

ICF and COPAC TIP Training Camp and Panam Champs 2013



View of the racecourse outside Union de Tula, Mexico

As a member of the Canadian National Team I was always very happy with how well our team worked together. Acts of kindness like one teammate bringing another's boat or paddles to Europe, helping to repair a boat after it was broken, or giving on-the-water advice were extremely common. When I arrived in Union de Tula, Mexico to coach the ICF Talent Identification Program training camp which led up to the Panamerican Championships, I was worried about the team dynamic of a diverse group of athletes from Chile,

Venezuela, Costa Rica, and Mexico, but I was immediately impressed. Although they had never met each other, they worked together as if they had been teammates and friends for years. I knew almost no Spanish when I arrived and I had no idea how I was going



Nicholas and Sophie help Luis and Arnaldo practice rolling a C2

to communicate with the Athletes. Luckily, three of the eight knew English and were always willing to

translate for me even when it meant sacrificing time they could have been paddling. On raceday they took time out of their own preparation to translate while I walked the course with athletes whom I couldn't have otherwise communicated with. After we finished workouts the more experienced athletes would go on the flatwater and help the others practice their rolls. They even made a point to teach me Spanish on our drives to and from the course. My favourite phrase was “una mas” because I would hear it at the end of every workout as the athletes begged me to let them do one more run.

The Pan-American Championships race was a huge success for the TIP development athletes. The first C2 in the history of Costa Rican slalom was made up of Luis Mendez and Arnaldo Cespedes who



The TIP team poses in downtown Union de Tula

astounded everyone by finishing just out of the medals in 5th.

Alexandra Giomar Fernandez was sitting in 8th place after the heats, but ended up just outside the final. Nicholas Sierra

Gallastegui of Mexico had a great semifinal and a nearly flawless final except for a single mistake in gate two; he ended up 10th.

Arnaldo Cespedes (CR), Alexis Perez (VEN), and Luis Mendez (CR) finished 12th, 13th, and 14th, respectively, narrowly missing the final in the hotly contested K1M class with Raciell Leon (MEX) in 18th. The Chilean K1M, Andraz Echeverria Olguin,

had a brilliant performance in the heats, but had some bad luck in

the big drop at the bottom of the course in the semifinals. Sofia Reynoso of Mexico had an amazing debut on the slalom scene by making the final and finishing 10th in the K1W class with a run that brought the locals to their feet.

The TIP program successfully brought together athletes from South American nations in which the sport is not popular to develop their skills, friendships and passions so that they can go home, train

hard, and pass on what they learned. We identified some very talented athletes who's local federations can use to build their programs with and eye on Rio 2016.



Clockwise from top left: Nicholas Sierra Gallestagui (MEX), Luis Mendez and Arnaldo Cespedes (CR), and Alexis Perez (VEN) practice before the race.

The entire event would not have been possible without Luis Grau and Nuria Vilarrubla. Luis was instrumental in building the features in the river, the gate system, getting the equipment for the TIP athletes, shuttled people, coached, helped organize the race, and—most importantly—was the life of the after party. Every time I saw Nuria she was busy organizing meals, transportation, accommodation, or race logistics and made my job very easy. Thank you to Pierrick Gosselin and Eric Lokken for inviting me to be a part of this great program.

Paul Manning-Hunter

