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The spirit of the Chase

Chicago City Chase asks contestants to sprint (and strip?) their way to victory.

By Tim McCormick



SLAKE CHARMER Can you guess who in this picture is more constricted?

We would have never guessed it, but reading *Time Out Chicago* can be a pathway to reality-TV stardom...albeit in Hong Kong. Aza Quinn-Brauner, an unassuming Art Institute of Chicago employee by day, has heard from friends that he's been spotted on television taking part in what's been dubbed a "part obstacle course—part scavenger hunt adventure," also known as City Chase. The event heads back to the Windy City on Saturday 23.

"My friend [and City Chase partner] Ted [Commes] was the one who showed me the article [in *TOC*]," Quinn-Brauner recounts. "We really had no idea how well we'd do, but Ted asked me maybe two days before [last year's event]. We just decided even if we didn't do well, it'd still be fun."

The lifelong friends ended up nabbing first place at the Chicago City Chase (the first edition in the States last year), then finishing fifth in Rome for the World Championships, where they competed against teams from around the globe. It was there that the National Geographic Channel taped their adventures for broadcast. While the race never aired in the U.S., Quinn-Brauner has heard reports from Hong Kong that he's made cameos on the NGC. (No fan sightings in Chicago to report...yet.)

While organizer Jason Erkes is reluctant to reveal any stunts for '08, Quinn-Brauner and Commes were happy to dish on a few of last year's dares: In Chicago, the tasks included belaying down Navy Pier and strip bowling (every time you didn't roll a strike, you had to remove an article).

In Rome, the boys had to sport those Borat thongs that ride up your keester while tackling an obstacle course. It wasn't exactly a scrapbook-worthy memento, according to Quinn-Brauner. "By the time we took them off, they were just these sandy things that had just been up our butts," he says. "We didn't want to look at them again."

Erkes promises that this year's challenges will top last year's, and there won't be any duplicate dares. "There will be more live animals," he lets out. "And I highly recommend bringing some salt and pepper and ketchup because the things people will be eating, you wouldn't find on a regular dinner table." He adds that "if you put barbecue sauce on anything, it'll slide right down."

As of press time, more than 600 entries had been received (around 500 pairs competed last year), which could put this year's Chicago City Chase on track to be the largest in the world.

Our returning champs admit they were a little haphazard in their approach last year, but let no one question their commitment this time around. They're so serious about making a return trip to the World Championships that they got a running start, taking second in the Boston edition of the City Chase series last month.

And while they're out for blood, Commes isn't about to let the prospect of repeating (or the Chicago Accenture Triathlon...yes, he'll attempt his first tri the very next day) get in the way of a good time: "They always say you should have some carbs, and beer is a good carb. So I might have a few."

The Chase begins on Saturday 23 at The Daley Center.