



JUSTIN MERRIMAN | TRIB TOTAL MEDIA

lain Athey, 17, carries oars along the docks before heading out on the Allegheny River on Monday at Three Rivers Rowing on Washington's Landing.

River Racing

HEAD OF THE OHIO REGATTA SET IN DOWNTOWN PITTSBURGH THIS WEEKEND

BY KAREN KADILAK

Rowers will race in a different direction and some will compete on a second day as part of changes at the 29th Head of the Ohio Regatta in downtown Pittsburgh this weekend.

Race director Megan Kuehm said for the first time in several years, the 2.6-mile course will run downstream from Washington's Landing to the North Side across from PNC Park.

Also, high school and youth rowers will compete on a separate day.

About 550 to 600 entries and 25 to 35 clubs from across the nation are expected for the two days, said Kuehm.

The Three Rivers Rowing Association will serve as host.

In a head race, competing crews race at different times, with their finishing times determining their places. The format is common at fall regattas.

Three Rivers Junior Rowing coach Steve McCarthy, who is helping Kuehm organize the event, said there are several reasons for the changes.

"In 2011, we were no longer able to use the North Shore for boat staging areas and trailer parking," McCarthy said. "We needed to be able to host the entire regatta on the (Washington's Landing) island, (where) we wanted to have the finish line.

Ready to row

What: Head of the Ohio Regatta sponsored by the Three Rivers Rowing Association.

When: Saturday, 7:30 a.m., masters, adaptive, college, open and corporate events. Sunday, 8:30 a.m., high school and youth events.

Where: Downtown Pittsburgh. Start at Washington's Landing, finish line just upstream of Fort Duquesne Bridge, across from PNC Park.

Details: Visit headoftheohio.org or call 412-231-8772.

"This year, we are returning to the original traffic pattern and racing down into the city. We wanted to give the racers the excitement of racing downtown toward the finish line with the natural flow of the water."

McCarthy said the event was expanded to two days to accommodate high school rowers who will be taking college entrance exams on Saturday.

He said the extra day also will give organizers flexibility if events have to be rescheduled because of inclement weather.

Rowers welcomed the changes.

"The finish line is in a much easier place for spectators since it's nearly in front of PNC Park and (Point State Park)," said Michael Coholich, 18, of Marshall, who belongs to the

Steel City Rowing Club in Verona. "I think we'll see bigger crowds and more families showing up to watch their kids race.

"Now that we're racing downstream, it will be easier on the rowers, and it will make the races shorter."

Steel City Rowing Club member Ellie Fetting likes the prospect of a big crowd.

"Rowing is usually a pretty solitary sport, so to get the crowd support will be really cool," said Fetting, 16, of Fox Chapel.

Troy Lampenfeld, a senior on the Central Catholic High School rowing team, expects some races to be faster.

"The flow of the river typically has a large impact on race outcomes based on weight," said Lampenfeld,

17, of Pittsburgh's East End neighborhood. "I can only assume that heavier crews will have a decent advantage because the flow will carry them faster and that the average time for the race will be lowered due to overall boat speed."

Lampenfeld and Fetting appreciate that they and other high school and youth rowers will compete on a separate day.

"This is a huge improvement," Lampenfeld said. "The wait for the start line is typically long and bothersome, but if there are fewer crews on a given day, then the process will be far more efficient."

"I think things will run much smoother," Fetting said.

Fetting looks forward to competing close to home after participating recently in regattas in Cleveland and Ontario, Canada.

"(It) is always fun because it is in my hometown," she said.

Coholich said he also enjoys competing in Pittsburgh.

"I know the water," Coholich said. Lampenfeld said he is eager to open the season.

"(Despite the changes), it will still be a head race and will be extremely competitive," he said.