

AUGSBURG, West Germany, Aug. 31—The canoe bucked like a bronc with a burr under his tail as Tom Southworth and John Burton steered through the concrete gorge past the boulder called Brundage's Nose—it is a bard nose, not a soft nose—plunged headlong into the Washing Machine and brought up against the rock in the middle of that maelstrom. The canoe rolled over once, rolled again, righted itself with both men still aboard and lurched on, burying its nose in white water diving down the Zoom Flume, twisting, careening, whirling through the Spin-Dry Cycle to surge past the finish line where the torrent empties into the river Lech.

The wetbacks from Media, Pa., had maneuvered the 30 gates at a cost of only 40 penalty points, but that underwater detour in the Washing Machine had eaten up seconds they couldn't afford. Their time for the voyage of 1,968 feet—call two-fifth of a mile—was 6 minutes 27.4 seconds.

With the penalty points added, their score for the run was 7 minutes 7.4 seconds. In the canoe slalom that doesn't get you arrested for loitering, but it was only tenth best among the 14 pairs that stayed afloat through the whole wild run.

Six teams went overboard on the first run and three would be racked up on the second. On their second trip, Southworth and Burton would cut 20 seconds off their score and finish 12th in the field of 20 with Russ Nichols of Huntington, L. I., and John Evans of Sylmar, Calif., 14th.

This was the last event in the canoe and kayak slalom, a slightly suicidal undertaking new to the Olympic Games, which combines the

best features of skiing down the Matterhorn, shipwreck, and going over Niagara in barrel.

The Fun of Drowning

The sport, if that is the word for it, is a hasty search for a watery grave, with rules. It is an outgrowth white-water racing, which appeals to people whose idea of fun is to be flung down the rapids ears over appetite, hurled against rocks and submerged until the coroner arrives.

On the international level it is dominated by the two Germanys, possibly because of some macabre streak in the breed. West Germany alone is reputed to have 100,000 kayak paddlers and there must have been 25,000 spectators massed along the banks for the two days of Olympic competition.

The course here, the world's only manmade whitewater river, is a cement-walled canal 39 feet wide that twists along an old river bed. The water rushes down the chute, varying in depth from a few inches to six or seven feet, boiling around concrete boulders constructed with evil cunning at strategic points, sloshing and churning against the walls.

As in ski slalom, the gates are skinny barber poles, red and white on one side, green and white on the other. They must be negotiated in numerical order, always with the green at the paddlers' right. That means that sometimes he must whirl his craft around and go down backward, sometimes he must find an eddy below the gates and struggle through against the current.

If he happens to capsize and he swept through gate upside down, that's perfectly all right. It impairs breathing but gets him no penalty points. Penalties for touching poles or missing gates vary from 10 to 50 points. Skull fractures and deaths by drowning are held to a minimum by headgear, life jackets and a rescue crew.

On the first day of competition, Jamie McEwan of Silver Spring, Md., got a bronze medal in the men's canoe singles, finishing third behind an East German and a West German. That day a Dartmouth junior, Eric Evans, was America's top man in the kayak singles, taking seventh place.

The second day opened with kayak singles for women, and when their first run was over a tall man with beard wandered into the press center. This was O.K. Goodwin of Newport News, Va., who had been watching his 19-year-old daughter, Cynthia. How, he was asked, had Cindy got into this dodge? He ducked apologetically.

Down Wet Bottom Chute

“My fault. I got into it through the Boy Scouts. Had an Explorer troop in Newport News. We had to travel 80 miles to find fast water. Then we got going to the annual races at Washington, D. C.”

“You mean there's fast water in Washington?”

“Oh, yes. Below the falls eight or nine miles up the Potomac. That's a good course—Wet Bottom Chute, Yellow Falls, Difficult Run, Stubblefield Falls.”

Cindy took up the sport about five years ago, her father said. In the first run she had made brilliant time but amassed a gang of penalty points and finished 15th.

Competitors count only their better run, and Cynthia's second trip moved her up to 14th place. Lyn Ashton Kensington, Md., finished ninth and Louise Holcombe, Cheverly, Md., 15th.

“How does Cindy build up the strength for that upstream paddling?” her father was asked.

“By paddling,” he said.