

Diary of a Local Boy in New York

They've Got Game and Canoe Too

By David Homer, Head Coach

All night long we were in the air on our way to Chicago and after that we hustled into New York's LaGuardia Airport for the second annual Liberty Cup Challenge in New York Harbor. I tried to get some sleep, but it was only enough to keep me awake to witness our full sized 80 passenger bus squeezing through the streets of New York with just us on it.

That was no easy task as the vendor's trucks were parked up and down both sides of seemingly every street and pedestrians were crossing streets like raging rivers of humanity with no regard to traffic at all. Finally, this was it, we were here in New York City. I was obviously so excited to be there that I fell asleep sitting up watching TV.

From certain rooms in the Marriott Financial Center Hotel, we could see her, The Statue of Liberty. That really gets you going for practice, as somehow this one is going to be different. When we got out there to practice we entered the water at the South Side Seaport, paddled around a support of the Brooklyn Bridge, past the south side of Governor's Island and then finally around the Statue of Liberty. It was awesome to be seeing the Statue of Liberty from our little canoe out in the middle of the Harbor.

We stopped to take pictures and then as we got closer to Goat Island, the tourists were racing to take pictures of us as we were racing by. We even received an informal announcement from the ferries that were docked in back of the Statue.

As we returned to our hotel, about a 20 block walk across the south end of Manhattan, it was clear that the New Yorkers were not accustomed to seeing us in our beach attire. We later took part in a luau style party for interested New Yorkers at the South Side Seaport where about a thousand people watched over the entertainment of Radio Hula and waited for the raffle of a trip to Hawaii.

On the average, the people in New York were very serious, but we came into contact with people of all

types there. One lady that I met is a friend of the sculptor who sculpted the Queen Liliuokalani statue at Iolani Palace. Another sweet lady told me about the history of the Brooklyn Bridge.

Still another

4th grade class of youngsters checked out the canoe in awe as it sat on the dock and one of the boys could not believe that we were going to get into that thing. (His exact quote was, "You'll going to get in that s...?" in a slang tone that I recognized from college basketball days. The question sure confused Walter Guild who experienced a definite culture clash there.)

Then there were the cab drivers who were playing chicken with the pedestrians in a way that made you fear for your life when you

were out crossing the streets again.

After that first day of rest and two days of practice, it was time to get to business. The women of Team Hawaii, including Outrigger members Paula Crabb and Kelly Fey, certainly did that. The Team Hawaii women won by three minutes in what seemed to be a very controlled race. (I would write more here, but I didn't interview enough of the women to get the whole picture.)

By the time that the men were getting on the water, it was just after noon and it was about 90 degrees and quite humid, exceeding most of the harshest heat conditions that I have ever seen in any race in Hawaii.

Things seemed under control at the starting line, but then the race started and weird things started to happen. A 35-foot boat decided to take a close look at

the start of the race and the wake slammed into and off of the wall and debilitated us as we were totally boxed in by the field.

We found ourselves in the fight of our lives with four other crews in a third place tie. Meanwhile, Team Hawaii, with Outrigger members Walter Guild, Mark Rigg and Todd

Bradley, was not lined up near the wall and rode the boat's wake to a lead followed by a team of New York marathon paddlers. Experience definitely helped

the leaders as they avoided the troubles that we were in, but we were confident that we could close the three boat length deficit as things cleared up. We were just starting to make our move as we paddled around Battery Park about four minutes into the race and then the fun really began. We turned a corner with an eight foot concrete wall.

We were still boxed in by all of the canoes that were next to us and there was no way to avoid all of the fishing lines that were hanging off of the wall. Bill Pratt, David Buck, Billy Balding and I hopelessly paddled along and Marc Haine and Ikaika Kincaid were forced to break three fishing lines that were now wrapped around our outrigger. What more could happen after that? Thankfully, nothing else and we spent the rest of the race battling our way back to finish in second place. There was no catching up to Team Hawaii which capitalized on that nearly one minute lead and extended to a victory of a little more than two and a half minutes.

After the race, we played some volleyball on the sand courts where we were joined by Gaylord Wilcox who was there with Anuenue. It was a fun session of us Hawaii folks having a good time and enjoying our time in the New York warmth. Former Hawaii residents felt like they were back at home in Hawaii while playing volleyball with us.

The next day came the park basketball game. We did our five minutes of team shopping, much less than the Team Hawaii women I assure you. We found an outdoor basketball court so we could have our own friendly game. When we walked in, we received incredulous looks from people who couldn't believe we could play basketball dressed in board shorts and other non basketball attire.

As we finished our friendly game, the locals asked to play against us as they didn't have enough players to have their own game. We succeeded in winning four games in a row before we had to go to dinner. One of our opponents commented on how he has a new respect for our athleticism, "They've got game and canoe too!"

