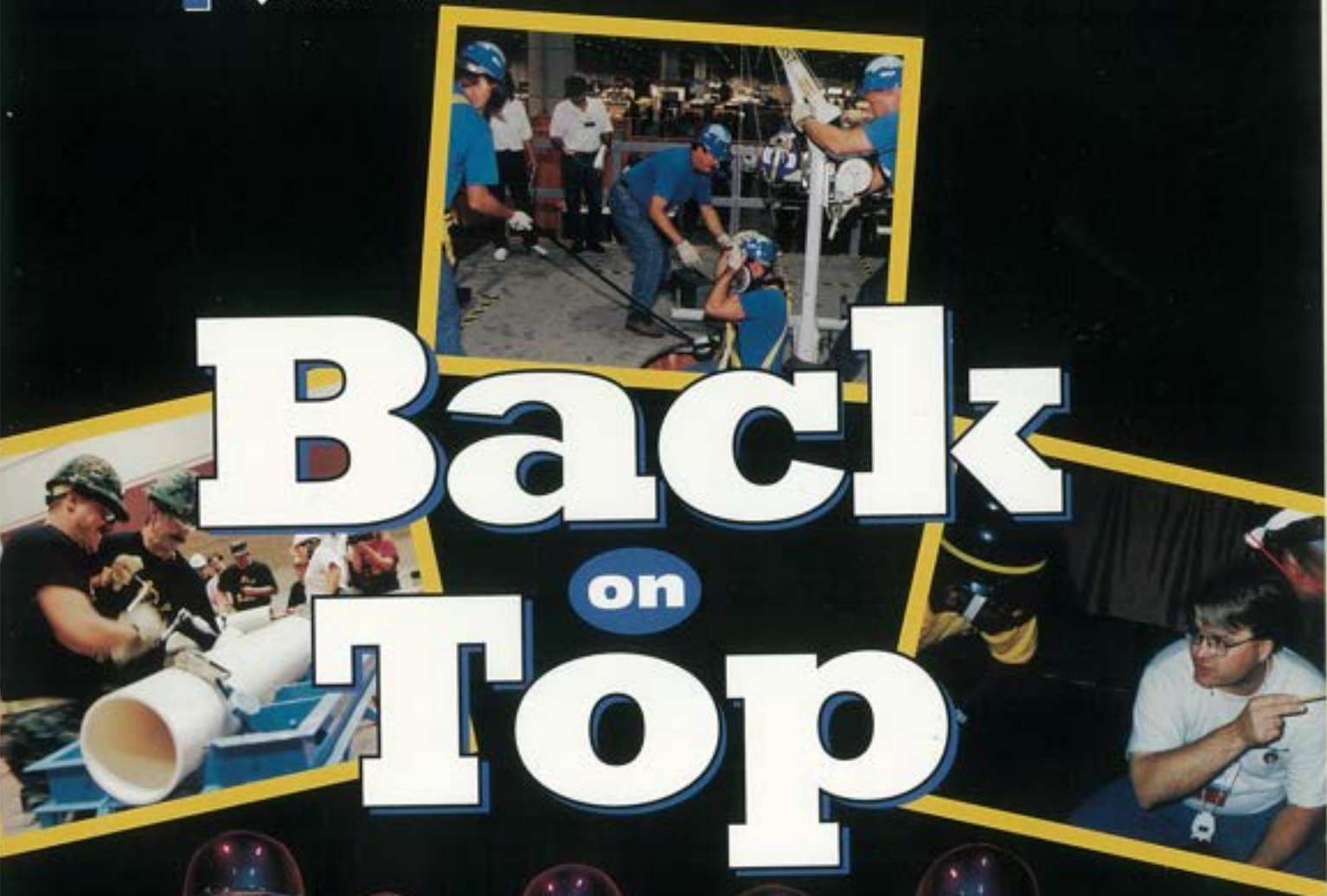


Operations Forum

Water Environment Federation

Vol. 15, No. 12

December 1998



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Operations Challenge

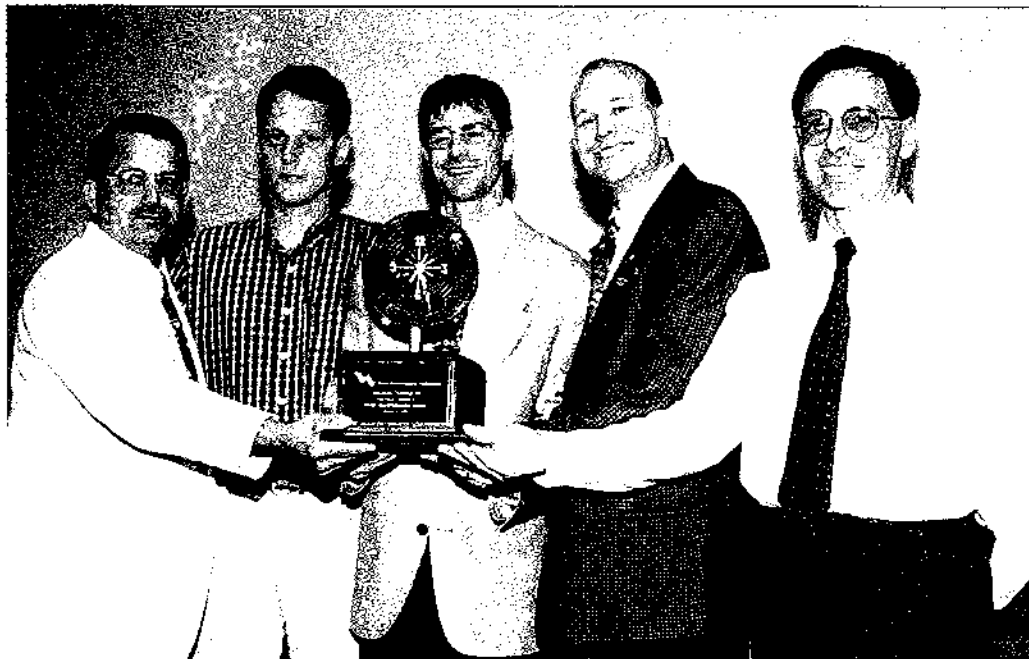
1998
**Virginia and Ontario Teams Grab Top Place
while Mississippi Tends to Mother Nature's Damage**

Sometimes the real world gets in the way of fun and games. Such was the case at this year's Operations Challenge, the national competition for operations and maintenance teams from all over North America. Missing from the 11th annual competition, held on October 5-6, at the Orange

County Convention Center in Orlando, Fla., was the sole team from Mississippi, the OMI Harrison County Renegades.

It's not that the Renegades were living up to their name and intentionally setting themselves apart — team members just had more pressing matters

A winning hand: Royal Flush of the Water Environment Association of Ontario advance to Division 1 next year. Left to right: Challenge Committee Vice Chair John Hart, Geordie Gauld, Gary Burrows, Barry Orr, and Michael Wemyss.



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than being rated for their speed and skill in process control, laboratory, safety, maintenance, and collection systems events. Hurricane Georges, which hit the Mississippi coast on Sunday, September 27, also knocked the Division 2 team out of the competition.

"We had some sad people," says Danny Garrett, team captain and lead operator at the Harrison County treatment plants. "But we couldn't justify going and leaving a disaster."

The hurricane's eye wall directly hit one of the plants, tearing apart the coastal area with wind speeds up to 178 mi/h (286 km/h). One plant was



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Division 1 winners Team HRSD G-Force of the Virginia Water Environment Association spring forth in the safety event.

Teams Warm up at First Regional Competition

Three weeks before Operations Challenge, seven teams gathered at the Foruche Wastewater Treatment Plant in Little Rock, Ark., for a similar competition of their own.

Division 2 teams Austin Blues (Texas), Columbia Activators (Missouri), Louisville Sludgers (Kentucky-Tennessee), K.C. BioBurners (Missouri), OMI Renegades (Mississippi), and the TRA CRWSers (Texas), and Division 1 team Little Rock Connoisseurs (Arkansas) gathered to practice their skills and take a test run before the national competition.

Rick Barger of the Little Rock Wastewater Utility, which hosted the competition, got the idea for a regional challenge as coach of the Connoisseurs. The competition is a way to get his team motivated while giving them enough time to adjust and refine their performance, he says.

The regional competition was designed to be as much like the national competition as possible. The events were the same as those in the national competition. Teams were rotated through the process control, laboratory, safety, maintenance, and collection systems event and were judged according to the same criteria. But there was a slight, yet crucial, difference.

"We came into the events with an attitude that we all would be representing the mid-south in the nationals, so we all wanted to help each other," Barger says.

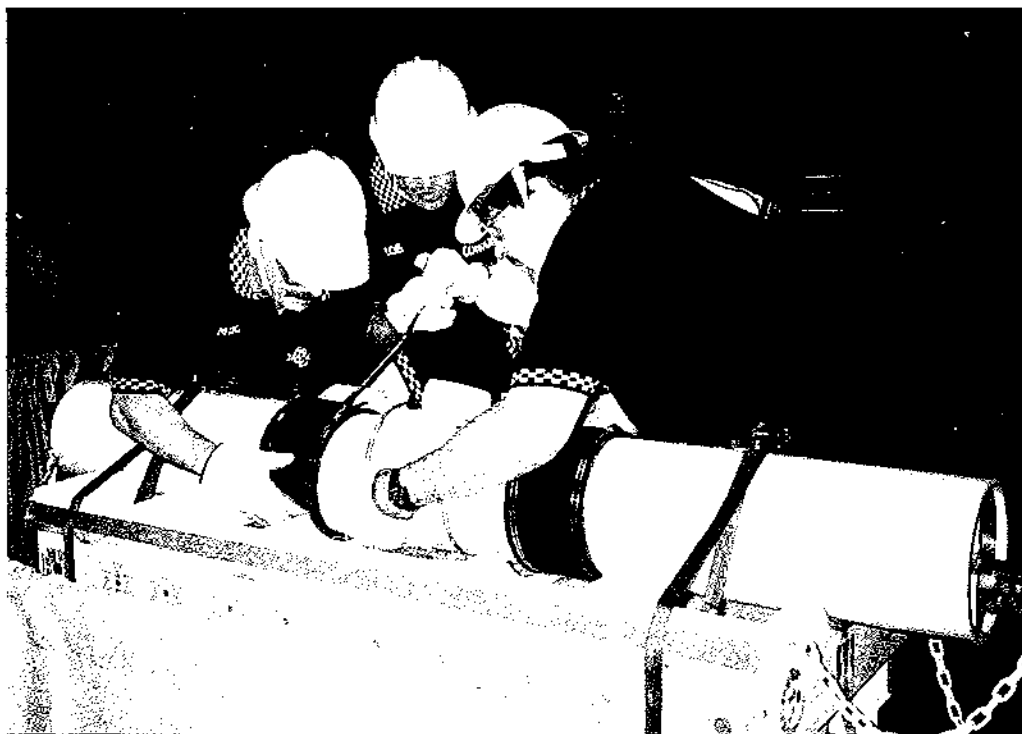
For example, after the competition, all five event coordinators ran down a list of "little things" that each team could improve, Barger says. Team members were given an additional process control exam, which they could use to prepare for the national competition. In addition, the Louisville Sludgers showed the Little Rock Connoisseurs how to saw the pipe more effectively in the collection systems event.

According to responses Barger has received, the regional competition did help teams in Orlando. "It gave us a chance to get over some of the competition nerves and evaluate our skills as compared to other states," Barger says.

Team members received gold, silver, and bronze medals, and trophies were given to teams that ranked first, second, and third overall.

Plans already are underway for two regional competitions in 1999. One most likely will be held in Texas, with the other to be held in Louisville, Ky., or Kansas City, Mo.

Barger encourages teams in other areas of the country to organize their own regional competitions and hold them 3 to 4 weeks before the national competition in 1999. For more information on the effort involved in organizing a regional competition, call Barger at 1-501-376-2903, or send him an e-mail at Rick_Barger@LRWU@LRWU.com.



The Bad Conducts of the Pacific Northwest Pollution Control Association remain calm in spite of a troublesome flexible coupling in the collection systems event.

With each passing year, participating teams are increasingly competitive.

flooded 3 ft (1 m) deep with water. Trees and light poles were toppled at others.

"We worked really hard," Garrett says of the team's practices. "This would have been the fifth year that the Renegades participated in Operations Challenge."

Besides practicing on its own, the team — with members Ronnie McElwain, Gerry Williams, Michael Hardaman, and coach Teddy W. Carroll — competed at a day-long regional Operations Challenge in Little Rock, Ark., that also boosted the performance of other participating teams (see sidebar, "Teams Warm up at First Regional Competition"). With their confidence buoyed by strong standings at the Little Rock competition and focused practice sessions, team members were optimistic that this would be their breakthrough year.

"We thought we'd be competing in Division 1 in New Orleans [at next year's WEFTEC]," Garrett says. But although they're down, they're not out. The Renegades plans to regroup soon to prepare for the state competition in May with renewed intentions of making it to WEFTEC'99.

While the Renegades were pulling trees off pumps and removing fallen branches, the 1996 champs, Team HRSD G-Force of the Virginia Water Environment Association (WEA), gave



A crowd of WEFTEC attendees find themselves unable to tear away from the safety event.

everyone *deja vu* when it topped Division 1 at the Challenge. Royal Flush of the WEA of Ontario, Canada, grabbed first place in Division 2 by mere fractions of a point.

Teams know that time is crucial. With each passing year, participating teams are increasingly competitive, exhaustively studying ways to improve their performances whichever way possible. Susan Steadman of New England's MASS Balance says her team goes through each event "over and over" in their minds. The team also views videotapes of practices and previous challenges, critiquing each other's actions.

MASS Balance team members also made sure that they got to the Challenge arena early and rested from a good night's sleep. While other conference attendees enjoyed an exclusive WEFTEC night at Universal Studios, most Operations Challenge team members were in bed.

The Texas WEA TRA CRWSers, who placed second overall in Division 2, said they tried to simulate national Challenge events as much as possible, down to acquiring equipment by the same suppliers and manufacturers.

"We see that you have to nurture support from manufacturers to sponsor you," says team member John Bennett. "This is our third year, and we've started developing contacts."

The 24-Hour Composites, a new team from California, had a different tactic. "We practiced on harder, thicker pipe, using the dullest knives [for the collection systems event]," says team member Norm Domingo half seriously. Although teams without sponsors are at a disadvantage, by the end of the day, Domingo says he realized the team needs something more than new equipment: "It's the p-word — practice!"

The Water Environment Federation wishes to thank the following companies for their donations to Operations Challenge 1998

AllMax, Inc.
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Gorman-Rupp
ITT Flygt Corp.
MSA
North American Pipe Corp.
Pima County Wastewater Management Dept. (Tucson, Ariz.)
Sumitomo Machinery Corp. of America
Toshiba International Corporation
U.S. Filter
Uni-Bell PVC Pipe Association
Uni-Hoist
USABlueBook
Vaughan Co. Inc.

Employees of the following organizations also contributed to the success of Operations Challenge 1998

Plum Island Wastewater Treatment Plant (Charleston, S.C.)
HRSD, James River Plant (Newport News, Va.)
Shelbyville Wastewater Treatment Plant (Shelbyville, Ind.)
Givens & Associates Wastewater Co. (Cumberland, Ind.)
Sanitary Sewer Board of the City of Fairmont, W.V.
Robinson Manufacturing (Oxford, Maine)
Gainesville Regional Utilities (Gainesville, Fla.)
Fay Spofford & Thorndike (Burlington, Mass.)
OMI Inc. (Richmond, Va.)



Cathy Vidito

MASS Balance of the New England Water Environment Association gets analytical in the laboratory event.

Operations Challenge

TOP 10 OVERALL

Division 1	MA ¹
Team HRSD	
G-Force	Va.
Connoisseurs	Ark.
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mtn.
L.A. Wrecking Crew ²	Calif.
Highlanders	Ontario
Precision Express	Pa.
Fecal Heads ³	Ohio
Rocky Mountain Prime	
Pumpers	Rocky Mtn.
GRU Reclaimers	Fla.
MASS Balance	New England

Division 2	MA
Royal Flush	Ontario
TRA CRWSers	Texas
Sacramento Wastewater	
Warriors	Calif.
River Rangers	Pacific NW
Austin Blues	Texas
Blue Plains Specials ³	Chesapeake
Wood County Woodys ³	Ohio
SWAT Team ³	Mich.
Sludgers ³	Ky.
Orlando Wizards ³	Fla.

PROCESS CONTROL EVENT TOP 5

Division 1	MA	Time
Connoisseurs	Ark.	715.91

Commode Commandos	Rocky Mtn.	1020.00
MASS Balance	New England	1126.57
Rocky Mountain Prime		
Pumpers	Rocky Mtn.	1173.44
Fecal Heads	Ohio	1180.68
Division 2	MA	Time
Austin Blues	Texas	1141.03
TRA CRWSers	Texas	1241.50
Royal Flush	Ontario	1255.50
SWAT Team ³	Mich.	1352.00
Vermont Sewer		
Marines	New England	1355.81

MAINTENANCE EVENT TOP 5

Division 1	MA	Time
Team HRSD G-Force	Va.	420.16
Connoisseurs	Ark.	478.85
L.A. Wrecking Crew	Calif.	516.00
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mtn.	527.70
Precision Express	Pa.	531.24
Division 2	MA	Time
Royal Flush	Ontario	530.66
TRA CRWSers	Texas	555.00
Sacramento Wastewater		
Warriors	Calif.	621.34
River Rangers	Pacific NW	691.19
Austin Blues	Texas	706.35

Winners '98

SAFETY EVENT TOP 5

Division 1	MA	Time
Highlanders	Ontario	375.00
L.A. Wrecking Crew	Calif.	377.00
Team HRSD G-Force	Va.	386.00
Connoisseurs	Ark.	393.00
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mtn.	414.00

Division 2	MA	Time
TRA CRWSers	Texas	370.00
Orlando Wizards ³	Fla.	398.00
Royal Flush	Ontario	420.00
Alexandria D-Train	Va.	467.00
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	Calif.	482.32

COLLECTION SYSTEM EVENT TOP 5

Division 1	MA	Time
Rocky Mountain Prime Pumpers	Rocky Mtn.	120.00
Commode Commandos	Rocky Mtn.	178.00
Highlanders	Ontario	183.00
Fecal Heads	Ohio	191.00
Team HRSD G-Force	Va.	194.00

Division 2	MA	Time
Sacramento Wastewater Warriors	Calif.	136.00
K.C. Bio-Burners ³	Mo.	182.00
Royal Flush	Ontario	184.07

TRA CRWSers	Texas	184.27
SWAT Team ³	Mich.	185.00

LAB EVENT TOP 5

Division 1	MA	Time
Precision Express	Pa.	484.32
L.A. Wrecking Crew	Calif.	504.39
Team HRSD G-Force	Va.	520.20
MASS Balance	New England	524.81
Bad Conducts ⁴	Pacific NW	572.00

Division 2	MA	Time
WREPresentatives	Ind.	530.34
Orlando Wizards ³	Fla.	616.28
24-Hour Composites ³	Calif.	649.29
Royal Flush	Ontario	650.55
Bowery Bay Bowl Busters ³	N.Y.	674.18

¹ member association

² 1997 Division 1 champions

³ new team

⁴ 1997 Division 2 champions