

Captain's report - AGM 2021

Introduction

Year 2 as Club Captain and although for much of the first half of the year we have faced many of the same challenges as last year, it has been great to see the progress we have been able to make as a club and a rowing community during the second half of this year. During the AGM last year we were just coming to the end of a 4 week lockdown, to then be put into another lockdown at the start of January that lasted until the end of March. They were some hard, cold and dark months to get through (with a few zoom circuits and ergo sessions to help) but I am very pleased we have not had to close the club again since, and we have even managed to get out and do some racing. It has been such a joy to see so many people returning to the club, getting out on the water and even taking in some new members.

I would like to give a big thank you to the club committee who have worked hard again this year to tackle the challenges that have been thrown at us by the pandemic and in parallel to that, working to keep the club progressing. Thanks also to our club members for following the rules and mitigations that have been put in place to keep yourselves and others safe. I know some of the mitigations may seem onerous at times but we need to follow the guidance that is provided to us by British Rowing.

Results

The club posted a total of 21 race wins this season down from 34 last season. Historically this is a fairly low number, but with the club only attending races for four months of the year, then 21 wins is quite an impressive amount. The results can be further broken down as follows:

- 21 sculling & 0 sweep wins
- 0 coxed boat wins
- 7 womens & 14 mens & 0 mixed wins
- 2 senior & 8 masters & 11 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, Graham Clark, Liz Pulford and Howard Marsh for volunteering to tow the club trailer, without their help many of us would not be racing.

Notable results

- Lauren Henry has had a very impressive year, she won the GB rowing team open trials at Caversham back in May. She then went on to win the women's championship single scull at the Metropolitan regatta in June. Following this she was selected to represent team GB at the under 23 world championships in Racice in the Czech Republic and Howard Marsh was selected as a GB rowing coach for the event. After going through the heat and the repêchage, Lauren made it into the A final where she came 4th, equalling the best position of any British athlete in the women's single at these championships. If that wasn't enough, Lauren then qualified for the Princess Royal Challenge Cup at Henley Royal Regatta. Her progression through the competition made her one of the stars of the show, beating an Olympic gold medalist on her way to the final where she lost out by an agonising 3 feet. These results are nothing less than incredible by Lauren and her coach Howard Marsh and on behalf of the club I would like to wish them both the best of luck with their future ambitions.
- David Smith won a gold medal at Masters C in the single scull at the British Rowing Championships in June as well as a Masters C medal in the double scull at the Henley

Masters Regatta. Dave continues to be a force to be reckoned with on the Masters scene.

Women's squad

Everytime I visit the club, Alex always seems to be there. Whether it is coaching from the towpath, running ergo sessions, coaching in the gym or fixing boats. His dedication to the women's squad, helping with the juniors and to the club in general has been commendable and it is greatly appreciated. Alex has been the women's captain for 4 years now, which I think is a record, and I would like to thank him for the time he has dedicated to the squad. I know his athletes are very grateful for the efforts he makes and that for many of them, their level of skill and confidence in a boat and motivation for competition is in large part down to Alex's abilities as a coach.

Men's squad

Hazel is stepping down from the Men's Captain position after 2 years in the role. I would like to thank Hazel for her hard work arranging training plans, putting crews together, planning races, coaching, coxing and bringing new members into the club, as well as running some fairly brutal circuit training sessions over zoom when we were all locked down. I am pleased to say that Hazel will be staying on the committee as a member and I hope she will be able to offer support to the new Men's Captain as they settle into the role and continue to help with bringing new members into the club.

Junior squad

The junior squad started the year with a new squad leader in Caroline Peck but unfortunately she had to step down before she could really get into the role due to a job move, but I would like to thank Caroline for the time that she was able to give to the role. Managing the junior group was then taken on by a team made up of Clare Wildin, Angela Holohan and Liz Pulford who have worked hard to organise and coach the squad, arrange for them to visit and compete in multiple races as well as putting on taster days and running learn a to row course for new members. It has been very encouraging to hear about how many existing junior members volunteered to help out with these taster days and also to see the parents who continue to help out on the towpath supervising the juniors, it really helps to give a safer environment for junior rowing.

Lydia Gough and Phoebe Cook took on the role of junior representatives this year and their input to the committee has been very valuable. Phoebe stepped down part way through the year following a move to another club leaving Lydia as the sole representative. Thank you both for your contributions this year with the committee and to the junior squad.

Recreational squad

Anne continues to do a great job of running the recreational squad which I believe is the most popular of all the squads and continues to get a lot of interest from potential new members. It is good to hear that they have been able to get out and about a bit more this year with a visit to Burton Head for a private race which they won, as well as visits to Nottingham, most recently for a Halloween row. I will let Anne comment in more detail on the recreational squad in her secretary's report.

Performance squad

The performance squad have trained hard this year and brought in many good results for the club. Howard's coaching and training plans have helped to keep his squad motivated despite the challenges of the pandemic and the lack of races. Howard's encouraging attitude helps his athletes to push themselves on to higher levels than they may have thought they could have reached otherwise and I hope his achievements with Lauren will inspire others as to what they might be capable of. As well as coaching at a world class level for international competition, he also finds time to coach those who are just starting out on their rowing journey and to pass his wisdom on to other aspiring coaches. He is a great asset to this club.

Equipment

- 2nd hand heavyweight Janousek double scull / pair
- 8 sets of new sculling blades
- Repairs/refurbishment to the following boats
 - Nigel Ramsden (Burgashell)
 - Bada Bing
 - Cuddywifta
 - Fawley Challenge
 - Millenium
 - Bridget Hull

Clubhouse

- Repairs to the club lift. This will likely require a sizeable investment in the coming year for further improvements.

Learn to row

Myself, Hazel and Alex have continued to work hard to bring in new members to the senior men and women's squads. We have had two members successfully go through our program of land based training followed by water sessions and they went on to win the first race that they entered, so we must be doing something right! We are now working with a second intake of beginners and plan to take on another group in January. If anyone would like to get involved with helping coach new members please let us know and thanks to all those who have helped out already.

Leicester Regatta

Leicester Regatta has now had to be cancelled for two years in a row but I hope with the way the pandemic is going, we should be reasonably confident that we will be able to run the event next year. Although it takes a lot of organisation and the day itself is long, stressful and tiring 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.

University business

Both DMU RC and UoL RC have recommenced activity on the water and the committee are in communication with both clubs on plans for training and safety. We have good relationships with both of these clubs and I expect this to continue over the next year.

Some more thanks...

Sarah Peck will be standing down this year as the Club Welfare Officer. I would like to thank Sarah for the time she has dedicated to this role and her invaluable work as she has taken on a number of cases and led a team in reviewing and updating the club's various welfare policies. Michelle Dempsey also got involved with the role over the past year and will also be standing down, I would like to give my thanks to her as well.

Many thanks to Tim Walton who has continued as a committee member taking on club maintenance issues. This is no easy task and I imagine it goes unnoticed by many club members, but this is largely due to Tim's diligence in organising required maintenance before issues come about, allowing the club to continue running smoothly and for us all to keep on rowing. Thanks also to Joe Holohan who has helped to keep the wheels turning on the club trailers and the club bikes.

Thanks to Nicola in her role as the club treasurer. This past year Nicola has kept a keen eye on funding available as a result of the pandemic and this has been a great help to keep the club bank account in a healthy position despite the drop in our usual revenue streams.

On behalf of the club I would like to give thanks to Liz Pulford in her role as Club President. As well as winning races, Liz takes on many responsibilities around the club and is always one of the first to put her hand up to take on a task that comes out of a committee meeting or a RoFo. This year she has taken on an active role with the junior squad alongside Clare and Ang, and she is eyeing up some big rowing projects on the horizon. Thank you for your continued dedication and enthusiasm for the club.

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 as this is what allows the club to keep running, and they are all very much appreciated. Over the next year it would be great to see even more volunteering from our members to help with club tasks. These don't have to be large or onerous tasks, it could be checking that the detergent bottles are kept filled up for cleaning the boats, monitoring the ergos and arranging repairs or checking and replacing broken cable ties for the rubber bumper on the landing stage etc. The more of these smaller tasks that you are able to help with then the more time it frees up for the committee to focus on some larger projects to help the club to keep progressing. If you think you can spare some time to take on some club tasks like this then please let me know.

Summary

I am really pleased this year to have felt some return of normality around the club with the majority of our members back on the water and with races on the agenda once again. Now that Covid is at a stage where it is causing less disruption at the club, I hope this will allow the committee to work together over the next year to bring in more members and take on some big projects to get the club in an even stronger position and make it an even more enjoyable, motivating and inspiring place to be than it is already.

Ben Pickering
Club Captain
November 2021