

Going All Out For Indoor Rowing Competitions

PI firm founder finds a new outlet for his competitive streak

By MARIE P. GRADY

If Carter Mario was having second thoughts about competing in an intense, indoor rowing competition, maybe the so-called "vomit buckets" should have stopped him dead in his tracks.

The basins next to the rowing machines at the international event at Boston University last February are as much a testament to the physical demands of the event as are the muscled bodies willing their way toward a virtual finish line. But Mario, a personal injury lawyer in Milford, is used to challenges.



Carter Mario, of Milford, placed 18th worldwide in his class in the CRASH B indoor rowing event held in Boston last February. A former wrestler and triathlete, he says his competitive streak also fuels his law work.

He was a scholarship wrestler at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has completed marathon bike races and triathlons. He is a human stun gun at judo.

And, oh yeah, he just happens to practice law on the side.

Mario placed 18th at the international indoor rowing event called "CRASH B" in February. The acronym stands for "Charles River All Stars Has-Beens." The winter rowing event was created by frustrated world class rowers who were unable to compete after the U.S. boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympic games in Moscow because of Russia's war in Afghanistan, a country where U.S. soldiers are now fighting terrorists.

"I had been a competitive athlete my entire life," says Mario. "This was just a natural evolution. This is very, very hard but it's not as toxic to your joints; it was really more or less a cross-training opportunity."

There was also another incentive, he says. "I got challenged by some guys that thought they could beat me."

Mario, a 53-year-old who weighs in at 180 pounds, competed in the heavyweight class for those 50 to 54 years old. While 180 pounds hardly seems a heavyweight, Mario puts the class in perspective. "Heavyweight in the rowing world is kind of a misnomer; if I were 165 pounds I'd look like a rail."

He placed 18th in the competition despite the fact he only started training a few years ago. There were about 2,000 contestants in all classes.

No Souped-Up Machines

Mario acknowledges a competitive streak that is not limited to sports. He started his own practice in 1989 and says the firm now employs about 65 people in five offices.

"I've been very competitive my whole life," he says. "The culture of our practice is such that, everybody who works here, 65 or so people, is able to function at a pretty active pace."

It was his competitive streak that led him to the love of his life. His wife Cindy was a cheerleader at the University of North Carolina. After she delivered him roses following a winning wrestling match, he asked her out on the mat. Although he is from Connecticut, Mario speaks with a slightly southern accent.

"What can I say? I married a redneck," he jokes.

In the rowing competition, he competes on a machine called an "Ergometer," or "Ergs" for short. All of the contestants in the February "CRASH B" event used an identical machine made by a Vermont company. "Nobody can come with a souped-up machine," he says.

The machine simulates the resistance a rower would face on the water. As the seat slides back and forth with the rower's movement, a computer keeps track of the rower's speed and ranking.

"It's almost a horse race," Mario says.

And the vomit bowls are testament to the fact it is not for the faint-hearted.

Leading up to his first event, Mario practiced every day. He has two machines, including one he has figured out how to take apart for travel. He carries it in golf bags and says the machine made a trip along with him to the Dominican Republic in January.

Mario's own bid at an Olympic wrestling berth was dashed by the 1980 boycott. So, an event created by rowers who also were left high and dry was appealing. So was the difficulty of the event. "It's one of the hardest things I've ever done outside wrestling," he says.

A father of three, Mario's kids inherited the competitive spirit. His daughter, a student at his alma mater in North Carolina, was a competitive soccer player before a career-ending injury that shattered her leg. His two sons both wrestle in high school and plan to wrestle in college.

He recommends rowing to other lawyers looking for a release.

"It's a good stress reliever," he says, adding the average \$800 cost of the equipment is far cheaper than the thousands of dollars some equipment can cost.

And you don't have to be all that coordinated.

"Anybody can do it," he says. "No matter if you are all fingers or all feet." •