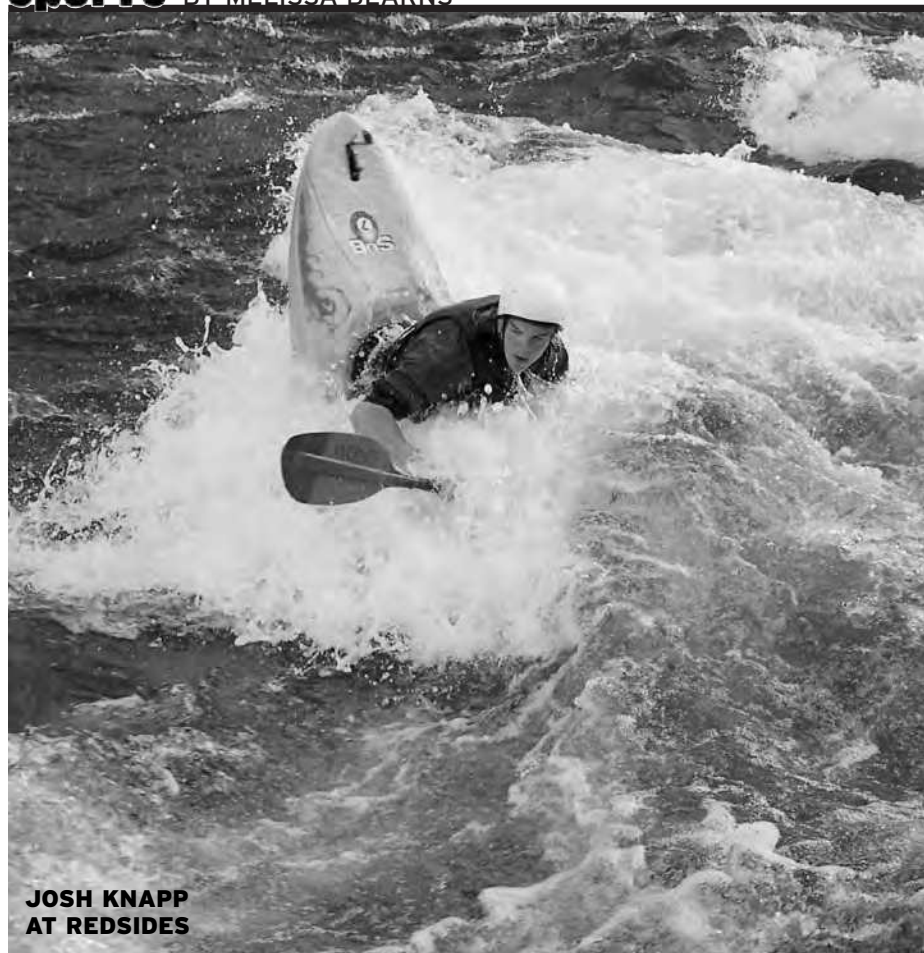




**JOSH KNAPP
AT REDSIDES**

PHOTO PROVIDED BY EUGENE KAYAKER

Getting Tricky at Redsides

Eugene's whitewater rodeo will be quite a show.

This weekend dozens of whitewater kayakers will gather on the McKenzie River at a spot just outside of Eugene to compete in one of the most exciting and fun-to-watch events in the sport: a whitewater rodeo.

We're not talking horses and cowboys here. To kayakers, a rodeo is a competitive event on the water.

If you've never had the chance to see a whitewater rodeo, don't miss this. Even people who don't kayak can appreciate the technically difficult and impressive tricks the competitors pull off.

boat pushes the nose down so the boat stands on end. Right at that moment, the kayaker pushes back, then tucks forward, doing a somersault. If all goes well, the boat will complete a forward flip and the kayaker will land upright.

Dramatic changes in whitewater boat design over the last decade or so have made tricks like loops possible and spawned a new breed of whitewater kayaker: the playboater, whose focus is playing and having fun. You're more likely to find a serious playboater hanging out working on tricks in a hole than running an eight-mile stretch of

"You'll see some amazing athletes out there. Some of the things they can do these days in the new boats, it's just incredible to watch."

- Guy Santiago, Oregon River Sports

Guy Santiago, co-owner of Oregon River Sports, started the Redsides Rodeo along with local kayaker Jason Bates back in 1996. Last year, they didn't hold the event so officially, this is the eighth one.

"It's like gymnastics in the water," Santiago says. "You'll see some amazing athletes out there. Some of the things they can do these days in the new boats, it's just incredible to watch."

It all starts with a spot on the river called a hole, where water drops quickly and then recirculates back on itself. That makes it possible for someone in a kayak to get into that spot and stay there instead of washing downstream.

Competitors paddle into the hole and stay there as long as they can, pulling a series of tricks with names like loops, cartwheels, blunts and roundhouses.

In a loop, the kayaker points the boat upstream in a hole and dips the nose of the boat in the water. The pressure on the front of the

whitewater. The kayakers who will be competing this weekend are some of the best playboaters in the Northwest.

But put the whitewater river runners and the playboaters together and they still only make up about 6 percent of the total paddling market. So manufacturers are moving resources (that means cash and product development) to the more popular, moneymaking parts of the sport such as sea and touring kayaks.

"Rodeos are dying," Santiago says. "Every year it's gotten harder and harder to get sponsorships for the Redsides Rodeo."

The irony is that the tricks playboaters can do are more technical, demanding and complex now than ever before. So spectators will get quite a show this weekend with the best of the best showing up.

Oregon River Sports will host the Redsides Rodeo Saturday and Sunday at Redsides, Highway 126, milepost 43 on the McKenzie River. For more info or to register call 334-0696.

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