

## **Head of the American, 10/29/22**

### **Race Report by Marty Udisches**

#### **Mixed Masters 2x, Angie Tinson (stroke) and Marty Udisches (bow)**

#### **As sent to the BIAC Novice list 11/1/22**

After a truly enjoyable debut at Boats without Barriers in the Mixed Masters Novice 2x in August, Angie and I agreed it would be fun to try racing at the Head of the American (HOA: no, not a Homeowners Association). When logistics, primarily the availability of the BIAC trailer, made it unlikely that BIAC would even participate at HOA, I was quite disappointed. As many know, I'm a big fan of racing. I had been training hard in anticipation of racing at least once before the Head of the Lagoon in November. Since I had to miss Head of the Port earlier in October, I was really motivated to make it to HOA.

Lake Natoma in Sacramento, a beautiful setting for rowing, was apparently created to potentially host an Olympic rowing venue. Basically a long, narrow reservoir downstream on the American river from Folsom dam, it features a straight-line 2k course for Spring sprint racing (as at the Gold Rush Regatta in May), with buoys separating each of the lanes. For Fall head-style racing, the start line is moved upstream, around a bend, to form a 5k course that's pretty straightforward: Starting near the starboard shore, go south, avoid a kink in the water near "Texas Hill" which forces everyone to port, then a nice, gentle turn to starboard lines everyone up more-or-less with the 2k sprint course (minus all the buoys). Kinda like returning toward BIAC from the #6 marker. And not a smokestack nor cargo ship in sight!

With most of a day spent hovering over the keyboard, burning up the internet to get everything arranged, I was able to get A. permission to use the Carpe Diem at HOA; B. permission to enter the race after the registration deadline had passed; and C., crucial to the task at hand, referral by BIAC's "Coach J" Janet Bellantoni to her rowing partner, who agreed to meet me at her boathouse in Berkeley. Inside the boathouse was the key to being able to race at HOA: a car rack that will fit a double, allowing us to car top the Carpe Diem to HOA. And ok, let me just get this out of the way, and I promise I'll ~~not repeat the bad joke~~ keep repeating this until you're sick of it: I proclaim the new name of the boat to be the Car-top-e Diem, what with this trip and a prior excursion with Laura and Angie to Tahoe.

Anyway, all of that is a long way to say that Coach Chuck does a ton in the background to make sure we can race, as I found out with the registration process and associated logistics (sure, I'm the club's main contact for the race; yes, I completed my SafeSport training, really, I did; we're car-topping and really really need a parking spot, etc.) But, like most things in life, I got through it, so Angie and I could focus on getting (more) ready. After Thursday practice, Angie and I grabbed the Carpe Diem, loaded the boat rack on her SUV's roof rails, de-rigged the Carpe Diem and loaded it on the boat rack, grabbed a couple sets of oars, some slings and went on our merry way, Angie a bit more cautiously than I, what with an extra five or so feet of expensive carbon fiber boat hanging off each end of her SUV.

As things worked out, neither of us could leave until early Saturday morning, which was fine, as our race was scheduled for 1:59. Note, that's in the PM, as in, sunlight, maybe even some warmth (and hopefully not too much wind) and likely no rushing around. This particular order of life events worked out quite serendipitously: Late on Friday afternoon I got a text from Emily, who rows on the comp team. She mentioned that during Friday practice, there was a set of oars for which they could only find one starboard oar to match three port oars. By any chance, had we grabbed an extra starboard? Well, nothing says "novice" like mis-matched oars, so I continued the Life of The Rockin' Suburban Dad by spending my Friday evening shuttling oars around. But whew, crisis averted, thanks Emily!

After a very easy drive out to Sacramento and arrival at the race venue, we immediately learned why I don't do this whole setting-up-for-races thing for a living: Where was my parking pass? My what? Parking pass. So we could actually drive to within a mile or so of the water and unload. Well, we somehow worked that out, only to be found by one of the organizers, who noticed this car-topped SUV wandering around parking lots ("Here?" "No, try making a right." "Ok, now where...") and rode up to us on her bicycle. "Can I help you?" she asked oh-so-wonderfully. A few minutes later we were in the car top lot, made quite obvious by all the other cars with, that's right, car top racks. Sigh.

Unload, re-rig, check heel ties, set foot stretchers, yadda, yadda...

The background venue music alternating between AC/DC and '90's country helped set the mood.

But if you're still with me this far, you probably want to hear about, like, the actual, you know, race? Oh yeah.

Piras happened to be there with his sons' team and graciously agreed to volunteer his buddy Akash (and himself) to help us get our oars to the launch site. The venue has one regular dock, just like we have at BIAC, quite far from where we were. But, most of the course is lined by (remember, potential Olympic venue) . . . beach! And, nothing dead or rotting to be found. Completely olfactorally neutral. I've beach-launched in a single and a quad, but why not learn how to not dump poor Angie when beach launching the Carpe Diem? Why not, indeed. The beach was just a few hundred feet from the SUV.

Off we went, in the designated warmup lane, avoiding clueless collegiate novices weaving around the tree stumps and rocks near the beach and staying out of the way of, shall we say, more accomplished crews, transporting posterior right away. If it's not obvious, it's a roughly 5k row back up to the start line, about the distance from the BIAC docks to marker #9, plenty of time to warm up. So, we did some feet-out work (so our feet would dry from the beach launch before stopping to put socks back on and tie in), some pick drills and a 3-2-1-2-3 warmup at 20, 22, 24, 22 and yeah, you guessed it: 20. We had time for one power 10, but with all the other crews around, the start line area approaching and my general unfamiliarity with the venue, I decided it would be prudent to save our power 10s for the race.

Bow numbers are assigned from "1" to the total number of boats entered, in race number order, so it's easy to tell by looking around if other crews are in a race before or after you. We were bow number 465, so that gives an indication of how many boats were there. Ours was the 36th

race out of 47. Getting closer to the start, we maneuvered so we were near other boats bow-numerically. Not surprisingly, these were all doubles with one man and one woman. There ended up being six boats.

In the staging area, the wind was blowing us toward the start line, but we were there early and had to keep backing to stay out of the way of the race starting before ours. I used the time to try to figure out a decent line and where, exactly, we were supposed to be as we crossed the start line. Different from sprint races, head races are started one boat after the other, with about 10 - 20 seconds between them. The starter makes note of your exact time crossing the start line, which is of course then compared against the time across the finish line. That time, plus or minus handicap (and in the case of Angie and I, that would be a minus, as in, time off, because it's a plus to be older!) is compared with other crews' times to determine finish order.

"BIAC 465, ready... ROW!" We had a few boat lengths to get up to speed before crossing the start line. My line was already off so we had to steer to port around the start buoy, but steer we did and then quickly took the rate up. It's amazing how the adrenaline flows when racing. We were up at 30 or so strokes/minute almost instantly and commented to each other how quickly that had happened. I suggested we back it down to 28, but in the back of my mind, I figured that may not last...

We had started third. The crew immediately ahead of us, not surprisingly boat 464, was from UNLV. Figuring this collegiate crew was youthful and strong, I wasn't sure what strategy to use: Hang near them for a while or just concentrate on getting past them? That question was answered as 466, Lake Las Vegas, got bigger in front of my view of Angie's hard-working upper body. Hmmm. This is what I call a compound passing situation: We were potentially getting passed while passing.

In head racing, as opposed to sprint racing, the crew being passed is obligated to give way or yield the preferred line to an overtaking crew. If you think about it, this makes sense: if a crew has already made up the 10 - 20 second gap from the starting order, they've already passed you if they're closing on you. So, not wanting to be "that boat", I had us move to starboard. We were now parallel to UNLV's stern, who clearly hadn't thought this through, as they were still off our port and clearly not making any move to starboard. I didn't care as I was too concerned about not letting Lake Las Vegas put a dent in Carpe Diem's stern. "Let's take it up to 30 or so and finish this," I suggested to Angie. "We can always take it down later." Ha! She didn't say.

While all this was going on, I was trying to not stay fixated on the water a boat length or two ahead of us. I knew we could make time on Lake Las Vegas if we could take a better line. Remember, Lake Las Vegas is off our port stern (ok, and they're likely to pass us) but the course eventually turns to starboard. So, staying to starboard is a better line, right? Right.

Part of my approach with bow seat is to provide lots of info to my stroke about what's going on around us. I'll do all the looking and calling steering, stroke just needs to keep pulling and not get distracted. But, while I know Angie to be a great athlete, clearly this pace will have us near max output eventually, and we're going to be out here a while. So I kept up a steady stream of info, distances to the boats around us, where we are left-to-right on the course, we can do this, keep it up, you're doing great (she was), etc. She never told me to shut up, so I kept talking.

The hardest part of my steering was knowing what was “next”, navigation-wise. I knew there’s this huge island, Texas Hill, part way down course. When I saw a bunch of buoys between the island and the starboard shore, I realized I needed to just be on the outside of the hill enough to not hit it, then go back to starboard. I kept calling port pressure as the course turned, judging where we were by how far away the red buoys, which separate the race course from the warmup lane, were to our port side. Eventually those red buoys slid waaaaay off our port side, so I knew we were theoretically near the theoretically fastest line. In theory.

While there had been wind, presumably toward our stern, blowing us into the start area while waiting for the race to start, I could instantly tell that the wind, somewhat confusingly, now appeared to be on our bow. Our 500 meter pace had started at a solid 2:11, got down to a 2:09 passing UNLV, but was now at 2:19 and would top out at 2:27 when we took the full brunt of the wind that I could now feel on my back. “Don’t worry,” I called to Angie, “we’re slowing due to the wind.” She’d later tell me this was helpful, as I had hoped it would be. Again, we were at high effort and the last thing we needed was discouragement caused by something out of our control.

Now we came up on white buoys off our starboard. Uh oh. Guess my strategy of catching the starboard edge was a bit much. I called starboard pressure and we got away from the buoys, which appeared to be marking the start of the final straight toward the finish.

While I was working the navigation issue, Lake Las Vegas was sadly, slowly pulling away. I let Angie know they had over a boat length on us. Since we were still on the power 10 from passing UNLV, I thought it best to not call for another one, but still suggested to Angie that we could indeed catch Lake Las Vegas. Slowly, slowly, we started to close the gap. For a while. We got within a boat length, but just couldn’t get closer. In retrospect, this part of the race was both terribly frustrating, but infinitely fun, knowing we still had over a kilometer to go. We had no idea if they’d roll over and die on us or if we’d somehow be able to take it up to 40 or so to finish them off.

Alas, they didn’t die, we didn’t quite take it to 40. My Garmin data would show a max of 34 in the final 500. Lake Las Vegas was clearly receding off into the distance. With about 200 meters to go, I called a final push to the finish. Knowing that it was all about time vs. our competitors’ handicap, we worked to shave as much time away as possible, briefly hitting 2:08 pace in that last 500.

And it was over. My heart thumping, I leaned forward and returned Angie’s low-five. What a run. The Lake Las Vegas crew waited and congratulated us on the race, which we returned. We clearly both appreciated each other’s presence in the competition and probably wouldn’t have gone as fast without the other. In an amazing coincidence, they had the same average age as us, so handicap wasn’t going to help us here. The final results had us in third place, as an amazing crew from Lake Casitas Rowing in Ventura, CA finished second with a nearly-insurmountable handicap of 2:27 off their time. Because their average age was 64. Wow, I hope I’m that fast when I’m an average age of 64. Lake Las Vegas won. But, for a regular Masters (not Novice) race, we were happy with third. Angie had made the astute observation earlier that since this wasn’t a novice race, we were racing against other clubs’ comp teams,

right? Yup, that's typically how it works, but since we weren't exactly the "A" crew, maybe we weren't racing other "A" crews, either, who knows...

Then, in the midst of our post-race reverie, a course marshall got on their bullhorn and kindly reminded us that we needed to move out of the finish area. A race is still ending and we were kinda in the way.

A spin and back to the beach to beach-land, we spotted Piras and Akash again. I managed to not dump Angie again and we reversed the trek back to her SUV. After some time with some "water" to help wind down from the race (hey, the sign said no alcohol, so we drank from our "water" bottles...) we began the de-rig, rack, pack, etc. process. Back to BIAC by 7pm, we had the Carpe Diem tucked back in and all the starboard oars with their port mates in no time.

What an awesome day. I'm so appreciative of all the help I got to be able to race. And thanks to Angie for being a great crewmate.

Looking forward to the Head of the Lagoon 11/12!





# Head of the American Lake Natoma, Sacramento, CA

Oct 29, 2022

## 36. Mixed Masters 2x

13:59 Official

| Place | Bow | Name  | Raw     | +/-                 | Adjusted |
|-------|-----|---|---------|---------------------|----------|
| 1     | 466 | C. Palmquist/m.<br>belsky<br>(Lake Las Vegas) | 22:20.7 | Age: 52<br>-1:07.50 | 21:13.2  |
| 2     | 467 | S. Chatwin/C.<br>Warren<br>(Casitas)          | 24:00.0 | Age: 64<br>-2:27.85 | 21:32.2  |
| 3     | 465 | M. Udisches/A.<br>Tinson<br>(BIAC)            | 22:46.3 | Age: 52<br>-1:07.50 | 21:38.8  |
| 4     | 463 | Sacramento State                              | 22:30.9 |                     | 22:30.9  |
| 5     | 469 | E. Coolman/R.<br>Coolman<br>(Casitas)         | 25:35.2 | Age: 60<br>-1:57.61 | 23:37.6  |
| 6     | 464 | R. Mendoza/C. Bjelic<br>(UNLV)                | 24:50.7 | Age: 19             | 24:50.7  |
|       | 468 | R. Briggs/S. Gray<br>(Table Mountain)         |         | Age: 69<br>-3:10.51 | Scratch  |

