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SD's oars, men win UCSD rows to first Cal Cup victory ... with key equipment borrowed from USD Mark Zeigler STAFF WRITER

The **UCSD** men's varsity was five, maybe 10 minutes from launching its boat onto Mission Bay ahead of yesterday's **Cal Cup** grand final at the 34th annual San Diego Crew Classic. And there was a slight problem.

The Tritons already were trying **to** become the **first** team in school history **to** win the **Cal Cup**. Now they were about **to** try **to** become the **first** team **to** win a race without oars.

At least they had a boat. Earlier in the week, the Tritons' shell sank west of the Ingram Street bridge in the winds that had whipped Mission Bay into a rowing version of the Poseidon Adventure -- forcing rowers **to** jump into the chilly water and swim the \$30,000 carbon fiber shell **to** shore.

But there they were yesterday, surging from third place midway through the 2,000-meter course **to** nudge UCLA by maybe a foot at the finish line. There they were, wearing their dark blue uniforms with a diagonal yellow stripe ... and pulling oars with light blue and white blades.

USD Toreros colors.

UCSD coach Zach Johnson credited his senior-laden crew with the historic **victory**, then thanked USD coach Brooks Dagman, his former college coach, for his last-minute benevolence with a set of oars.

It was a day that belonged **to** the unexpected, though. The Stanford men successfully defended their title in the Copley **Cup** by passing favored **Cal** down the stretch. And the USC women, with seven Eastern Europeans pulling oars, blew away four-time defending champion and No. 1-ranked **Cal** in the Jessop-Whittier **Cup** by two boat lengths.

For **UCSD**, an NCAA Division II school, it was a chance **to** bask in the glow of the big time.

"It's really good for our school," Johnson said. "We have athletes who work really hard, same as everyone else has. But it's nice for them **to** finally get some recognition. We're a school of 25,000 that sometimes seems **to** get overlooked."

Johnson is in his **first** year as head coach, but he didn't know locating eight oars in five minutes was part of the job description.

Seems the **UCSD** women had an extra shell at Crown Point Shores and wanted **to** row it back **to** the school's boat house on the opposite end of Mission Bay, and needed some oars. The men's team had an extra set -- an old, weathered, out-of-date, beat-up set -- that it told the women they were welcome **to** use.

So the women grabbed a set of oars and rowed off.

With the men's varsity oars.

The result was a frenetic search for oars stiff enough for men's varsity rowers and an abbreviated prerace pep talk from Johnson, but in the end none of it mattered. The Tritons, with four seniors in the boat, executed the race plan **to** perfection, keeping touch with the leaders through the opening 1,000 meters and then making their move over the next 500.

That drew them even with UCLA and UC Davis.

"From there," Johnson said, "it was just the guys wanting it more than anybody else. We have some seniors in the boat who have come up short a few times, and they weren't going **to** let that happen again."

UCSD crossed the finish line in 6 minutes, 30.60 seconds. UCLA was second in 6:31.02.

Next up on Mission Bay was the four-team Copley **Cup**, and it was nearly as close.

Cal held a slight lead with 500 meters **to** go before Stanford pulled even with 250 **to** go and won by two seats, 6:09.44 **to** 6:10.49. Stanford had never won the Copley **Cup** in the **first** 32 years it was held. Now it has won two straight.

Cal was ranked No. 2 nationally and had six foreigners with years of club experience in its boat. Stanford had six guys who didn't start rowing until college.

"We have a huge amount of respect for what they do," said Stanford coach Craig Amerkhanian, who rowed and coached at **Cal**. "They are outstanding. They bring out the best in you. But it's almost impossible **to** beat them ... This is huge for us."

The benefits of stocking your boat with foreigners was never more evident than in the Jessop-Whittier **Cup**, the premier women's event. USC, ranked eighth nationally, ended **Cal**'s four-year run as champion by a whopping 7.76 seconds with a lineup of hometowns that went like this:

Olomouc, Czech Republic; Wloclawek, Poland; Valmeira, Latvia; Novi Sad, Serbia; Lipetsk, Russia; Jurmala, Latvia; Rousse, Bulgaria. The only Americans in the boat were coxswain Lauren Cowan of Los Angeles and Robin Hextrum of Stinson Beach.

"I go **to** Europe (**to** recruit)," said Trojans coach Zenon Babraj, a former U.S. national coach who defected from Poland in 1984. "I try **to** attract the people who are good students and who can speak English. There are talented athletes here (in the United States), but traditionally USC is not a rowing school like **Cal** or Washington.

"It's a necessity for us **to** bring the most talented athletes, and if we can't get them here we have **to** get them elsewhere. But hopefully you'll eventually start **to** have local athletes come."