National Concrete Canoe Competition – June 2008
SIUE Concrete Canoe Team Play Ball Trip Report - What We Did and Learned

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Introduction
The SIUE ASCE Student Chapter participated in the 2008 National Concrete Canoe Competition held at Ecole de Technologie Superieure (ETS) in Montreal, Quebec, June 18-21, 2008. This trip report briefly discusses our experiences and what we learned.

Background
Team Play Ball finished second place overall at the 2008 MCRC in Fayetteville, AR, at the University of Arkansas. However, the first place winner from University of Oklahoma was judged to not be eligible for competing in the national competition because of structural problems incurred during the regional competition. The ASCE NCCC committee then extended the invitation to SIUE which we accepted without hesitation. There was a very tight time frame (less than two weeks) for all registration materials to be completed and submitted.

Transportation
The team decided to fly team members and ship the canoe and displays to Montreal since the preliminary cost estimates for that option seemed to be less expensive than driving the canoe and team there. A verbal quote for shipping the canoe was provided the team but no hardcopy of the quote was seen by the team. In retrospect, subsequent events appear to challenge the cost effectiveness of this decision.

The canoe’s shipping crate was the curing tank (constructed of previously used, weathered 2x4s and plywood) which was reinforced for shipping by adding additional OSB panels to the interior and exterior surfaces with drywall screws and bolting the top to the frame using bolts and t-nuts. The crate for the displays, paddles, life jackets and miscellaneous supplies was constructed of new 2x4s and 7/16 inch OSB which were screwed together.

The crates for the canoe and misc. and were transported to the SIUE loading dock by team members for pickup by UPS Freight. The team shipping coordinator had prepared and attached to the canoe crate two versions of the customs paperwork as recommended by ETS – this later proved to be key to getting the crates through customs. The crates were marked “Do Not Lift in Center” and “Please Lift by Both Ends Only”. Upon UPS Freight arrival, the driver noted that he did need the bill of lading and crates marked, but in either case, he had no room for the crates. SIUE loading dock folks typed the bill of lading and marked the “ship to” info on the crates. The crates were picked up by UPS Freight on Friday afternoon, June 13. No team representatives witnessed the loading.

The team flew to Montreal and all arrived in the afternoon of Wednesday, June 18. The team members went to the dorm and then to ETS. The advisor picked up the rental truck near the airport and drove it to the ETS parking area in downtown Montreal. Traffic was a mess, especially since it was the evening rush hour and raining. One of the team members rode along in the truck and helped navigate using a GPS-enabled Blackberry. This was very helpful. The team met the truck outside ETS and proceeded around the block to pick up the canoe. Unfortunately the ETS loading dock was already closed for the day so we could not retrieve the canoe yet. The team went to dinner at restaurant Baton Rouge.
The first captains meeting was held at ETS to convey basic information about the schedule, where to park, some common traffic rules for Montreal (now they tell us). ASCE Student Services U of OK was there, but without a canoe. That was an indication to us that just being at the competition is very important to teams that want to be successful. Our two teams also spent a lot of time together – we truly appreciated their sportsmanship and support.

Judging (Thursday, June 19)

Early Thursday, the team and truck went to the ETS loading dock to pick up the crates and then to Place du Canada park for final product judging. The team found the crates inside the loading dock area. It was awkward even for the ten team members and loading dock people to get those crates on the truck. It was obvious that the canoe crate was very awkward to move and seemed more flexible than before shipment. At the park, all teams were dispatched from the ETS parking area so that two at a time were unloaded at the park. The team and truck arrived at Place du Canada and immediately unloaded the misc. crate and then opened the canoe crate. Right away we noticed the gunnels were cracked in one place on each side all the way down to the chine. What a tense few moments that caused. Photos of the broken areas and the crate were taken at that time. The team consulted with the judges about their options. It was decided that the canoe could be repaired with duct tape and the team would accept a 25-point penalty. The canoe and displays were setup with just enough taping done to stabilize the canoe until all judging and official photos were complete.

The canoe was carried to and very carefully placed on the weighing apparatus (weight 158 pounds). Another team’s canoe apparently cracked while being weighed.

Although it was chilly with periods of rain, the 22 teams present circulated, discussed, joked, photographed and generally admired each other’s canoes and team efforts. What a wonderful learning experience and camaraderie all of this socializing provided. True, the lunch and dinner lines were very long, and the rain fell several times, but those temporary inconveniences were diminished by the good things that happened.
The official events wound down around 6 pm. It was initially planned to load in the reverse order of the morning unloading sequence. After several teams loaded, however it became apparent to the organizers that it would be better to send the team trucks in a queuing order established at the ETS parking area. After the truck was loaded most of the team went for dinner while Jennifer, Todd, and BMV went to see the Technical Presentations site. After returning to the dorms (via Metro trains, as we would use many times during our stay), two of the three presenters practiced and refined the PowerPoint presentation until after 10:00pm.

**Technical Presentations (Friday, June 20)**

Team *Play Ball* arrived at the ETS building an hour ahead of their scheduled 8:00 am presentation time and had breakfast. The presentation room was a nicely appointed auditorium sitting perhaps 100, with a stage and massive video projector. Now, we've all used PowerPoint and the normal Windows interface many times. But when prompts come up in French, suddenly it's a new ball game. The 3 presenters, Jennifer Titchenal, Troy Turner and Ryan Zwijack, were very businesslike, both in appearance and demeanor. They each presented their parts well and had smooth transitions. The team completed their presentation in just over 4 minutes then responded to questions from the judges for another 10 minutes.

Presentations by other teams were generally very well done. One presentation (UCLA) was particularly notable in its style. The lone presenter spoke with a multimedia presentation running in the background, all timing was preset. His timing seemed just right throughout – truly a polished presentation. Presentations went from 8:00 am until about 4:00 pm. Following the morning presentations, some of the team members carefully completed patching the canoe with duct tape to make prepare for the races. At the same time, the crate to be returned with the displays and miscellaneous materials was packed and taken to the ETS loading dock for its return shipment.
Race Day Events (Saturday, June 21)

Race 1: Women’s Endurance  
Paddlers: Front: Jennifer Titchenal, Middle: Laura Niemeyer, Back: Trisha Youngquist

There were some delays leading up to the start of the race, so the paddlers were in the water for about 15 minutes prior to starting the race. The canoe was beginning to show signs of becoming water logged, but was not taking on water yet. The first part of the race included the slalom, which the team moved through quickly, but as they turned the corner onto the endurance portion of the race they could tell the canoe was more sluggish. While before the canoe had sliced through the water with ease, the canoe was now sitting lower in the water and pushing through the water at a slower pace. The paddlers had to work extra hard to keep their speed up, and by the end of the race they were completely exhausted. (I think we finished around 15th out of 22 for this race)

Race 2: Men’s Endurance  
Paddlers: Front: Ryan Zwijack, Middle: Don Seitz, Back: Kyle Hannel

The men’s team was ready to go at the start of their race and maintained a fast pace as they worked through the slalom, but about half way through the slalom water started to spill over the sides on a few of the turns. The paddlers continued onto the endurance portion but the additional water in the canoe was making it difficult. As the canoe became more unstable more water continued to wash over the sides into the canoe and by the two-thirds point in the race the men had slowed down considerably. Water was approaching their waists’ but they were determined to finish. This determination was evident as they were nearing the ¾ mark in the race. Suddenly, the canoe started to sink, but the men never stopped paddling until their life-jackets became ejector seats and lifted them out of the canoe as it went under. The canoe popped back up, and despite being exhausted, the men swam the canoe all the way across the finish line.

...unfortunately the canoe took on too much water over the top, but they did get it across the finish line allowing the team to continue competing in the remaining events.
Race 3: Women’s Sprint  
Paddlers: Front: Jess Huxman, Back: Jessica Schuerman

At this point the paddlers were worried about making it through the race before the canoe sank again, but they were determined to do their best. At the start they gained speed and kept the canoe on a straight course towards the buoy, and made a nice close turn around the buoy as they made their way back to the finish line. The water-logged and sluggish canoe was the last to make it across the finish line, but not by much. The women did an amazing job at keeping up with the other teams despite the circumstances, and they didn’t sink. (Not sure what the overall placement was for this race)

Race 4: Men’s Sprint  
Paddlers: Front: Ryan Zwijack, Back: Troy Turner

The men were anxious to race, and at the start gained amazing speed during the first half of the race. As they rounded the bend, the team was astonished to see they were one of the leaders for this heat. While they finished as one of the leaders for their heat, overall they were 12th and didn’t make it into the finals.

Race 5: Co-ed Sprint  
Paddlers: Front: Jennifer Titchenal, Middle-Front: Andy Owens, Middle-Back: Laura Niemeyer, Back: Kyle Hannel

The paddlers were extremely nervous before getting into the canoe, but to their surprise there was still plenty of free-board after all four were in. At the start of this race the team took off with ease and stayed near the front of the pack until the turn around the buoy. After they turned, the swells in the water began crashing over the front of the boat, soaking the front paddlers. The team slowed down to reduce the amount of water crashing into the front to avoid possibly sinking. While they didn’t win the race, they also didn’t sink and could have gone faster had they not been worried about sinking with the added water that came in.
Final Results
Out of 22 teams, SIUE *Play Ball!* earned 19th place overall, 15th in paper, 16th in presentation, and 18th in final product.

What we Learned
☼ Going to the national competition exposes one to a wealth of information. Although we were competing in the top ten percent of all the teams in North America, the spirit of cooperation and sharing was awesome.
☼ If you are going to ship the canoe pack it well. Also, get the shipping quote in writing so you know, among other reasons, what the quote really represents.
☼ Keep at least one change of clothes and basic amenities in your carryon bags when traveling by air in case your checked bag is “misdirected” in one or both directions (which it did to one of us).
☼ It wouldn’t hurt to learn a little of the language before traveling to a predominantly non-English speaking country.
☼ No right turn on red while “on the island” in Montreal.
☼ Always do your best, be positive, be natural, be yourself. One of the team members was pleasantly surprised to find that one of the corporate sponsors was impressed with her and offered her an intern position on the day of the races. She was further astonished to hear at the Awards Banquet later that evening that the sponsor awarded her a $1000 scholarship along with nine other students. She is now an intern in Arizona for that firm.
☼ The team learned many more technical and racing techniques and are cataloging them for future reference.

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Team *Play Ball!* at the Olympic Basin in Montreal (left to right, back row): Andrew Owens, Kyle Hannel, Don Seitz, Troy Turner*, Ryan Zwija; (front row) Jennifer Titchenal*, Jessica Huxman, Laura Niemeyer, Jessica Schuerman, Trisha Youngquist. (*co-captain)