

Wheeler

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potential there. A call went out to Johnson at Yale, his old prep teammate, and at the next meeting of the United States Rowing Association, Johnson brought up the idea of a national championship event at East Fork State Park in Ohio.

PREVIOUSLY, THE only season's-end rowing event that invited all colleges was the Intercollegiate Rowing Association regatta, but the IRA is held on the same day as the Yale-Harvard annual race and was thereby not a genuine national championship.

"Nobody had ever picked up the idea before of how to bring all the schools together for a real national championship," says Bill Hollenback, president of the USRA. "This is such a traditional sport. Tradition is a wonderful thing, but sometimes it can be a barnacle."

The break from tradition was not only to have a national championship event, which the USRA agreed to sanction, but to have it in the rowing vacuum of the Midwest. It is here because Engeman brought it here.

"This event has been the inspiration of one man, Bill Engeman," said Hollenback. "He broached the idea and he did something about it. He realized, first, that for such an event to work it would have to pay for the crews to come out. And then it was a question of what would put a cap on the whole thing. That's the expense-paid trip to the Royal Regatta. I tell you, I went to the Royal Henley for the first time last year, and I must say, it's the damndest pageant anybody ever put on."

Engeman, whose satisfaction is not complete by having the national race here twice, says that the future of it at East Fork depends on the willingness of the collegiate crews to come. After the first two races, however, it is hard to imagine them unwilling. Their lodging is provided by Holiday Inn East. Their fare to England is provided by British Airways. Additional funding for the event is provided by Fifth Third Bank, whose board chairman, Bill Rowe, was a Harvard oarsman in the late '30s.

REGATTA OFFICIALS say

that the race is able to walk on its own now, but it was a toddling two Saturday, a courageous but calamitous young thing. In one of the preliminary heats, a water ski boat sent waves of wreckage through the racing lanes and wiped out the run; the Coast Guard is not yet convinced that the Regatta is big enough to close off the lake. A press boat submerged on its way to the starting line, ruining thousands of dollars of photographic and video equipment. The Brown crew broke a seat in its shell before the race began, and it took several cumbersome relays to replace it.

When the race ended in a tingling photo finish between Harvard and Washington—fortunately, the photo equipment used to determine the winner was safely landed under a tent—the ineffective public address system was unable to communicate the results to the officiating crew on the pier. While the Harvard oarsmen were hugging each other, USRA official Ed Singer was waiting anxiously for word.

"Everybody is saying Harvard won," he said, "but how can they say that when I don't know that they've won." After three videotape replays, it was officially resolved that Harvard, coming from behind, had prevailed by a foot or two in the last stroke.

"I have seen finishes that close before," said Singer later, "but never in the fashion that we were fortunate to observe today, with the winning team coming from a full length behind."

THAT WAS the oddest thing, really. That, after all the legendary races on the hoary Eastern water courses, it suddenly seemed that none could prove more memorable than the 1983 Cincinnati Regatta at East Fork State Park, Bantam, Ohio.

When it was over, Charles Butt, the gray coach from a Virginia high school, went up to Harry Parker, the famous coach from Harvard, and said, "That was a helluva boat race." Inside, Butt knew that, indirectly, the race had emanated from him, that his lessons of long ago had been manifested Saturday on Harsha Lake, with Harvard winning on the last gasp.

"A helluva boat race," said Butt.