

# IN

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# Upper St. Clair

## *ROLLIN' ON THE RIVERS*

The USC Rowing Association takes to the water



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# Local Team Makes a Splash

*USC Rowing Association creates lifelong skills and memories.*

BY PAUL GLASSER

Rowing will be a lifelong pursuit for recent Upper St. Clair High School graduate Brendan Boettger. Boettger was a member of the Upper St. Clair Rowing Association for four years and will attend Temple University this fall on a partial scholarship for participation on the men's crew team. Crew is considered a varsity sport for students at Upper St. Clair High School. Boettger hasn't decided on his major yet but is considering either biology or business. He says he's excited about living in Philadelphia and being challenged on the collegiate rowing team.

"Being surrounded by people who are a lot better than me will help me reach my full potential," he says. Boettger expects to row throughout his college career and says he will pursue the sport recreationally after he graduates from Temple. "After dedicating eight years of my life to rowing, it would be pretty hard to give it up," he explains.

Boettger played football, ice hockey and basketball before he joined the Upper St. Clair Rowing Association. His father and brother had also participated in crew and

encouraged Boettger to give it a chance. He initially thought it might be boring but quickly fell in love with the sport. "I really like the way it pushed me to my physical and mental limit," Boettger says.

Rowing helps you become physically fit but it's also a great way to build camaraderie and make friends. "You are pushing yourself to your maximum potential but everyone else on the boat is doing the same thing," Boettger says. "It's good to know you are not the only one who's feeling that at the moment. You are with your team all the time so you get to know them really well. It's a great way to make

connections and lifetime friends."

According to him, anyone can participate in crew and provide leadership. The coxswain is an important position because he or she yells commands to the team during races and helps steer the boat. Coxswains also help keep the team motivated.

Being outdoors is another great benefit of rowing. Boettger says rowing on the Allegheny River provides a great view of the city. The crew team participates in regattas in Ohio and Virginia as well, and he noted that the Occoquan



Front Row (l to r): Kapil Sharma (Captain), Jack Shephard and Andrew Caldart (Captain)  
Back Row (l to r): Grace Wagner, Osa Wheeler (Captain), Laura Yates, Kyra Hughes and Assistant Coach Dan Craft.



The team getting ready to take to the water.

River in northern Virginia was very scenic. “It was a very curvy course with trees on either side,” he says.

Boettger adds that rowing has provided a lot of memorable experiences, such as when his team won first place in a semifinal qualifier for a national competition last year. The race was at Dillon Lake in central Ohio, and Boettger says he expected to do well but did not expect to finish first. The team members had to push themselves to their physical limits in order to pass the leading boat. As he became more fatigued, Boettger just wanted the race to end.

“You don’t even feel or hear anything anymore because you are in the moment,” he explains. “When we got first, that was probably the happiest I have ever been. After we put in the boat, we ran out and jumped into the lake!”

Boettger notes that although rowing used to be popular in America, not many people know about it. He hopes it will become more popular thanks to books like “The Boys in the Boat,” which is about an American rowing team that won the gold medal at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. The book is also set to be made into a movie.

Rowing was very popular in Pittsburgh before industrialization and pollution increased in the late 19th century. In 1860 there were at least 11 rowing clubs and a championship race offered more than \$15,000 in cash prizes.

Elke Caldart, president of the Upper St. Clair Rowing Association, says the team will benefit from the sport’s growing popularity. The association sent out 1,500 postcards to families in Upper St. Clair with children in middle and high school. It is also organizing camps to teach middle school children the basics of rowing. “We really need to get younger people involved,” Caldart says.

Like Boettger, Caldart’s son tried other sports before joining the rowing association but didn’t get to play much. However, because he worked hard during rowing practice, he became team captain as a senior. Caldart says any students in Upper St. Clair can join the team and compete: “There are no ‘benchwarmers.’”

Rowing is a very physically demanding sport but it is also very safe because it is low-impact. “Pound for pound, rowers are the strongest athletes on Earth,” Caldart says. “They work every muscle, head to toe.” Teamwork is also very important, and team members quickly become

friends. “Everyone has to row in unison so you have to work together,” Caldart explains. “We spend so much time together we’re really a family.”

Joining the rowing association is a big commitment because rowers practice five days a week for four hours. They compete in the spring, fall and winter, and practice on indoor rowing machines when cold weather hits. “If you don’t already have them, you will develop excellent time management skills,” Caldart says.

In addition to new members, the rowing association is also seeking sponsors and donations. The Upper St. Clair Community Foundation recently gave the association a \$2,500 grant for purchase of a new boat, known as a “shell.” However, a four-person boat was recently damaged when it struck a submerged log. The boats are made from fiberglass and a second-hand, fully equipped four-person boat can cost between \$10,000 and \$20,000. The association holds fundraisers but it takes a long time to save up enough money to buy a new shell.

“That’s a lot of pie sales,” Caldart laughs. ■



Christening of new rowing shell, The Invictus, during senior recognition ceremony on May 23, 2016 at the Crowne Plaza.

For more information on the USC Rowing Association, go to [uscrowing.org](http://uscrowing.org).