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Martin Dreyer's Change a Life Academy is ramping up 2018 FNB Dusi Canoe Marathon preparation at this month's Ozzie Gladwin Canoe Marathon.

A handful of the Change a Life stars had a busy winter period with Under-23's Mthobisi Cele, Mpilo Zondi and Under-18 paddler Mvelo Ngidi taking on the gruelling Berg River Canoe Marathon and all finishing in the top 10 after four days of brutal paddling.

The Fish River Canoe Marathon was the next assignment for the CAL team and at the national K2 river championships it was Mpilo Zondi and Mthobisi Cele who combined to finish third in the competitive Under-23 category.

With the warm summer conditions comes the thought of the three-day journey from Pietermaritzburg to Durban in February and Academy founder Martin Dreyer sees the Ozzie Gladwin as a vital part of their preparation for the Dusi.

'The Ozzie Gladwin includes a long stretch of river paddling which is so important for the guys as river paddling is non-existent whilst KZN remains gripped by drought,' Dreyer said.

'It's not a very technical stretch of river but it plays an important role in seeing where the fitness levels are going into the rest of the season. Ozzie also gives me a good gauge on how the different combinations fit together and the synergy of these new paddling partnerships.'

Despite being the first seeding race of the new season, the Ozzie Gladwin is also a race that incorporates all three aspects of Dusi paddling: flat-water and river paddling, as well as portaging.

'The eight kilometres of flat water at the start is a big test and it will show how the guys cope with bunch racing. Riding wave or drafting is important with flat water paddling because a solo paddler is slower than a group taking turns pulling the bunch. It will be interesting watching this flatwater showdown before everyone scrambles onto the 2km portage down to the river.

'The Ozzie Gladwin is a great season opener and a good way to see how strong combinations are,' Dreyer added.

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There is a slight feeling of a changing of the guard amongst the Change a Life Academy with the younger generation starting to put in some good performances. Non-Stop Dusi winners Mpilo Zondi and Mthobisi Cele will be the pair to look out for, with the young Iwele Ngidi pairing up with Thabani Msiya as well as Mmeli Cele and Msawenkosi Mtolo.

Change a Life stalwart Kwanda Mhlophe will be teaming up with Siphon Canham for the Dusi season.

The 2017 Ozzie Gladwin Canoe Marathon takes place from Albert Falls Dam to Thornvale Farm on Sunday 26 November.

Picture of defending Non-Stop Dusi Canoe Marathon champions Mthobisi Cele (front) and Mpilo Zondi (back) courtesy of Jetline Action Photos/Gameplan Media

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