

**NMMU Rowing Club
River Vaal Regatta
2nd & 3rd February 2008**

The River Vaal regatta was initiated in 1987 by a group of rowing enthusiasts who were motivated by a Royal Henley Regatta Steward and member of the Organizing Committee and prominent rowing personality, Angus Robertson. They had a vision to hold the South African equivalent to the Royal Henley Regatta with two-boat racing. The regatta was designed to be a high class regatta with international competition. The first regatta was held in 1988 and has run each successive year since then attracting local, national and international participants. The regatta has grown from 12 races in 1988 to nearly 200 in 2008. The 2008 regatta attracted 33 clubs and 534 athletes competing in 272 boats!

For the first time in the Club's history NMMU sent a contingent up to this prestigious River Vaal Regatta held on the banks of the University of the North West's ground in Vanderbyl Park Gauteng.

Only a small contingent was sent up to the regatta due to financial constraints. Our two rowers Benji Ekron and Shane Reynolds arrived at the University of the North West on Friday the 1st of February and were able to set up their boats and get in a short row before an afternoon thunderstorm put an end to their practice session.

Both Shane and Benji had been entered into the "Vaal Sculls" race with 23 entries. They then raced together in a double in the "Vaal Doubles". Competition is extremely fierce at this regatta with many national and provincial participants in the entries. Racing at altitude was another obstacle our rowers had to overcome.

The Vaal Sculls was the first race on the Saturday. It took the form of a heads race with the top 8 times going through to the quarter finals. Shane Reynolds got the 4th fastest time (less than a second behind 3rd place) and Benji Ekron got the 5th fastest (4 seconds behind Shane).

Later that afternoon the quarter finals took place. Benji Ekron came up against Roff from the University of Johannesburg and narrowly lost. The altitude playing a bigger part as the day went on. Shane comfortably won his race and progressed into the semi finals on Sunday. Here he came up against Roff and he too narrowly lost in the final 100m of the race. Racing at altitude really took its toll for the coastal crews. The final was contested between Roff from the University of Johannesburg and Rech from St Albans. Rech won comfortably in the end.

In the Vaal Doubles which had 13 entries NMMU managed the 4th fastest time and went through to the quarter finals. That afternoon Shane and Benji raced a Mondeor crew and won comfortably. The following morning they raced in the semi-finals. It was only 20 minutes after Shane's semi final sculls race so he was feeling the effects of a tough race when they had to compete against Rech from St Albans and his doubles partner. The St Albans crew was too strong and went on to the finals and won that comfortably.

The weather on both days was extremely dry and hot. Midday temperatures soared into the high thirties. Racing had to be stopped twice due to thunderstorms although the regatta organizers managed to catch up the lost time.

Competitors raced over a course of 1530m. It had a kink at the 500m mark to the left and then a kink to the right with about 400m to go. Crews had to be confident in their steering abilities to navigate the course.

All in all it was a most successful regatta for NMMU. Making the semi finals for both races was an impressive achievement. And this sets the precedent for future NMMU crews who wish to attend this regatta. The regatta was very well run thanks to the hours and hours of preparation put in by the River Vaal Stewards who organize the regatta. One thing that was learnt from this competition is that you need to be very close to you best to be able to compete in it. Many crews were packing up and on there way home by lunch time on Saturday after being knocked out against stronger crews. Overall a great weekend was had for NMMU Rowing who will definitely be making the River Vaal Regatta a permanent fixture on their rowing calendar.

David Pearton
Chairman
NMMU Rowing Club