

## **Rowing Report 2005/6**

### **Introduction**

The Club continues to attract oarsmen at the J14 age group. The numbers gradually reduce through the next four years so that by the time the J18 age group is reached there is usually a small core group of boys going for National medals. This year saw two boys, Scott and Mason Durant, fly the flag and win for LRGsBC at the National Schools Regatta and then also represent both Club and Great Britain on the international stage, and win gold medals. A first for LRGsBC junior oarsmen. On the coaching front, we are pleased to have RGT back with us to enthuse our junior oarsmen. Rowing is a sport which requires huge amounts of time and effort from boys, their parents and coaches. The medals won are a tribute to them all.

### **J15s**

A sizeable squad of J15s represents the up and coming element of the Club. They had their first taste of the Head season with a trip to Northwich Head in the Autumn. J.Carey and J.Morley had a good run down the course without any problems. The rest of the squad were raced in quads throughout the afternoon which proved an interesting experience for coxes as boats race in close proximity to others. One crew had a clean run but the other had steering difficulties at the Narrows when it was pressured by two following crews. They found the bank which cost them valuable time and pride. Nevertheless, all oarsmen had made a start on the North West racing circuit. They then moved on to Agecroft Head on Salford Quays. A quad (C.Baron, A.Kirkham, N.Ranson, C.O'Halloran, V.Clemence -cox) came 6<sup>th</sup>.behind Warrington, Grange A and B, Bradford GS, and Merchant Taylors.



After that, they had a relatively quiet winter season. In the summer they entered Lancaster Regatta. By this stage, several double sculls were more appealing to the more skilful oarsmen and one or two were also developing single sculling potential. Two J15 double scull combinations started to show some form (J.Flesher & C.O'Halloran, J.Carey & C.Ranson). The squad also benefited from two boys from the winter rugby squads. This raised the potential of the crew boats with the J15 coxed quad (T.Heap,M.Bush,C.Metcalf,Hwang - cox V.Clemence) having a good race. The best LRGsBC single scullers were James Carey, Nick Ranson and John Flesher. All of whom were up against quality opposition who start competitive sculling a lot earlier than LRGS boys.

### **J16/18 Squad**

The J16 squad struggled to get going in the Autumn as there was a lack of belief or desire to train to the level required to compete on the racing circuit. Some entered the opening Head race at Northwich (J16 2x of C.Beck and S.Atkins) but were outgunned against talented opposition. Danny Bellion was singled out as having the potential and desire to push as far as he could. He was placed with the previous year's National Championship squad to gain experience. A LRGsBC J18 4x- (M.Stott (OL),I.Fishwick,D.Bellion,B.Wilson) was entered into Chester Long Distance Sculls

coming 4<sup>th</sup>. A promising start, but it was always going to be a short lived crew with the stroke man off to University. After that, the newly formed J18 4+ of Ben Wilson, James Mercer, Isaac Fishwick, Danny Bellion and cox Ed Barton tried their hand at sweep oar rowing to see if there was sufficient enthusiasm and potential. They had a good bash at the course at Northwich but failed to overcome the powerful Shrewsbury School squad. All change again as the J18 element gave up to concentrate on University entrance.



At York Small Boats head in November, a much needed morale booster came in the form of a J16 coxed four of E.McDonald, D.Bellion, M.Flintoff, S.Atkins and E.Barton (cox) who notched their first win on the season. Danny Bellion then just missed out of the J16 single scull pennant by 0.9 seconds from Hall of St.Peter's School over the 3500 metres on the river Ouse. The J16s didn't use the experience to keep them going and most gave up competitive rowing. This paved the way for Danny Bellion to concentrate on his sculling.



Danny travelled far and wide including the National Schools Regatta in Nottingham. Many thanks go to his father for getting him and boat around the country to get races at the summer regattas. He nearly won at York and at Durham regattas which added to his desperation to win. This finally came at Lancaster regatta where he beat Archam and then Snelson of

Runcorn RC. Worth waiting for!

### **J18 GB Trials Squad**

It is always the case at the start of any season in September that the athletes available, and the possible crew combinations needed to medal at a major championship are mulled over by the coach. LRGsBC is a very small schoolboy club and has been fortunate in the past to have had a J18 crew that has, after four years of dedicated training and rowing, worked its way to the forefront of the field at a national level. However, LRGsBC has never in the past had an international oarsman selected to row for Great Britain at the international level. That was the challenge facing the Durant twins as we debated what we should do after their Bronze medal in the National Championship J18 coxless pairs the previous July. On that same afternoon, they had also raced in a LRGsBC J18 coxed four that finished sixth in the final of the National Championships. A good but in some ways disheartening result. It made the decision to carry on with the pair much more probable and the rest of the four went their own ways.

We had had experiences dabbling with 'selection' in previous years with Harry Shepherd after he had become National Champion at J16 Single Sculls. Scott and Mason Durant had the ability to challenge other pairs much bigger than themselves because they are twins and we were going to use that advantage in the February Pairs Trials. To begin with, they spent the Autumn gearing themselves up by beating as many crews and scullers as possible in the North West. The first selection trial is a 5000 m sculling race as all juniors have to be able to scull. The Durants took on all scullers at ChesterLDS and then Northwich with a convincing win in the J18 2x over a Northwich double. Scott also won the single scull pennant at Northwich.

They received monthly training schedules from the GB team selector and had to meet certain targets on the ergo and in the gym. Even the help of Dr. Grant Abt of the St. Martin's College Sports Physiology Department was enlisted to monitor how their land based training was going. They then travelled to Boston, Lincolnshire in November for the first Trial. 170 other hopefuls also showed up. Both boys did well with Scott coming 51<sup>st</sup>. and Mason 66<sup>th</sup>. On the road with a mission, they immediately travelled to York to join the rest of the LRGsBC squad for a race the next day. Thanks for mum, Diane, and brother Kyle for helping with the transport! In York, they won the J18 4x- (S.Durant, M.Durant, J.Mercer and B.Wilson).

The long winter months arrived and new challenges kept them going. Scott won the J18 1x pennant at Agecroft Head and also won the 2x pennant with his brother in the afternoon. They spent their Christmas money on new racing bikes and entered the Agecroft Triathlon on Salford Quays (3km ergo, 15km cycle, 5km run) coming 18



and 19<sup>th</sup> out of the 38 senior men who entered. By February, they were ready for the opportunity they had waiting for. The GB Junior Long Distance Pairs Trials at Boston against 50 other pairs. The 500 mile round trip would be worth it. Day 1 saw perfect conditions in bright sunshine. They set off in the middle of the order and quickly showed their skill, passing a couple of pairs towards the end of the 5km test. They did better than expected coming 5<sup>th</sup> overall. An

excellent result which guaranteed their selection to the next Trial and got them noticed by the selectors. Day 2, however, was cold and with a strong headwind which favoured the heavier pair combinations including 'World Class Start' athletes who had been targeted and trained for their potential. Other pair combinations were setup between the other schoolboys to see if they could fair any better than the previous day. The boys were asked to row the same pair in comparison and they battled their way down the course, managing 10<sup>th</sup> overall which on average made them one of the strongest pairs in the country. The pair were then formally invited to the GB Spring Assessment Trials in Nottingham at the end of March where the number of invited pairs was reduced to 19 (38 athletes).

In the meantime, training had taken a new sense of purpose. At the Yorkshire Head, they lost out just to the St.Peter's/St.Leonards pair who were also looking for selection. They made up for it by winning the J18 2x. By this stage, potential GB oarsmen are encouraged to train together in core groups whenever possible. We knew

the St.Peter's School Crews and coaches and arranged an extra day of training with Rory MacLeod and 'Noddy' Reilly O'Donnell courtesy of Dr.Jamie MacLeod. At GB Spring Assessments at Nottingham in March, the pair had good results in their pairs matrix and subsequent seat racing. Mason was invited back for Pre-Munich Training Camp whilst Scott did his Art exams. They both then travelled to London to join a junior squad of oarsmen and women embarking on a week's training camp at Hazewinkel under the instruction of GB Junior selectors. Both boys did well, in their pair and in a coxless four clocking 6:32 over the 2km multilane international course.

After that, they travelled to join a party from St.Peter's School, York who were competing at Ghent Junior Regatta. This regatta is the first of the season for many European teams with national squads from Portugal, Germany amongst the starting line ups. It gives an early indication of how the winter training has gone as well as providing important race practice ahead of domestic national trials and regattas. The German teams appeared to be using the event for regional trials ahead of national selection. Some of the athletes were to meet again in the World Championships in August.

The LRGsBC boys won the Junior 18 Coxless Pairs race over 2km and then doubled up with Rory McLeod and 'Noddy'. The boys had previously trained in this combination and although they were a length down to a good German four, came through to win the coxless four event. On the Sunday, they followed up by winning a silver in the coxless four again and also raced an eight. These medals are not easily come by and pleased the boys as well as GB selectors



By the time of the GB Small Boats Regatta at Dorney Lake, Eton in late April, the boys were getting very fit. Scott clocked the fastest ever LRGsBC 2km ergo result (6:23) as part of his land based tests. All the pairs were first raced off over the 2km course in time trial style to establish rank orders for the regatta style side by side multi lane races. Every race had to be raced flat out to secure promotion to the next round. The boys started 3rd. and finished 5th. in the time trial which secured a ranked position in the semi-finals. They then came 2nd in their semi-final beating the Bergoine twins from Bedford Modern School. This secured them a place in the top A1 final for junior boys. In the final, they had to row through their friends MacLeod & Reilly-O'Donnell from St.Peter's School, York/St.Leonards, Durham and in a close fought race came third behind the Molesey/Stourport World Start pair of Sbihi & Beech (7.01 min) and the Eton/Abingdon pair of Locke & Bucke. They clocked 7.09

minutes, a personal best. This result puts them in a small group of coxless pairs which are the very best in the country and shows a steady improvement from 5th overall at the February Long Distance Trials in Boston and 4th at the Nottingham Spring Assessments. On the basis of these performances, Mason Durant was selected as a bowside oarsman for the GB sweep oar team to compete at Munich International Regatta in May. He was the first LRGsBC oarsman to row for the GB junior team. This late selection was made to replace a previously selected oarsman who has been out with injury.



### **National Schools Regatta**

It between all these Trials, the thought that the twins might get split up or might not win a National medal whilst on GB duty had to be addressed. They entered the National Schools Regatta at Nottingham in May and won 'The Committee's Cup' for Championship Coxless Pairs convincingly.



The weather conditions were a little windy to begin with This gave rise to some technical decisions about 'gearing' of the oars that would have to be carried into a head wind. The twins used 'clams', which can be quickly fitted onto the oar before a race in such a

situation, to change the leverage of the oar. Nineteen crews entered the Championship Coxless Pairs event and all of these were required to race a processional race (time

trial) to reduce the numbers to twelve. The boys are used to such situations after coming through National selection trials and rowed well, overtaking a Hampton pair, whilst keeping their strokes long into the head wind. The draw for the semi-finals (6 abreast) indicated that they were the fastest crew as they were placed in the most favoured lane (lane 6) due to the cross wind. The crews around them were not the same as those in Trials with many GB Trialists in School fours and eights but still nothing was taken for granted and



the semi-finals were to be race as hard as was necessary to get to the final. As it happened, the LRGsBC boat took an early lead by 300m and led all the way, opening up a large gap between them and the rest of the fleet. By the 1000m mark the call came to reduce the rating. With 500m to go the boys reduced their rating further. The boys rowed smoothly with long strokes pushing their boat further each stroke than all

the others. By 5 o'clock, the wind had dropped on the first half of the course and a reduced cross head wind rippled the middle and top end of the 2000m course.

It was clear, however, that everyone else was chasing LRGSBC and that we making the decisions on gearing and race tactics to suit us. In the final, the boys again had the favoured lane 6 and were ready to take charge.

Off the start, the Royal Chester RC pair briefly showed their bow ball ahead but fell back. The physical looking Shiplake College pair and the Latymer Upper School pair, who had also appeared in National Trials, tried to make their mark. Within 200 metres, however, the LRGS were a couple a feet ahead and their stroke length began open up the gap. Four seconds by 500m, 9 seconds by 1000m, 10 seconds by 1500m and 19 seconds by the finish.



- 1 (6) Lancaster R.G.S. 7:49.19
- 2 (5) Shiplake College 8:08.52
- 3 (4) Latymer Upper School 8:12.59
- 4 (3) Royal Chester R.C. 8:20.19
- 5 (2) Stratford-upon Avon B.C. 8:27.44
- 6 (1) Worcester R.G.S. 'A' 8:46.91

### **GB Final Trials and International Events**



The final trials are held at Nottingham over a week. It is an intense and exhausting time for both oarsmen and for coaches who have to 'support' their athletes in vital selection meetings. Decisions are thrashed out between GB selectors and coaches that will affect who goes to which events including the World Championships.

It didn't help that the boys had not ventured to Marlow or Henley Royal Regatta as they had School exams. They

were ranked high but had not had a quality race for a while. They lined up on the start of the first pairs trials with World Start athletes and were unfortunate that the wind and waves built up just for their race and lessened off for the others. The results showed that six or seven pairs had made 7.01 for 2000m. they spent the rest of the week fighting their way up in fours but the seat racing selection process meant that not every athlete is tested at once and no one is really such who is being tested. Deciding who is tested becomes very important and coaches who can influence this decision can possibly help their athletes at the expense of others.

Scott Durant was selected for the Great Britain coxed four at the Coupe de la Jeunesse Regatta at Groningen, Netherlands and won gold on both days, beating the course record. His twin brother, Mason, was selected for the England eight and also won a gold medal at the Home Countries International.

## Summary of Wins and Representative Honours

J16 4+ York Small Boats Head (E.McDonald, D.Bellion, M.Flintoff, S.Atkins and E.Barton –cox)

J16 1x Lancaster Regatta (D.Bellion)

J18 1x Northwich Autumn Head (S.Durant)

J18 2x Northwich Autumn Head (S.& M.Durant)

J18 4x- York Small Boats Head (S.Durant, M.Durant, J.Mercer and B.Wilson)

J18 1x Agecroft Head (S.Durant)

J18 2x Agecroft Head (S.& M.Durant)

J18 2x Yorkshire Head (S.& M.Durant)

J18 2- Gold medal Ghent Junior International Regatta

J18 4- Gold medal Saturday at Ghent Junior International Regatta, Belgium St.Peter's Sch./St.Leonards/LRGS (N.R.O'Donnell, R.MacLeod, S.Durant, M.Durant)

J18 4- Silver medal Sunday at Ghent Junior International Regatta, Belgium St.Peter's Sch./St.Leonards/LRGS (N.R.O'Donnell, R.MacLeod, S.Durant, M.Durant)

J18 2- National Schools Regatta - The Committee's Cup' for Championship Coxless Pairs (S.& M.Durant)

J18 2x Lancaster Regatta (S.&M.Durant)

J18 1x Lancaster Regatta (S.Durant)

Novice 1x Lancaster Regatta (M.Durant)

Francis Russell Memorial Trophy – Lancaster Regatta (S.Durant, M.Durant, D.Bellion, Ed Barton-cox, JOG/LRGS)

Munich International Regatta – Mason Durant represented Great Britain as part of the J18 eight (the first LRGSBC oarsman to represent GB as a junior).

Coupe de la Jeunesse Regatta – Scott Durant represented Great Britain as the stroke of the GB J18 4+ winning two gold medals and breaking the course record.

Home International Regatta, Strathclyde – Mason Durant represented England and won a gold medal.

