

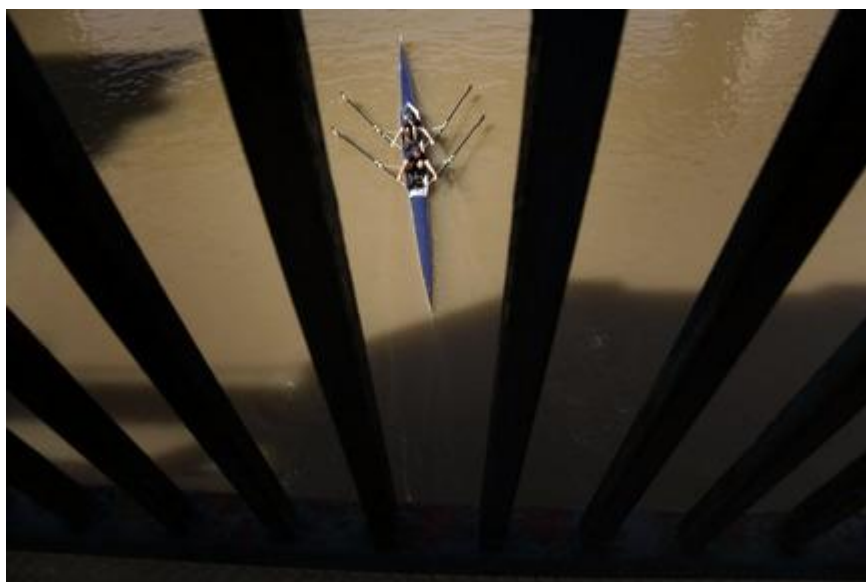


Head of the Cuyahoga Regatta challenges rowers, rewards watchers

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Thomas Feran, The Plain Dealer



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Lonnie Timmons III, The Plain Dealer

Emery Eiber and Henry Kershaw of St Ignatius row in the mens junior double final during the 15th annual Head of the Cuyahoga regatta by the Cleveland Rowing Foundation on Saturday, September 18, 2010. Photographed through the railing on the Columbus Road bridge.

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Ore boats gave way to oar boats on Cleveland's twisting river Saturday as more than 1,000 rowers from seven states and Canada competed in the 15th annual Head of the Cuyahoga Regatta.

Its 2.5-mile course, with more curves than any other race in the country, offered a challenge to crews and rewards to spectators on a day of sunny skies and calm water.

"It's so twisting, you can watch boats launch, pass and then finish at Settlers Landing," said Theresa Gang, executive director of the host Cleveland Rowing Foundation.

"You can see them at least twice, and that's unique," said Jeff Patterson of a Toledo suburb, who's been involved in rowing for five years through his kids in the large program at Anthony Wayne High School.

"This is the best place to see a race, and it's one of my favorites because of how close you can get to the rowers," he said.

As many as 2,000 spectators watched from tents, tailgates and a variety of vantages within shouting distance of the coxswains barking orders in eight-rower shells. The 250 boats in more than 40 events ranged from 63-foot, 200-pound eights to 27-foot, one-person singles.

Most watchers gathered on the West Bank of the Flats at the regatta's Spectators Village, across the water from the rowing foundation boathouse. Next year, the foundation expects to host the event from a new location just around the bend upriver at Rivergate Park -- a seven-acre public area that the group is creating for rowing, canoeing, kayaking and 20-rower dragon boats.

Further opening the river to recreation, the park will also raise the profile of what has been "the invisible thing to do in Cleveland," said Bill Braun, who was among the foundation's founders in 1989.

They started with five rowers, now have 850, and Braun expects participation to double over the next five years as the group increases its work with Cleveland Public Schools.

Efforts to clean up the river also have paid off. "The water's clear, there's much less debris, you see wildlife you never saw."

"We have a lot of people who can't wait to be using the river for fun," said Sarah Ott-Hansen, development director for the nonprofit.

Local crews in the regatta included Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland State University, St. Ignatius High School, Shaker Heights High School, John Carroll University, Baldwin-Wallace College, Hawken School, Western Reserve Rowing Foundation and Cleveland Scholastic Rowing Association. Rowers ranged from their early teens to their 70s, and at least half were women.

Race results from the Head of the Cuyahoga are posted at regattacentral.com.

More on the rowing foundation is at clevelandrows.org.

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