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Women's crew team cruises to victory down the Cuyahoga

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There is no question that the Case crew teams spend plenty of time on the water. Many people don't realize how much time they spend on the road as well, with trips to Pittsburgh, Columbus, Toledo, and even Boston. Traveling much while trying to wake up at 4 a.m. for early morning practices (not to mention trying to complete homework) could make even the most motivated Case student weary.

This is why this past Saturday's Head of the Cuyahoga was one of the year's most highly anticipated events. Racing in Cleveland gave the Case crew members an opportunity to shine at home while saving time usually spent on the road.

The highlight of the event was the performance of the women's 8+ team (eight rowers with one coxswain). The women took first overall with a time of 15:10.07. The women's team included Katherine Allen, Shannon Armstr, Miranda Cullins, Jenna Copeland, Marta Mazawi, Agata Toborek, Carolyn Sayre, Erin Brandt, and Stephanie Crabtree as coxswain. The win was a rewarding experience for the women, as they took a long and hard road to reach the top.

"Our previous 8+ teams have not been that strong," said Mazawi. "At one point, we were just happy to beat somebody."

Not only did they win the race, but they also beat two of their biggest rivals, John Carroll and Michigan State.

"They beat us last year, so it was definitely sweet to avenge those losses," Mazawi said.

While those previous losses were tough to accept, they provided the women valuable experience that paid dividends this time. On the other hand, even though they had more experience, the ladies did not expect to just show up and win.

"We expected to perform better [because of our experience]," said Mazawi, "but I don't know if we were expecting to win the race either."

In addition to experience, practicing on the Cuyahoga River and learning its twists and turns undoubtedly gave the team a tremendous advantage.

"It's one of the most challenging rivers around," said Sayre. "Most other rivers we race are straight. Knowing how to cut the turns can cut 30-40 seconds off your time."

The men's team also competed in their 8+ race. While they did not finish first, they put forth a solid performance well, finishing the race with a time of 13:58.49. The time was less than a minute behind the winning time.

"The team did OK, given the expectations that we have three freshmen and only two seniors out of 12 guys," said senior Brian Chorney. "For the most part, there's a lot of people who just started rowing last year. We have an inexperienced team, but we still did very well."

The men's team consisted of David Simpson, Alan Valenti, Sam Rivier, Chris Cichiewicz, Michael Cooper, Ky Gaiser, Chris Denzel, Chorney, and Meg Grow as coxswain.

Perhaps the most impressive thing about the members of both teams is their ability to balance the rigors of sports mentally and physically demanding with their difficult academic schedules. Combine that with travel and waking up at 4 a.m. on certain days for practice, and soon just thinking about it makes anyone tired.

"You learn to prioritize," said Sayre when describing how she handles the demands. "You know exactly how long it takes to do things and exactly how much you have to do. A lot of this comes from being older and being used to the academic part of it."

It is a good thing that Sayre and the rest of the rowers possess this ability, because the schedule does not get any easier. Coming up in October are Head of the Ohio in Pittsburgh, the Frogtown Races in Toledo, and the Head of Charles in Boston. The rowers have been through it before, though, and coming off strong performances this past weekend, they are riding a wave of momentum that will hopefully carry them to even greater success.

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