

The Flat Hat

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5 a.m. wake-up call

Written By:

September 22, 2009

During his sophomore year at the College of William and Mary, Nishant Kishore '10 lost a bet and had to wake up at 5 a.m. for his first crew practice. Instead of being intimidated and exhausted by the two-hour workout, Kishore says it was exactly what he was looking for in a sport.

"Controlled fury," Kishore said about the experience. "You put everything you have into the drive and then release on the recovery. It's relaxing and invigorating at the same time."

This is the passion the team has been working hard to inspire in new recruits in order to continue to grow in size and reputation.

With a new coach and many new rowers, the crew team spent the past few weeks building their team relationship.

Not everyone is thrilled by the idea of blister-building and muscle-straining at dawn five days a week, so the crew team has to work hard to sell itself to potential new members. In addition to the ubiquitous flyers with the simple message "WMRC WMRC WMRC," new attractions such as a recently built dock have helped increase interest.

T.J. Wallin '10 credits recent membership growth to ideas from the executive board and the team's new coach, Nathan Walker.

One idea, a summer crew camp for high school students aiming to attract potential new rowers, paid off. 60 potential newcomers showed up for the first practices this year.

Building a good team requires attracting initial interest, and also being able to keep it. This year, the team had a freshman bonding week from Sept. 7 to 13. From Monday night capture-the-flag to Thursday night s'mores, the new members had a

chance to bond with their fellow freshmen as well as the upperclassmen. The activities were meant to kick-start the familial relationship the team develops over time.

“It helps the freshmen get to know the varsity members as more than just the scary varsity team. They get to know them as friends,” Kishore said.

Freshman bonding is just the start. They have a photo scavenger hunt around campus and Colonial Williamsburg — taking pictures in trees, with reenactors and the like — in their spandex unis. The relationship the team builds on the water carries into the rest of their lives.

“We spend too much time together,” Lorelei Thomson ’12 said. “But it never stops being fun.”

The team has its own parties and socials, and members can be seen grabbing dinner together in the Commons or catching a movie together in someone’s room.

“In most sports, if you’re a man down, you still compete,” he said. “If we’re a man down, we won’t race. Our dependence on each other fosters our bond.”

He and Kishore have developed such a good relationship through crew that they decided to room together this year.

The team builds a relationship based on mutual respect and trust. Every teammate works just as hard as everyone else and has earned his or her place on the team. The rowers have to prove their skills to earn a slot in the varsity-level boats.

“No one is guaranteed a slot [in the experienced boats],” Kathleen Murphy ’12 said. “It’s about what works best for the team, and not the individual.”

Some new recruits who have rowed before, called experienced novices, may be turned off initially by the team’s policy that new members must row as novices for the first month; they can begin to move up into the more experienced boats if they have the talent. Murphy explains that this is so that everyone can get used to the boats and rowing at the collegiate level.

It isn't just the rowers who have to prove themselves to the team — the coaches have to as well. Walker started as head coach last spring, coming in with years of experience rowing at Purdue University and respect from the rowing community at large. But it's his hands-on approach that helped him bond with the team.

"[He's] awesome," Jamie Hall '13 said. "He recently rowed, so he has the rower's perspective. And he even does some of the exercises with us."

Walker explains that it is sometimes a challenge for him to be able to provide the rowers with the best resources and tools to live up to their potential.

"It's like an iceberg. You can't always see all of what goes into [rowing]. The equipment has to be sufficient and up to date. You have to choose between regattas – one will give you more competition, but it's farther away and more expensive. You're constantly adding up the pluses and minuses of every choice."

Walker believes that it is the hard work of the athletes that makes the club so successful.

"Students at William and Mary are the most completely dedicated, both inside and outside of rowing. Their passion rubs off on me."

With a new coach, lots of new members and a positive mentality, the College's rowing team is going to be making great strokes this year.