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Home / Codes / Canoeing / Dusi U23 contest will be hotly contested

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7

1

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The 2018 FNB Dusi Canoe Marathon is set to dish up a number of mouth-watering showdowns, none more exciting than the contest for the Under-23 men's crown from 15-17 February.

The prestigious age-group title is one that many have strived to hold, however the calibre and competitiveness of paddler in the U23 age category makes the racing that much harder with a number of crews eyeing strong overall race finishes.

As the generations change and the faces shift into the senior age category, the U23 age group provides a number of paddlers with their last shot at age group glory before they fight it out with the best elite paddlers in the business.

One of the pairs who will be searching for glory in the Under 23 age group race will be the impressive duo of Stewart Little and Khumbulani Nzimande.

The pair were the highest placed U23 crew at the recent 50 Miler Canoe Marathon, a race that provides a strong gauge as to who the Dusi contenders will be.

'It's been quite difficult for us to train together in the build up to the Dusi,' Varsity College student Little said. 'With me in Underberg and Khumbulani at Nagle Dam we have had very few chances to train together but this past weekend we put in three really good sessions.

'We thought about not racing the Campbell's Farm to Dusi Bridge race, but we raced because it was good tripping for us.'

The Euro Steel duo understand that they are going to be up against some tough crews for the title, but Little feels that they need to rather focus on their own strengths.

'We need to race practically and we both know that we are better in the latter stages of the race so we don't want to go out too quickly. Our transitions between paddling and running are good and we gel really well in the boat with me steering and Khumbulani providing all the power!'



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Arguably the U23 favourites, the cousin duo of Mthobisi Cele and Mpilo Zondi have been building well towards the Dusi, despite a glitch at the recent Campbell's to Dusi Bridge race.

'We are on track with our preparation and we have been training really hard for the Dusi,' Euro Steel/Change a Life's Cele commented. 'Last weekend's race didn't go as well as we would have liked and we made a few mistakes that cost us a bit. It was still a good bit of practice for us and has told us that we still have work to do!'

The pair waltzed to the 2017 Non-Stop Dusi title in trying conditions, but they will not be relying on that win as their source of confidence.

'That Non-Stop win was very different. The conditions were different and there is a lot more paddling involved in the Dusi so we are looking forward to the challenge of the Dusi.'

With Little/Nzimande, Martin Dreyer's Change a Life Academy's Siyanda Gwamanda and Nqobile Makhanya, Mvelo Ngidi and Thabani Msiya as well as Nkhosikhona Mabaso and Jabulani Gwamanda all out to win the age category, Cele and Zondi don't feel like they are under any more pressure.

'We are all really good friends with the other guys so it doesn't feel like a competition, but it will be an exciting race!'

Picture of Little (front) and Nzimande and Zondi (front) and Cele courtesy of Anthony Grote/Gameplan Media

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