

Lightweight Eight Finishes Second in the Petite Final at Youth National Championships

The lightweight girls eight of coxswain Katie Murai, stroke Kaily Vonesh, seven seat Jennifer Wukawitz, six seat Kristine Sanders, five seat Brooke Overend, four seat Cynthia Bui, three seat Brigitte Ngo, two seat Katie Rosoff, and bow seat Emily Van Hoffman finished in second place in the petite final, only a second out of first. They can now say that they are the eighth fastest lwt. girls eight in the country. A very proud title to carry.

This journey started back in September at the Head of the American in borrowed Resolute shell, a group of young athletes finding a common love for a boat and a dream. With the help of parents, the girls' efforts and the program they were able to obtain the boat, but the road towards the dream would take great effort and develop into a dynamic journey that concluded in Cincinnati, Ohio.

The lwt. eight that started in September would not be the one that would finish, but you kind of got the feeling the eight was not just an eight. Every girl that had spend time in the boat, Sam DeMeyer, Isabella Holmes, Fiona Maguire, Janessa Rasmussen had left apart of them that would continue to inspire the remaining crew. And there were plenty of set-backs, but with every challenge came another point of growth.

Then in the late weeks of April with only 2 plus weeks till SW Regionals, three girls decided that they were willing to make some personal sacrifices and wanted to be a part of the boat. Kaily and Jen were in the original line-up in October. But Jen focused most of the year on the Varsity 8+ and 4+. Kaily had been in strong contention in both, but was side-lined by walking pneumonia and a severely pulled intercostal muscle. And Emily had only joined the team in January. All three would have to drop a few pounds and attempt to put together a national bounded boat in less than three weeks.

After the first practice you could see the fire and determination. But was it enough time and there appeared to be much stacked against them. Kaily Vonesh coming back from missing almost four weeks of practice, Jen Wukawitz having drop back to lwt after putting so much effort to put on weight to support the Varsity program, Kristine Sanders only fourteen years old, Brooke Overend a novice, Cynthia Bui was a coxswain last year, Brigitte Ngo and Katie Rosoff struggling to break the 125 lbs barrier and Emily Van Hoffman starting in January.

At Southwest Regional Championships the girls shocked Oakland who had been third all year in the region by holding them off in the sprint and earning a spot at the US Rowing Youth National Championships.

The training between States and Nationals was great. The girls prepared well. Often rowing all seven days and putting several extra hours in the gym. Jessica and I were proud of their efforts and excited to see them race.

The first race was on Friday against some tough competition. The weather was terrible. And the girls struggled and did not qualify out of the heats. Instead they would need to return and race in the evening for a second chance to make the semi. That evening they returned and finished second to Community (who had finished second overall last year). It was a good race and they were now in the semi.

The girls drew a difficult semi-final with teams like Los Gatos and Maritime. And unfortunately, the inexperience finally caught up to them. They were physically prepared, but doubts began to settle in. They had a tough race. But honestly, I believe that day each one of them grew immensely.

Although, they had set out to make the Grand Finals and maybe even win a medal, we all headed to dinner Saturday evening with the parents sitting 22 people at our extended table to celebrate the girls' accomplishments. A toast was made to those girls, for no matter what happened on the final day, they were champions in all our hearts. They were at Nationals and they had accomplished their dream.

The girls raced a courageous final race. They finished second in the petite final only a second out of seventh. Ninth place was over 12 seconds back. We were proud, for you could once again see the confidence and the passion that had gotten those nine incredible young ladies here.