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BAY AREA LIVING

ON THE WATER FRONT

U.S. sailing team mobbed at check-in

By Paul V. Oliva

When London fires up the Olympic torch next week, Northern California will have more open-water Olympic hopefuls than most countries: four sailing, eight rowing and one in open-water swimming.

In the ever-anxious game of peaking at just the right time, athletes have been completing training in various locations. In recent days they have begun to arrive at the Olympic venues for the Opening Ceremony and a final bit of training on site.

The American sailing team was the first full team to arrive at Heathrow Airport in London (Monday) and the first team to check in at the U.S. Olympic Committee's processing area.

"We were mobbed by press at London Heathrow, probably 30 to 40 press just waiting with excitement for the first athletes to arrive. Really cool," said Dana Paxton, a spokesperson for the U.S. sailing team.

After running the media gantlet, athletes got a reward: more Team USA

gear from Ralph Lauren and Nike.

Rowing events: Rowing, which will kick off next Saturday, will be the first open-water event on the Olympics agenda.

The rowing competitions are set to take place at one of the world's finest rowing venues, a 2,200-meter lake at Eton Dorney park in Buckinghamshire, on the western outskirts of London.

Among the 550 Olympic rowers, a key boat to watch is the U.S. women's eight-person boat, with Modesto rower Erin Cafaro, 29, and Sacramento coxswain Mary Whipple, 32.

Other Northern California rowing contenders are Julie Nichols of Livermore (lightweight women's double sculls), Silas Stafford of Santa Rosa (men's pair), Anthony Fahden of Lafayette (lightweight men's four), Scott Gault of Piedmont (men's four), Kara Kohler of Clayton (women's quadruple sculls), and Zach Vlahos of Piedmont (men's eight).

What are the differences among all these events, you may ask?

Sculls use two oars for each rower, while in the rowing shells each athlete uses a single oar, or sweep. Some of the boats are designed for lighter crews, and some have a coxswain who steers and coordinates the team.

Sailing competition: The sailing events will begin July 29 in Weymouth and Portland, on the south coast of England. There are 380 competitors: 237 men and 143 women.

Zach and Paige Railey are two of the serious medal contenders with Bay Area ties. Siblings from Clearwater, Fla., they are members of the St. Francis Yacht Club, which sponsored their Olympic bids and is a home for the sailors when they compete and train here.

Paige, 24, has won both the ISAF Rolex World Sailor of the Year and US Sailing Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year in 2006 while she was still a teenager. She is ranked fifth in the world in the women's dinghy called the Laser Radial.

Her brother Zach, 27,



U.S. Sailing

Medal contenders and siblings Zach and Paige Railey are members of the St. Francis Yacht Club.

won Olympic silver in 2008 in the men's heavy-weight dinghy called the Finn, and he dreams about being able to have that moment again. "Making the Olympic team with my sister Paige is a dream come true for both of us," he said in January. "This is what we've worked for. This is what we sacrifice for."

Stanford University assistant sailing coach Erik Storck will represent the United States in the men's two-person, high-performance dinghy called the 49er.

In strong position for a

gold medal is the three-person women's match racing team that includes Molly Vandemoer of Stanford.

Open-water swimming: While pool swimmers get all the attention, in part because of the Michael Phelps-Ryan Lochte show-down, Sacramento distance swimmer Haley Anderson will get a shot at open-water glory against 48 other competitors Aug. 9.

The 20-year-old is representing the United States in the 10-kilometer open-water swimming

marathon. That's six loops around the Serpentine lake in London's Hyde Park.

Anderson is currently at the open-water team's training camp in Canada.

Short tacks: On Wednesday in Auckland, Emirates Team New Zealand unveiled the 72-by-46-foot, 13-story-tall AC72 catamaran that it will use in an attempt to wrest the America's Cup from San Francisco. A ceremony featuring fireworks and a ring of fire is planned to launch the boat.

On Friday, the biennial San Francisco to Hawaii race called the Pacific Cup concluded a weeklong series of rolling starts from slowest to fastest boats. Forty-eight boats from 20 feet to 60 feet long were competing.

A French trimaran with hydrofoils called LHydroptere DCNS is standing by in Long Beach for favorable weather to break the 2005 speed sailing record to Hawaii of four days, 19 hours, 31 minutes.

The California Maritime Academy hosts the sixth William I. Koch International Sea Scout Cup this week. It's a biennial regatta for young men and women ages 14 to 21 to compete for the top sailing prize of sea scouting.

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