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the Rice Thresher

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Slam team slips to 12th in national tournament

By Melissa Waitsman | Thresher staff

Despite a disappointing 12th place finish for the Rice Poetry Slam Team, team member Stephen Bor received an individual award at the College Unions Poetry Slam — one of five given over the course of the competition. The tournament, which included 80 people representing 20 teams, was held April 7-11 at the University of California-Berkeley.

The Rice team, consisting of Bor, a Hanszen College senior, Lovett College junior Adriana Ramirez, Hanszen sophomore Jennifer Weinberg and Baker College senior Rassul Zarinfar, participated in two preliminary slams before being eliminated.

The Rice foursome made it to the second round of preliminary competition.

The team's alternate, Hanszen sophomore Rey Valdez, joined three other alternates to form a wild-card team at the competition. The wild-card team replaced a college whose team dropped out. All four of its members turned in impressive performances in the first round, but the team came in last in a more competitive second round.

The poetry slam consisted of four rounds, and a team's score was computed from the individual scores of the poets during that round. The team scores from the first and second rounds were combined, and the lowest eight scores moved on to semifinals. From there, the four lowest scoring teams made it to the final round.

In the first round, Rice tied for second place with Georgia Southern University. To break the tie, a single combat matchup was held. Each team sent up one poet, and on the basis of that performance, the team won or lost the round.

Rice sent up Bor, who performed his poem "Lily Wang," a work he wrote about a Rice student who shot an Asian woman two years ago. Bor earned second place for Rice with a 29.6 to 29.4 win over Georgia Southern University. The performance also earned Bor a nomination for the "Poet with the Most Heart" award, the only individual award that specifically honors the poet rather than the poem.

Judges selected some of the best poems and poets to highlight before an audience of some 900 people in a final round of competition. Bor and Ramirez were nominated, Bor for "Lily Wang" and Ramirez for her poem "PTC."

Bor said he was stunned by the size of the audience that night, which was much greater than the 150-200 people who attended most of the tournament events.

Bor said Berkeley, the home team, and Eastern Michigan University, which brought in supporters, provided much of the audience.

"I really want to encourage more people to come out to the poetry slams," Bor said. "Having a big audience like that really makes a

difference.”

Ramirez said she is happy with the team’s performance even though Rice did not place very high.

“Despite it all, I really feel we delivered,” Ramirez said. “We may not have won a big trophy, but we did win the respect of other teams, which we didn’t have last year. We also won the respect of fans with nothing but our poetry.”

Ramirez said several fans remembered her poem “Don’t Let Your Lover Make a Mess Out of You” from the competition and approached her as she was shopping in Berkeley.

“They came up to me and asked if I was the girl who did the poem with the snapping, and then they actually began to do the first line of my poem,” Ramirez said.

At last year’s national competition, Rice took third place. Ramirez said that finish left the team somewhat complacent, but the returning members are ready to work hard for next year.



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