The Wind in Their Sails

Although they consistently finished at the back of the pack in regattas this year, the members of Rice’s club sailing team are remarkably enthusiastic and optimistic. At least they’re out there competing, which wasn’t the case last year, and they feel the winds of change blowing in their direction.

Spring graduate Nancy Pattyn joined the sailing team her freshman year and has seen the club’s transformation firsthand. Her sophomore year, the team took a blow when its leadership graduated. “We lost most of the team and a lot of experience,” she says. “Last year, our membership was about four people, and the second semester, we were completely inactive. Fortunately, the tables have turned.” Now, with junior president Garrett Tate and standout sophomore Jim Doty leading the team, the future looks much brighter.

The goals this year were simple—compete in enough regattas throughout the season to qualify for the SEISA Coed Dinghy Conference Championships in April. Next year, the hope is to recruit more members, increase the team’s visibility on campus and build on this year’s improvements, which will require a coach’s expert guidance.

“We will need a coach to help us with the techniques that will take us to the next level,” Doty says of the team that has been coach-less for the past several seasons. “We have come so far—from not being in the pack, to being at the end of the pack. The improvement that will put us in the middle of the pack is not as difficult as the challenges we already have overcome.”

With limited funding, equipment and experience, just being competitive against the other teams in SEISA, which is the team’s former faculty advisor. “But they have a really fabulous attitude.”

Key to this year’s improvement, Tate says, was the addition of new teammates. In his first year on the team, Doty, who came to Rice with competitive sailing experience, pitched in greatly, teaching the basics to inexperienced sailors. “None of this year’s members provided more of a boost than Jim,” Tate says. “He brought valuable experience to the team, and his several more years of eligibility will be necessary to keep building the club have much visibility on campus, the team hopes to increase membership again next season by banking on sailing’s combined mental and physical challenges to appeal to Rice students looking to get involved with a club sport. “Physically, you have to practice for hours to get your movements and timing precise, and sailing in high winds can be a test of strength,” Tate says. “Mentally, the tactics of a sailing race can make it like a game of chess on steroids.”

Doty sees the Rice spirit and sailing as the perfect combination. “Sailing is a sport that is structured along the same lines as Rice,” he says. “It requires personal commitment and relies on creativity and a team effort.”

In the eyes of its members, the future certainly is bright for Rice sailing. “This has been a season of growth,” says Doty. “The best thing about this team is that our leadership is so young.”

Pattyn agrees. “I think next year’s team is going to be awesome,” she says. “With a larger and more dedicated membership and repaired boats, I expect the team to improve a lot. I am actually kind of sad I’ve graduated.”

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team’s competition district, has been a challenge. The team has only two working boats in its fleet of 420s—two-person dinghies with two sails—but it hopes to raise funds to purchase more before next year’s season begins. “The deck is really stacked against them, and they are building this thing from the ground up,” says Marie Wise, in the years to come.”

Tate calls Wise the largest contributor to the team’s success this year. “We were on the brink of falling apart,” he says, “and Marie appeared and worked closely with the club leadership to give us a new sense of direction and put us on good footing once again.”

Although club sailing doesn’t