

Playing shell game

Being a rower in Saskatoon presents certain challenges

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The StarPhoenix

For Saskatoon rowers, being able to make fast friends means being able to make fast times on the water.

Members of the city's rowing club often spend an entire season getting used to new crew members in time for national championships, only to repeat the process again the next season.

Take Katie Haver and Kendra Hamilton. Before the spring, the two had never been in a boat together. Now, they are the top junior women's crew in Saskatchewan in both pairs (one oar per rower) and doubles (two oars).

"There can be a lot of varying differences," says Hamilton. "To get used to someone you have to spend time with them, because if you have a completely different style your crew might not work out.

"Or, you might have the same style and your crew (would) set up really easily."

Even though Haver and Hamilton have become a fast, cohesive unit in only two months, Hamilton feels the two still aren't the ideal team.

As they head this weekend to Canada Cup, the annual national championships in Montreal, Hamilton knows they still aren't as in synch as other teams might be.

"It takes a year, or two years (sometimes)," she explains. "We're comfortable (but) we're still finalizing things."

Adds Haver: "(We're) more or less the same. She's taller, so that makes a bit of a difference because I have to reach a little more than I normally would and she has to shorten up her stroke a little bit."

Hamilton and Haver beat Monica Clay and Dawn Jorgenson of Regina last weekend in junior women's doubles at a regatta in Kenora, Ont., in a race-off to become the Saskatchewan crew in that event.

"That was huge," says Haver. "The girls from Regina were bigger and more intimidating.

"Going into the race, I think Monica and Dawn expected to be out in front, so when Kendra and Katie went out in front, they were panicking," says John Haver. "It was a bit of a surprise. They just had a really good race."



CREDIT: Richard Marjan, The StarPhoenix

Saskatoon rowers Katie Haver (left) and Kendra Hamilton have come a long way together in a short time

Hamilton and Katie Haver will join Clay and Jorgenson and four other Regina women for the women's eight -- another group of largely unfamiliar faces.

"Kendra and I took a road trip down to Regina, and we actually got quite a few practices in," says Katie Haver. "We've had more practices than Saskatchewan normally has in the eight."

MIX AND MATCH

In the senior men's four, it is hoped the combination of two long-time pairs teams will pay off in a medal at nationals.

The group consists of Todd Kesey, Colin Dyck, Craig Hamilton and Josh Banciscue. Kesey and Dyck have formed a pairs crew for several seasons, and Hamilton and Banciscue have spent about a year together.

"This boat came together quite quickly but we're definitely using the last days of training (to get ready for nationals)," Kesey says.

Kesey will team with Dyck in pairs and also rows in singles. He says the four is a priority race.

"Usually in the higher-end competitions you only have a select few races, and everybody prioritizes their training (for them)."

Kesey is hoping for medals in both fours and pairs; he and Dyck won that event as juniors.

In addition to training, Kesey and Dyck also have coaching responsibilities. Kesey is the club's coach, and John Haver and Dyck are in their first season as northern provincial team coaches.

"We're pretty novice coaches, but we've actually had a really successful year," John Haver says.

Haver, who has competed for several seasons, was sick with whooping cough at the beginning of the season and opted to coach. He expects to return next year as a competitor, but says he has a new-found appreciation for what coaches face.

"You don't see as an athlete some of the things that go on behind the scenes organizing for events," he explains. "You appreciate just rowing and being an athlete a lot more (after) seeing what goes into it."

As nationals near, the rowers increase the intensity and quantity of their training. At this point in the season, two workouts per day is the norm.

"In the spring we do a lot of (technical training), long pieces, low stroke rate," says Erin Hlynsky, a member of the senior women's four with Hamilton, Vanessa Glendinning and Liz Bauer. "Now, peaking before nationals we're doing a lot of high-rate sprinting stuff, so shorter workouts, but the intensity kicks up."

Hlynsky and her crew mates -- another group that hasn't had much time to get to know one another -- are aiming for finals and possibly a medal.

"It's really fast racing, it's a really competitive weekend," says Hlynsky. "It brings out the best in a lot of people because of that competitive spirit all around, and you work so hard to get there that you're so pumped when you do it."

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