

SPORT

Paddlers hoping for top five places



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'Change A Life academy' paddlers will be looking for top ten finishes in this year's Dusi canoe marathon.

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PADDLERS from the ground-breaking 'Change A Life academy' in the Valley Of A Thousand Hills are targeting five of the top ten places in The Unlimited Dusi canoe marathon that starts on 16 February.

Spearheaded by the fancied title hopefuls Thulani Mbanjwa and Sibonelo Zondi, both of whom were part of the original core group that started the academy with tutor Martin Dreyer, the flourishing training group is bristling with talented K2 crews positive about their chances of racing into the top ten, and ideally onto the podium.

"Obviously Bungee (Thulani Mbanjwa) and Sibonelo (Zondi) are the most recognised guys to have come through our academy and we are hoping for great things for them in this year's Dusi but there are many other really talented guys in our squad as well," said multiple Dusi winner Dreyer.

"The Cele brothers (Richard and Nhlamayake), Thomas Ngidi and John Ncgobo and Lucas Mthlale and Mmeli Cele will all be hoping for a top ten finish whilst it will be very interesting to see just how Nkosi Cele and Skhumbuso Ngidi go."

"Then there's Kwanda Mhlope who, even though he's now part of the new professional team Team Best 4 Kayak Centre and will partner Lance Kime, we still consider as one of our own and are excited about their chances of finishing in the top five," he added.

The group have been hard at work in recent months preparing for the biggest event on the Change A Life calendar and are optimistic that their efforts will be rewarded when all the action gets underway in less than a month's time.

"After the KZN river season last year a lot of the guys stayed fit and kept the Change A Life flag flying high by doing some multisport events midyear where some of them really did well. Then, once the rivers filled up a bit, the guys have been training really hard and are in fantastic shape at the moment," said Dreyer.

Under Dreyer's watchful eye several of the 'Change A Life' squad, many of whom are from the Valley of Thousands Hills - the same valley through which the three day race twists and turns, have made phenomenal progress in recent months and the academy now finds itself on the brink of potentially dominating the top ten of this year's K2 race.

The vastly experienced Dreyer knows all too well though that anything can happen on a river and is hesitant to make any predictions ahead of the gruelling three days of racing which lie ahead of his young hopefuls.

"There is definitely a lot of potential in our academy at the moment and we really are hoping to do well at this year's Dusi, but just how things will pan out one can never be certain," said Dreyer.

"We would absolutely love to have five boats in the top ten but we're trying not to focus on results too much just yet. The guys have the potential and have been given the tools, hopefully now they can go out there and drum out the tune," he added.

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