Battle Ship H20

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It’s just like a movie:
The crew of the USS Chocolatey Shatners desperately throws buckets of water overboard, but the ship continues to sink beneath the tide, emotions of dread and despair etched on the crew’s faces.
“Captain, the enemy is approaching on the starboard side!”
Like lightning, the HMS Your Mum crashes into the right side, nearly tossing the Chocolatey Shatners into the crashing waves.
“This is the end of the line for you, Shatners!” cries the crew of Your Mum.
“Eat chlorine, Mum! Tyler, release the Kraken!” The Chocolatey Shatners’ cabin boy Tyler reveals a huge bucket of pool water and dumps it right into Your Mum. The canoe sinks and the crew melodramatically goes down, their arms in salute as they drop waist-deep to the bottom of the pool.
This is Battleship H2O, an intramural event at Iowa State. Many students compete in intramurals, from the traditional (volleyball, flag football and ice hockey) to the unique (curling, euchre and pickleball). Battleship H2O continues to rise from its obscure niche to be an intramural success story—quickly becoming the next broomball.
The sport was created very recently in the United States, but its precise place of creation is unknown. The earliest evidence of its existence traces back to around 2010 or 2011. Introduced to Iowa State in 2012, it was an immediate success, with over 380 students participating that year.
The number grew to 433 the following year.
Intramural Coordinator for Battleship H2O Nathan Pick believes the concept of the sport contributes to its popularity.
“Students like to participate in fun things that they can’t just normally do every day,” he says.
The strategy and tensions that happen in the game are very attractive for many people. You also get to sink ships without having to resort to deadly weaponry.
According to Pick, intramural Battleship H2O consists of teams of three players in a canoe. Four canoes are placed in the water...
at the same time. Each of the three team members has a bucket. Once play starts, the goal of the game is to try and sink the other canoes before they sink your canoe. This is done by using your team’s buckets to dump water into the other canoes. You can also use the buckets to remove water from your own canoe to keep it from sinking. Once a team’s canoe sinks, tips over or if a player falls out of the canoe, they are eliminated.

This offers some high-octane, testosterone-pumping play. Students who have participated agree—it’s pretty freakin’ awesome. Take Alec Sauerbrei, a sophomore in Chemical Engineering, for example. He signed up because he liked being able to swim and the idea of battleship—IN WATER!

“The game is super fun. Even though you’re getting splashed in the face with water you have to fight through and keep filling the other ships,” Sauerbrei says. But he does warn the aquaphobes and lipids of the world, “You will get soaking wet playing this, otherwise you’re not playing right.”

Sauerbrei is a member of Whatever Floats Your Boat, a team comprised of his friends Michael Linthicum and Tyler Shelby. Together, they have made it all the way to the championship game. They give thanks to their strategy of having the middle person sit toward one end of the canoe, tipping the water pools into that end. They say this allows the guy sitting at that end of the canoe to bail water more quickly and easily, which leaves the middle guy and the person at the other end to dump water into the other canoe. It’s taxing on the muscles, but it hasn’t failed them yet.

Michael enjoys the pandemonium of it all. “Everyone’s yelling at each other and nobody can see anything because they’re constantly getting buckets of water splashed in their face. Nobody ever really knows what’s going on.”

Michael, like the growing number of others who have played the intramural, has found great love for the new sport.

“It sounded hilarious and I wanted something different to do. All of my expectations have been met.”

Michael Linthicum and Tyler Shelby.