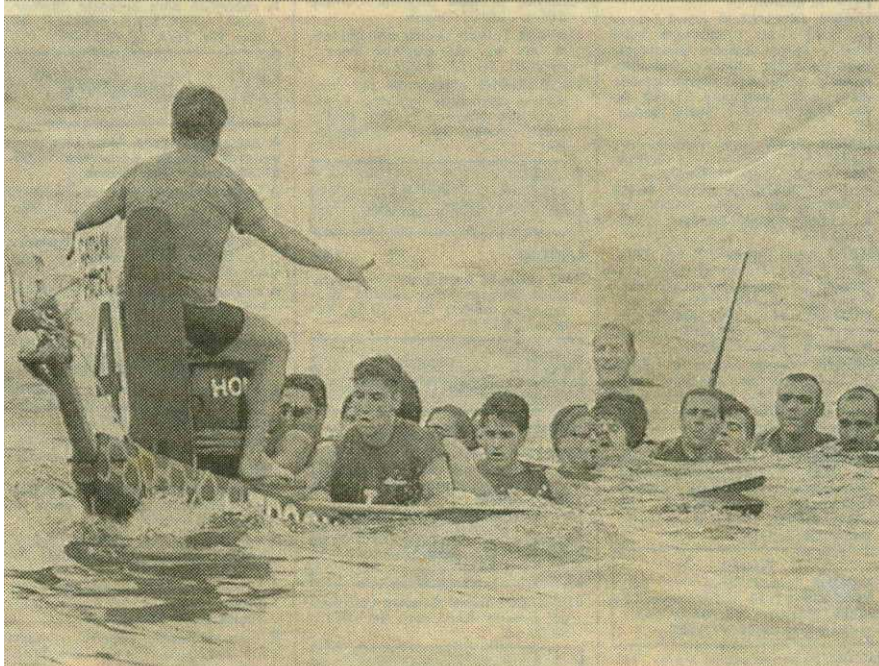
"It's lucky we didn't have a race on in the morning - it would have been a real conflict of interests."

The races, organised by the Hongkong Tourist Association in conjunction with the Urban Council, saw 32 overseas teams from 14 countries join 128 local teams in the competition.

The favourites to win today's finals are last year's winners in the men's section, the Indonesian Rowing and Canoeing Association and in the women's section, the False Creek Racing Canoe Club.

The first team takes to the water today at 9.15 am.

AFFONDANO MA NON MOLLANO



HONG KONG — Aiuto, uomini in mare. Succede a Hong Kong, durante una sfida tra dragon-boats, le imbarcazioni spinte da 20 pagaiatori, più il timoniere a poppa e il tamburino a prua. Il «dragon» italiano (foto) comincia a imbarcare acqua a 20 metri dal traguardo. Nulla di compromesso: sia pur con difficoltà, la barca concluderà la gara