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EXCLUSIVE: At home with Eric Jackson

**+ Ben slams big air's, big attitude + Best office chairs for paddlers
Athens Slalom Stadium—who's going + COOL PHOTOS**

Paddler Profile by Tim Shuff

Anna Levesque

Girl at Play

Age 30

Roots L'Orignal, Ontario. "At the moment I spend a lot of time in Fayetteville, West Virginia."

Home waters Rouge River, and now the put-in waves to the New River Dries.

Kitchen girl New World Rafting on the Rouge River, minutes away from Anna's home, "was always taboo in high school, like the bad place to go." But in university she broke the rule, spending her first season in the kitchen and her second at reception. Thanks to a few female mentors, she learned to paddle. And the badass macho raft dudes? "They didn't really give me the time of day."

Video star She just released *Girls at Play*, a kayak instructional video for women. Career bonus: the video has propelled her to the role of women's kayaking guru. "I've separated myself from the field," she says. "Kayak schools are calling me up wanting me to teach women's clinics." She is currently mobile with the Girls at Play Summer Tour—free women's kayaking clinics in 10 locations across North America.

Free boating Anna's sponsors include Dagger Kayaks, Shred Ready, Astral Buoyancy and Mountain Surf. And she is one of the lucky three sponsored by Nike ACG, with Brad Ludden and Ben Selznick. Landing the Nike sponsorship when she was shopping around her *Girls at Play* pitch was a career turning point.

Into Africa In Uganda this winter, Anna successfully ran the first female descent of the Itanda Falls on the White Nile, a big-water challenge. "Before I ran it a South African paddler told me that he had never met a woman who could really kayak because no woman had ever run it."

Kayactivism The Africa trip was part paddling, part community service. Anna assisted American MD and kayaker Jessie Stone with a malaria education project. This trip was "incorporating kayaking into the bigger picture of life....I think we all get too focused on ourselves."

Crying woman "Women are much more calculated. They want to be sure that they can make that line and that they'll be okay at the end." Sharing the sport with other women and learning from each other's experiences is key. "I wanted to create a media space for women to express themselves about the emotions they feel and let other women know that they feel them too, that it's normal, that you might cry on the river or you're going to feel scared and how to work through those emotions."

The sequel Anna plans to produce a second women's video focused on the basics of kayaking—"to complement the instruction in *Girls At Play*." Also she'll be teaching women's clinics for paddling schools across North America and leading women's trips to Mexico. "I hope to do a Girls at Play Summer Tour in 2005 [and] to go back to Uganda....I have lots of ideas!"



above: Self-portrait in the village of Kiabirwa, Uganda, on the White Nile. photo by Anna Levesque

below: Surfing the Nile Special, White Nile, Uganda.

photo by Kristen Read

