

Captain's report - AGM 2020

Introduction

This has been a challenging year to take on the role of Club Captain, I think Rob managed to do a very good job of timing when he handed the role over...but it has been a privilege to work with such a committed and hardworking group of members on the club committee.

This year has largely been overshadowed by the Coronavirus pandemic and it continues to challenge us. I would like to give a big thank you to the club committee who have worked tirelessly to get club members back on the water where possible, with special thanks to Liz, Sally, and Tim for their hard work on the club's Covid documents, Anne for her communications with the club's MP and the C&RT to help get us back on the water and to Liz and Howard who have worked to source and keep stocks of the sanitising equipment at the club. I would also like to thank our club members for following the rules and protocols that have been put in place to keep yourselves and others safe.

Results

The club posted a total of 34 race wins this season down from 75 last season. Bearing in mind there were no races for approximately 50% of the year, 34 wins is an impressive amount. The results can be further broken down as follows:

- 33 sculling & 1 sweep win
- 1 coxed boat win
- 21 womens & 10 open & 3 mixed wins
- 20 senior & 14 junior wins

I would like to give thanks to our squad leaders for organising their athlete's race entries and special thanks to Alex Wellings and Graham Clark for volunteering to tow the trailer on so many occasions, without their help many of us would not be racing.

Notable results

- Lauren Henry won the women's headship at Nottingham Autumn Head and at Newark Head was the fastest female sculler and 2nd fastest sculler overall.
- At Lincoln Head Sophie Connolly was the fastest female sculler and James Bradshaw was the fastest overall sculler.
- 7 juniors were selected to represent the East Midlands at the Junior Inter Regional Regatta. These were James Bradshaw, Blythe Lyons, Teddy Sherman, Stanley Alexander, Leonard Hubbard, Samuel Gosling and Freya Talbot (cox).
- Kelly Sapsford won a bronze medal at the World Indoor Rowing championships for her category.
- Sophie Connolly got the British and World records for fastest 100,000 meters on the ergo for her category.
- Matt Bowles got the British records for furthest distance over 4 minutes and fastest 6000 meters on the ergo for his category.

Women's squad

Alex continues to take a dedicated approach to coaching the women's squad and I am pleased to hear that he will be standing again for Women's Captain for the 4th year in a row. The squad have posted a number of wins this year and I expect they will have ambitious targets for the year ahead.

Men's squad

Hazel has worked hard with the men's squad over the past year and it is great to see some members who were not long ago on a learn to row course, now rowing confidently in fine singles. Work continues with the current learn to row members who will soon be at a level to be included into the men's squad. I am pleased that Hazel is carrying on as Men's Captain to continue the good work she has been doing.

Junior squad

The junior squad remains strong despite the challenges of this year. With restrictions on boat usage it has forced many juniors to row in single sculls when they may have normally rowed in crew boats. Rowing in singles really helps to develop an athlete's technique and I know many juniors have really benefitted from this opportunity and really taken to it. It has also been great to see many more members and parents helping out with coaching and supervising the junior members on the water. Special thanks here to Shaun Brown and Barry Sherman who have been regular fixtures running up and down the tow path together and to Sophie Connolly who has done a great job in encouraging many of the juniors and building their confidence on the water.

Graham Wright has decided to step down as Junior Squad leader after 3 years in the role. I would like to say a thank you to Graham for his service to the club in this position. During this time he has taken a large number of new junior members into the club and there have been many junior race wins. I am pleased to hear that Caroline Peck will be taking on the role from Graham, I wish her well in this and ask that she is given the support and help from others that this role deserves.

Freya Talbot and Autumn Bates will also be stepping down as junior representatives this year, many thanks for their help with the junior squad. Special thanks to Freya who has been in the role for 3 years and has been involved with many aspects of the junior squad including coaching, coxing, running sessions and being a key member running the junior summer camps, all alongside winning plenty of races herself.

Recreational squad

Anne continues to do a great job of running the recreational squad. I know there have been far fewer trips and tours for the squad this year but it has been good to see they have been taking advantage of the restricted water sessions we have been able to provide and a number of them having their first sessions in the explore singles. I will let Anne comment in more detail on the recreational squad in her secretary's report.

Performance squad

The performance squad continue to bring in excellent results for the club, even when there are no races available they look to other challenges with the British and World indoor rowing records that have been achieved. As well as this there are a number of athletes in the squad aiming to trial for team GB and I wish them the very best of luck with their aspirations.

Howard's encouraging and positive attitude towards his athletes continues to help them to have big ambitions and to realise that with the right level of work and dedication those ambitions can be achieved. I look forward to seeing what this squad will achieve over the coming year.

Equipment

- New lightweight AVE single scull
- 4 sets of new sculling blades (paid for in part with funding from the Mick George Sports Fund)
- Boats refurbished to an excellent standard:
 - City Challenge
 - Harry Wykes
 - David Ladds

Clubhouse

- A new kitchen has been installed - many thanks to all of those who have been involved with this, it has been a real team effort.
- The front gate has been fixed - a big thank you to Tim Walton for getting this sorted and I would also like to thank Tim for the many other unseen jobs that he does for the club. He brings a wealth of knowledge and experience to the committee and his efforts are very much appreciated.

Learn to row

Myself and Hazel have worked hard to develop a new learn to row training program starting off with 8 weeks of land training prior to getting on the water. This has worked well in getting beginners experienced with the rowing technique and establishing a level of fitness prior to water training and has helped them to quickly gain confidence once in a boat. We will be taking this program forward with a new learn to row intake when the Covid restrictions allow for it. Thank you to those who have helped out with coaching the L2R and we would appreciate continued help with this in the future.

Leicester Regatta

It was a great shame that Leicester Regatta could not go ahead this year due to the Covid restrictions. Although it is a long, stressful and tiring day, it is always great to see the club members come out in force for the regatta and work together to make it the success that it always is. A big thank you to the regatta committee who went a long way in organising the event this year all for it to be cancelled a month before the date. I really hope that next year we will be in a position to dust off the bunting, set up the cake tables and try to remember which bit of scaffolding goes where.

University business

The committee have been in close communication with both DMU and ULBC on plans for training and also for safety, which is now even more important with the Covid situation. We have good relationships with both of these clubs and I expect this to continue over the next year.

Some more thanks...

I would like to say thank you to Sarah Peck for her work as the Club Welfare Officer. She has taken this role very seriously over the past year and volunteered a lot of time towards it, most recently in leading a team to review and update the clubs various policies. I am pleased to hear that Sarah will continue in this role and that Michelle Dempsey will be getting involved with it as well.

On behalf of the club I would like to give thanks to Liz Pulford in her role as Club President. I know Liz has had a very challenging time this year in the role but she has taken those challenges in her stride. It has been great to see how engaged Liz has been this year with members across all squads and especially with the juniors. I believe Liz will be going into her 15th year as Club President and it is clear that her dedication to the club is as strong as ever.

There are too many people to thank to be able to name them all, and I like to think that is a good position to be in. As a volunteer club we must all make contributions in one way or another whether it is chopping back trees along the canal, repairing boats, coaching, fitting kitchen cupboard doors or filling a hole in the car park. These contributions help to keep the club running and they are all very much appreciated.

Summary

This has been a year like no other with many challenges along the way. At the start of the year there was widespread flooding which cancelled many races across the country and left some clubs looking at the possibility of having to shut down. Then there has been the Coronavirus pandemic with its various lockdowns and restrictions on day to day life. Although there are a lot of negatives to this past year, there are many positives that I take from it as well. I have experienced the club committee working at it's best to overcome challenges and put in place whatever is needed to get our club members back on the water. I have seen improved camaraderie and inclusiveness between squads. Many more club members have been helping out with coaching of others to help them improve and it is great to see junior parents getting involved with this as well. Club members have volunteered their time to set up activities to help others continue to feel involved and engaged with the club, whether this is simply a squad zoom call, quiz nights, group cycles or Hazel Ward's monumental efforts running club circuit training sessions. All of this makes me confident that as a club we will come out of this far stronger than we were before.

A big thank you to the vast majority of our members who have continued to support the club with their membership payments even when they can't visit the club. We have lost many of our sources of income this year with the football and rugby car parks, club functions, West End

Runners all being affected by Covid, so your membership payments really help to keep us going.

Unfortunately the pandemic continues to challenge us and will do for some time to come. As I said when I first had to announce that the club would have to close, rowing is far more than just a sport to many of us, as well as a physical and competitive outlet it is a source of ambition, it's our friendships, it's a community that we are involved with nearly everyday and it becomes a way of life. To have that taken away, even temporarily, is very hard to take. But in time it will be back to the way we remember it, the club will reopen fully, the boats will be back on the water and there will be races to be won.

Ben Pickering
Club Captain
November 2020