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# Undergraduate wins university's first gold medal at national rowing championships

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As engineering major Patrick DelBarba waited to launch his boat for the finals of the nation's largest collegiate regatta, one question kept crossing his mind: Would he

even get to race?

Philadelphia's recent flooding had contributed to an extremely fast current on the Schuylkill River, and as his event at the Dad Vail Regatta approached Saturday, a bracing wind began blowing upstream.

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It was “absolute insanity,” DelBarba recalled, describing waves splashing over his head as he approached the starting line. “We were worried that they would cancel our race right then and there.”

Fortunately for DelBarba, Dad Vail Regatta officials sent the six scullers down the 2,000-meter course. As much as he wanted to improve upon his bronze-medal performance at the same race in 2013, DelBarba decided the conditions required significantly more caution.

“When we eventually started the race, the two other rowers on either side of me both tried an aggressive starting sprint, which resulted in both of them stumbling a bit with their oars,” he explained. “I opted for a more conservative approach, with the intent of at least finishing the race upright and dry.”

DelBarba’s slower, more deliberate strokes proved the smarter strategy. He finished first, a full 10 seconds ahead of his closest competitor—and more than two minutes faster than the last boat.

“I just kept things slow and careful,” he said. “In the end, it just came down to making fewer mistakes.”

His time of 8:25 was about 50 seconds slower than in Saturday morning’s semifinals and 1 minute and 10 seconds slower than in Friday’s heats. Nevertheless, it was more than fast enough to make history for Case Western Reserve’s crew team: His is the university’s first-ever gold medal at the nearly 80-year-old competition.

Other CWRU rowers also participated in the regatta: The women’s pair of Abby Sevier (stroke) and Colleen Kennedy (bow) advanced out of Friday heats into the semifinals, while the men’s team fielded varsity and novice fours that did not advance out of Friday heats.

DelBarba expects even more success in 2014-2015 as new head coach Aaron Marcovy enters his second year. A one-time rowing standout at St. Ignatius High School, Columbia University and Oxford University, Marcovy returned to Cleveland last year after spending three years as a USRowing athlete at the Oklahoma City National High Performance Center.

“Under his leadership, we’ve started to turn some heads in the rowing community,” DelBarba said, “so I can’t wait to see what happens next year.”

This summer DelBarba, a Pittsburgh native, will row for Philadelphia’s Vesper Boat Club with its Under 23 (U23) team. He hopes to make the U.S. U23 National Team.

After graduation next year, DelBarba hopes to return to

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Philadelphia to continue training. A computer science major, he also hopes to land a position developing electronic hardware for water sports.

“If all goes well [with training], the logical next step would be the Senior National Team and then Rio [de Janeiro for the Olympic Games] in 2016,” he said. “How far I make it is anyone’s guess, but I’m excited to have the opportunity to try.”

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