

Greenwich Invitational kicks off crew season

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Posted: 04/04/2009 11:12:05 PM EDT

Cold, damp, windy weather is not something one would expect for April 4. Nevertheless spring is here and with it comes the start of a new crew season for Greenwich.

Greenwich opened its 2009 campaign with strong showings from both the boys and the girls squads in the NYPPEX Greenwich Invitational Saturday. The successful day was capped by a first-place finish from the boys' varsity 8s who walloped the field with a 3:16.1 in the 1,000-meter race.

"This was a great way to start the season," boys coach Jamie O'Donnell said. "Despite the weather the water was like glass for most of the course and we really flew."

Buffered by Grass Island and the north side of Greenwich Harbor, the crews were able to row unmolested by the wind for nearly the first 750 meters. If anything they were aided by the off-shore breeze. The final fourth of the race, however, was a different story. The 25-mph winds, which occasionally gusted into the upper 30s, tossed the boats around making it difficult to stay on course.

"The first half of the race was nice," stroke-oarsman Matt Lonski said. "But we knew what was coming when we saw other crews getting tossed around the closer they got to the finish."

On the girls side, the varsity 8s cruised to a third-place finish in 3:46.4 and for coxswain Kerry Gilder, the finish was about what she expected.

"It was a good start of the season being right in the middle," she said. "We had two very good crews ahead of us and with the conditions this was about what we expected."

Said girls coach Sarah Johnson: "I told the girls no one likes to lose the first race, but its a good position to be in because they've identified specific things in their race plan that they want to work on and they've identified points in the race where they can make gains."

On the conditions, Gilder said that while she was aware of the stiff breeze and choppy water close to the finish she, and her crew consisting of Julie Sussman, Kristen Lunder, Lottie Galliano, Maria Lycouris, Riley Johnson, Daisy Finley, Lara Tiramani and Patty Suqilanda, were so focused on the stroke, the finish and the adrenaline rush that they paid little attention to what the wind was doing.

Despite the less-than-favorable weather, Greenwich had no absence of support as a large contingent of parents and friends turned out at points throughout the course to cheer Greenwich on. Even for the awards ceremony Greenwich's contingent was the source of some of the loudest applause and a near continuous standing ovation for all of the days competitors.

"It's funny, I was sort of able hear the cheers as we passed by," boys coxswain Glaura Paiva said. "But I was so focused on my boat and my boys that I was not able to hear much."

The focus was a difference maker as Paiva, Lonski, Alex Hagan, Chris Parker, Gustav Rydevik, Gregory Oudheusden, Sam Hagan, Greg Riddell and Zach Wright plowed through the competition. Their individual heat against Saugatuck was over quickly as Greenwich built a length-and-a-half lead by the 500-meter mark.

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"They have a lot of potential across the board on varsity and look like they'll have a really good season," O'Donnell said. "We still have a lot of work ahead of us but they got off to a good start today."

Gilder is equally confident that the girls varsity will have an exceptional season.

"The two crews that we lost to aren't in the Connecticut Public School Championships so we're looking forward to that because the other boats aren't starting as fast as we said. "And for the local regattas coming up we just hope to gain on them every race."

NOTES: The varsity squads were not the only Greenwich teams to post big finishes. The girls varsity 4s with coxswain Abby Karp, Sussman, Jordan Lupo, Johnson, and Daisy Finley took first in their class with a 4:25.4 beating Bay Shore head-to-head. ... The girls A Quads took third in 4:04.8 with Lunder, Galliano, Lycouris and Suquilanda in the boat. The biggest finish of the day outside the varsity 8s came from the boys freshman/novice 8s. Coxswain Tyler Day lead Nick Ekholm, Peter Kelly, Timmy Wyle, Bradley Allen, Paul Singer, Alex Buck, Derik Norrgard, and Charlie Russell to a convincing first place finish in 3:29.2. The next closest finisher was Saugatuck in 3:48.4.