

# Georgia Tech Crew 15 Years of History

## GT Crew Highlights

- ? Chartered 1986
- ? First competed Fall 1986
- ? First Dad Vail Medal 1990
- ? First Champion Medal 1993
- ? First Dad Vail Team Points (3rd) 1996
- ? First IRA Regatta 1997
- ? First Dad Vail Gold 2000
- ? What's next?

## Inside this issue:

John Hunter	2
"Our Finest Hour"	3
"How we were Founded"	4
"The first couple years"	5
Reflections	6
Fireworks, Rower / Coxswain Relationships	7
Tech Blade Design Atlanta Rowing Festival 1999 Debbie McKenna Permenter	8
Joining GT Crew was life altering	9
Varsity Men's 1997 ltwt8+	10-11
Our First Dad Vail Gold	12-14
Jim Wilson—My experience	14
92-93 Vmen ltwt 8+. A close look	15-21

## For the Alumni... from Slim

I set out a task for myself this spring to document the history of the crew team. Why? Did I not have anything else to do? I did, but it just wasn't as exciting as rowing. What would you do—create a methanol and MTBE chemical plant for your senior design project... or think about crew? I think each rower has been presented with this same question of how to allocate your time, and I think I did what any sensible rower would have done... I chose the latter option only to discover that I had to do the former to graduate.

I hoped that I could get all the information correct and in full detail, so I left it up to other people to describe. I contacted the alumni that I knew, and invited everyone to write something. I additionally got into contact with some of our 'lost' founders (who can't and won't believe it's been 15 years!).

I unfortunately didn't have the full alumni updated list at the time I was making all these requests (I just got it 2 days ago from the Alumni Association) and feel bad that I couldn't contact everyone. I also had to worry about passing Chemical Engineering—if I didn't finish my senior design project on time, I wouldn't graduate.

So to make it up, I will create a second edition of - GT Crew history this Fall (when I have more time to contact more of our 'old' alumni). I hope people get into the writing mood after seeing all of these great stories—without stories we have no more past.

It's been exciting going through the old records

So there's a very large story about the 92-93 Varsity Men's lightweight 8+. I put every anecdote (small or very big) into the packet that were sent to me. For the second edition, I will do the same. Write away!



15 Years of History

from the 'crewhouse', the damp musty basement of the 'watersports-house' which we keep our few ergs and weights in. I've relived my childhood dreams of being an archeologist digging through old files

So for the crew team, I give this as my gift. I'm too poor to donate monetary items; plus my car was just stolen so I can't help drive to practices! I hope that our alumni will both remember and realize how great Georgia Tech Crew is. We are limited by many factors; however we are never limited by the desire and passion to row. For all of us, the passion comes from a different place, but it is a universal truth among us.

Please enjoy all the stories that your fellow alumni have compiled and I hope that it sparks that fire back in you.

## John Hunter

There is hardly a rower on the crew team whom has never heard of John Hunter. During his studies at MIT, he fell in love with the sport of rowing. He rowed for barely a year before he had to quit for various reasons.

He was the first non-Tech alumnus to hold a position on the GT Advisory Board to the Institute

After retiring to his house, *Serendipity*, overlooking the Chattahoochee River, one of the projects which he took upon himself was the Georgia Tech Rowing Club in 1988. He had a dream to see shells row up and down the river in back of his house, and he devoted a portion of the latter part of his life to do so.

Mr. Hunter passed away in 1999



## John Hunter in the eyes of Jim Wilson

I was President of the club in 1992, working with Betz, Flowers, Lynn Ann, and a couple of other folks. We tried to take GT Crew to the next step (i.e., revisited the idea of going varsity with Homer Rice and the GT Athletic Association), capitalizing on the Olympics fervor. This was when I met John Hunter via Debbie Permenter's strong suggestion.

We were looking for ways to get funding for the team, and Debbie felt Mr. Hunter (this mysterious guy who lived in a home across the river called "Serendipity") was the guy to see. I remember putting a tie on and driving out to his house, nervous because of the rumors of his rough demeanor. His (very large) German Shepard greeted me at the door... a dog that actually was very sweet. Mrs. Hunter then took over the greeting after the dog announced my arrival with several barks. She was very cordial and very Southern... reminded me of a younger version of my grandmother. She led me into the back room where Mr. Hunter was sitting. We went through the formal greetings and he quite pointedly told me to take a seat.

I explained what I wanted on behalf of the team, and he provided a few suggestions. One of them included storming the AA tower... namely Homer Rice's (the AA Director) office. He felt quite put off that the man was unresponsive to his General Patton-style of negotiating. Well, more like "you are going to do this". Mr. Hunter made me laugh. Of course, not really in front of him, but I genuinely liked him. He had a hell of a lot of fire. Retired he was, but accept it he didn't. I always wondered what his underlings at Oxford Industries called him... "Sir"? "Commander"? "Chief"

It was difficult sometimes having him on the Board of Directors for the Crew Team. He didn't play too well in groups. His idea of leadership was a "benevolent dictatorship" (his words). But he truly meant well, and he had a very generous heart. Yes, he gave quite a

*(Continued on page 3)*

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*"He had a hell of a lot of fire. Retired he was, but accept it he didn't."*

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*His idea of leadership was a "benevolent dictatorship"*

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## Our finest Hour...

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The crew team has made remarkable achievements that stick in the heads of those involved and never go away. The following are the highlights of our best achievements.

Our best team finish at Dad Vails occurred in 1996; Georgia Tech got third place in overall team points. Novice men's Itwt 8+, silver; novice women's open 4+ (the 'Phat Phour'), bronze; Varsity Men's Itwt 8+, silver, Varsity Women's Itwt 4+, bronze. Incidentally, this occurred literally days after our infamous trailer accident where a lot of our boats were destroyed. The team refused to give up their Dad Vails aspirations when the adviser told the team they were to return back to Atlanta (rowers had to be sent to a hospital for a basic checkup after the van flipped). For a race that we train 9 months for, it is hard to listen to authority. For this finest hour in 1996, the next fall was spent under suspension and no Georgia Tech boats were allowed to row.

The women's team had their finest hour at the 1999 Dad Vails. They fielded an open 2+ that earned a bronze medal. They also entered an open 4+ that knocked the socks of the competition to get silver.

The men's team had their finest hour in the spring of 1993 and 1997. It is debatable which crew was fastest; the rowers in 93 will tell you they were faster - the rowers in 97 will tell you they were faster. The 93 men's Itwt 8+ brought the team to a level never seen before, and set the standard for years to follow. They set team records and did many first time accomplishments for the team (see Jeff Woodard's article). In 1997, after a fall of suspension, the men's team fielded another one of the fastest boat in the history of the team. They got 2nd at Champion (by 0.03 seconds) and 9th place at IRAs, beating every other club team in the nation, and many other varsity teams.



Our Finest Hour where fate lined up for us

(*"John Hunter in the eyes of Jim Wilson"* Continued from page 2)

bit of money to the team... but if you look closely, you will see he wanted us to work for the money instead of him giving it outright. Take the dock. He had the money to just pay for a new one, but instead he paid for the wood, framing material, and a single contractor to tell us how to put it together.

I would call him often, telling him how the team was doing. This seemed to delight him. He was very proud of the team's efforts, but liked to watch from a distance. As I got to know him, I respected him all the more. He was someone who had been through a lot in life, but continued to respond with generosity.

**Written after Mr. Hunter's passing**

**Jim Wilson**

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**Jim Wilson**

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## How we were founded

Michael May,  
Original Team Founder,  
First Team President

I was a coop in Huntsville working for the US Army and met some students at UAH (University of Alabama at Huntsville) who introduced me to rowing. Anyway, upon my return to GT for my last year and a half (I took 5 and a half years to graduate), I decided I wanted to try rowing - I had no eligibility left for Track or Cross Country Running.

*“Nowadays,  
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competitive shell”*

It was early 85 Winter term, and upon return from co-op I realized there wasn't a program at Tech. I looked around and Emory University had a Crew Club. I went over there and they introduced me to rowing at the Atlanta Rowing Club. From there I convinced my roommate at Tech, Mark Turner - also a cross country runner and track member, to row a pair with me and we started training at the ARC. This is how the McKenna's first got involved, we met Debbie and Jeff at the Rowing Club and became friends with them. I also started coaching a high school girls 4 and coxing them. Anyway, from there we rowed most of the spring and summer for ARC in the pair and did pretty well. During the late summer of 85, the memory is sorta hazy here, I decided, I believe because other students at Tech were getting interested to start an organization and get sanctioned by the school as a club sport.

Anyway, we got officially recognized by the school in Spring 1986 and received money from the Georgia Tech Student Foundation. From there we bought some oars and a Pocock 8 from a school out west. I remember that it took us a while to find enough people to fill boats and the first season we only had a women's 4 and a men's 4. Mark and I didn't row in either boat; we were still working on the pair. Both of us are very small guys and we worked well together, but the guys we had interested in the four were bigger and they worked out as part of the barbell club if I remember right.

It was a trial the first year getting money, although SGA did come through for us in the end. Nowadays, though and even to a lesser extent then, it was about money. Money basically meant being able to get a competitive shell. After I left, I think this is where Debbie had the largest impact.

*“Its funny  
looking back on  
it now, but  
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rowing club is an  
accomplishment  
that I take a lot  
of pride in.”*

Anyway, we started operating the club and more and more people got interested. I graduated in December of 86 and moved to Florida. Mark stayed and got a Masters till the following spring and then moved to Florida in August of 87. We bought a great lightweight Vespoli pair and raced for another two years, but it is real hard to keep it up and to coordinate all of the work schedules.

We sold our Vespoli a couple of years later to guess who, but Debbie McKenna (Permenter), who at that time I believe was the first official coach of the GT team. I still follow the events and have supported the effort from afar. Its funny looking back on it now, but starting the rowing club is an accomplishment that I take a lot of pride in.

**This was a brief e-mail written to me going over how he started the ball rolling for rowing at GaTech.**

## The first couple years

from the eyes of Chris Perras

For the first 6 months of the club I stroked the men's four until we found our true stroke and the boat seats were settled. Eddie Montavlo (sp? -stroke); Jeff Kemp, myself, and Jeff Lukens (bow). Our coxswain changed from race to race, as did the boat we used in races. If I remember correctly our first actual race together was the Mardi Gras Regatta in New Orleans in 1987.

The four of us (and our coxswain - a girl I remember only as Jen) drove to Mobile, Alabama in Eddie's convertible Volkswagen in a rainstorm with the roof duct-taped shut. A tornado blew through New Orleans in the morning and the regatta went on "as-planned". We couldn't find the boat that had been promised to us, had to scramble to find a replacement boat (a wooden Pocock I think), and made the finals. Where, being coxed by my now wife Kim Kruger, Jeff Lukens jumped a track at the start and we rowed the entire race with 3 rowers (such for us knowing the rules). But the time we had, the way the swing felt in the heats, and the fun we had at the Hootoo Guru concert that night convince us that our goal was Dad Vails. Our workouts moved to 4-6 days a week on the river and running stadiums when we couldn't row. Up at 4:30am, 30 minutes to the river, row for 1-1.5 hours, commute back to school 45 minutes to an hour, class, workout in the afternoon.

Along the way to Dad Vails we "perfected" the "flying Cuban start" (Eddie Montalvo), won the Augusta Regatta, and broke the cardinal rule of never dating the coxswain (Avril Baker). We spent spring break in Miami rowing on Biscayne Bay and I still remember Debbie's or Kim's truck breaking down on the Florida turnpike very late at night and "hotwiring" the accelerator pedal with string tied to the engine. Along the way I think we only canceled one practice for "excessive" partying. The smell of bourbon being sweat from one of the oarsman isn't a pretty smell. We made the finals at the Dad Vails (30-46 boats, can't remember) and finished 6th as we ran out of gas in our normally strong 3<sup>rd</sup> 500m piece.

In 1988 Jeff Kemp and I decided not to try to cut weight to lightweight and decided to row an open, coxless pair (Debbie's converted double, so it was really a coxless, rudderless pair!). We trained together and at times had some of the best swing I've ever felt. We went to Dad Vails in the pair, qualified for the finals, and finished just short of a medal in 4<sup>th</sup> place (to our nemesis FIT). Had we had a rudder I have no doubt that we would have finished second or third given we rowed an extra 100-200mm due to our erratic course. I still remember rowing with Jeff back to the boathouse knowing that it was my last row in college and feeling like something was already missing.

I rowed at Harvard Business School from 1991-93, but the feeling was completely different by then.

The *commute* to the boathouse... a mere 2-minute jog across the bridge. *Fundraising*...? You've got to be kidding...this is HBS. *Team*...? Whoever was free to row after class.

Writing this has got me thinking and want to catch up with some of the best guys I spent time with in college... Thanks Eddie, Jeff K., and Jeff L.

Most of all thanks Debbie, for without you I am absolutely convinced there would never have been a GaTech Crew.

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*I still remember rowing with Jeff back to the boathouse knowing that it was my last row in college and feeling like something was already missing.*

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## REFLECTIONS

*"Hmmm...anecdotes. To be honest, there isn't much I remember that won't get someone in trouble (even me)."*

**Sara Willson**

"Damn - I don't think I have any stories that could be put down in a book. I don't know if that's a good thing or not."

**Bito**

### The Funky Monkey

The entire sprint season of 1992 was just one giant anecdote. I rowed bowseat in the novice men's 8+ (aka "The Funky Monkey"), in a wild season that saw us win a couple of medals (including the Silver at SIRA) and finish the season with an appearance at Dad Vail. That season was probably my most successful as an athlete. After crew, I continued to race bicycles, but never saw the same success as I did with those guys. Until I met Brandi and Cody (wife and step child), it was THE best time of my life.

**David Penn**

*"Most races are decided even before the crews get on the water. 0.03 seconds will be burned in my mind forever."*

**Gil Nowell**

[referring to the Vmen 97 ltwt 8+ 2<sup>nd</sup> place finish at Champion]



*It is funny now, but founding the Georgia Tech Rowing Club will probably be my greatest legacy of my times at Georgia Tech - At the time we were doing it, I never thought that. I thought this would be a good thing, but I am very impressed with the continued dedication every year of the members to continue to grow and develop the crew effort.*

**Michael May**

## Fireworks Anecdote

Carol Sikes

"It isn't really spring break unless you set off fireworks on the beach at night; and if you're going to set off a lot of fireworks, do the big ones first in case the cops come; and then if the cops do come, light the whole bag on fire and then run so at least you can watch them all go off instead of letting the cops take the good ones and keep them for themselves"



***Fireworks: do the big ones first in case the cops***

## Rower / Coxswain Relationships

Charles Reed

One time we went to Eat's after practice in Spring '97, and on the way out to the car, Cliff Cantrell and Gary (David Jimenez) were fighting over who got to ride shotgun. Since they would be riding in my stylish blue Volvo 240, shotgun was quite an honor. Given the attitudes involved, it was no surprise they were arguing.

So Gary pushes Cliff back from the door and heavyweight Cliff (190lb.) picks up coxswain Gary (buck+change, and soaking wet), walks around to the back of the car, and says to me, "Open the trunk." So I thought it would be funny to pretend that we would put Gary in the trunk, and I opened it up.

Then Cliff put him in the trunk and Gary looked at us like "this is funny, but you don't have the guts." So Cliff said, "Close it!" and I did, thinking it would be funny to make Gary believe we would leave him in there. Then Cliff said, "let's go".

At first I hesitated, but I went along with it and we drove off with Gary in the trunk. While we were driving back, Bobby O'Keefe opened the ski hole between the back seat and the trunk and said, "Gary, you alright?" Gary threw a flashlight at Bobby, to which Bobby said, "okay, talk to you later" before closing the ski hole back.

We got back to campus, dropped Bobby off at his dorm, and parked in the deck on West Campus. Now I was getting into the prank, and I suggested that Cliff and I go get a book he wanted to borrow, leaving Gary to wait it out. After leaving Gary in the parked car for about 15 minutes, Cliff and I decided to come back and open the trunk.

When I raised the trunk, Gary was crouched with the tire iron in his hand. He chased Cliff a full 2 laps around the parking deck before watching Cliff get away and making his peace with me. While he had been waiting in the deck, he used my trunk tools and started taking apart the trunk lock, which we then put back together. Later that night, Gary avenged his incarceration. He got into Eighth St. Apt.'s and while Cliff was sleeping, he snuck up on him and dumped a trash can full of ice on his bed.

A year or so later, Gary's parents surprised him with a car at Christmas. He got the key and went outside - only to see a blue Volvo 240 in the driveway that looked exactly like mine. The trunk looked especially familiar to him.

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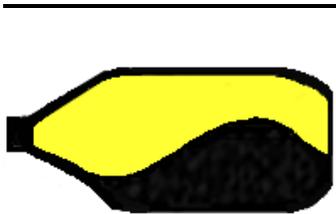
*"So I thought it would be funny to pretend that we would put Gary in the trunk, and I opened it up."*

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The Tech Blade Design



The GT Crew Blade Design

Most rowers think that we're some type of Math freaks and can't get enough of our trigonometric functions of the Sine and Cosine wave functions - well at least those rowers from Tech. UGA rowers don't know what a Sine wave is.

The Tech Blade Design originates from Norm Vickers, a former coach. Norm came from Dook [sic] Crew, bringing with him the "art of Zen rowing." As Jim Wilson recalls, "He saw me clenching my oar handle with this death-grip/vulture/tetanus that prompted him to give me the 'go with the flow' lecture. This led directly to the bastardized Tao design on our blades". Tech's blade represents the dualism found in rowing, as in life. The 'altered' Ying Yang symbol in represents the grace of crew by its demand for synchronization and technique, while requiring raw muscle to win.

Atlanta Rowing Festival 1999

*"After several years of losses to GT Crew in Mens' lwt & hwt events, the Clemson men continued to search for a way to win just one eights race. In lining up to launch for the Mens' open 8+, we noticed stickers on the backs of each of the Clemson rowers' backs. "GT Crew" was all they said, I guess to pump them up each stroke of the race in an attempt to beat us.*

*It didn't work."*

**Bobby O'Keefe**

**Debbie (McKenna) Permenter**

*"She was also an amazingly generous person, donating her time, money, and advice to the team. Like Mr. Hunter, she was also controversial. Some folks got along well with her, some didn't. I thought she was a real fire cracker. I always enjoyed spending time at the Magnolia Tea Room (her restaurant)... she'd have us work there as a team to help us earn money. She was a wonderful friend and wound up writing me a letter of recommendation for med school. I learned so much by working with her."*

**Jim Wilson**



Power and Determination, like our original founders

*"[She] helped get the club into full gear and single-handedly kept us going for most of the first two years. Someone attempted to start a crew program at Tech almost 10 years earlier but failed. She coordinated fund-raising, coordinated regattas, boat "rental" at regattas, coxed us, rowed with us, employed some of us, and fed most of us when we were hungry. Not too bad for a 5'4", 120lb "chick" (said with the utmost respect Debbie)."*

*"Without you [Debbie] I am absolutely convinced there would never have been a GaTech Crew."*

**Chris Perras, Founding Member**

Joining the Crew team was a life altering decision for me...

Janet Kinard Green

After not doing anything my freshman year, the crew team helped me get myself together. Over the years, being on the team taught me all sorts of things to succeed in life. I met my closed friends on the crew team. That is probably why I still try to do so much for the team. I know how it affected me and I want to make everyone's experience as positive.

In my years on the team, the lightweight women - my boat - went to Dad Vails 3 times. The second time - Spring 96 - was the most fun I ever had at Dad Vails. You might wonder how that can be since that was the year the van flipped taking most of our boats with it. Driving up on that accident was the very worst feeling in the world. But for most of us that went, that Dad Vails proved to be the most fun and rewarding. I remember going into the hospital to check on the novice lightweight men who had been in the flipped van while the novice heavyweight men went "sploring" to see what they could find. They ended up on top of the hospital throwing stones down on Chris Betz. Everyone was fine and after a long night, on we went to Philly. Once we got to Philadelphia, the true spirit of the rowing community came through. All the officials and fellow rowers worked so hard to help us. They found boats for us to row and basically helped in any way possible. Word had already gotten out about the accident and everyone was lined up to offer support. The results of that Dad Vails was a medal for most boats that went, a third place overall finish for the team, and a suspension that kept us from rowing at Georgia Tech that fall.

The third Dad Vails that I went to was the best we had ever done, missing first place by so little that we weren't sure whether to celebrate a silver medal or be upset for missing gold. That Dad Vails was the most rewarding to my boat—Kim Becker (Miller), Dana McAlhany, Shelly Holdren, Sara Willson, and myself—because we had worked so hard and knew that we would do well. The bronze we won in 96 was so unexpected that we were nothing but happy. But in 97 we knew we would do well. We thought we would win which made it so hard to settle for second. However, it is always satisfying to watch hard work pay off.

I could go on and on about the crew team. Like the time we got stuck out in a storm with Carol as coxswain. Or when the Dad Vails committee instituted a "no peeing over side of the boat rule" after Andrea did so while waiting for our race to start. Or firing Coach Bob at Spring Break and then setting off fireworks in celebration—Operation Trebor. Parties at the Townhouse. But then I would start sounding like a high school yearbook. So I'll leave it at that.




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*"The results of that Dad Vails was a medal for most boats that went, a third place overall finish for the team, and a suspension that kept us from rowing at Georgia Tech that fall"*

*"I can't tell you how many times I cross Key Bridge in Georgetown, see the eights, fours, and singles going down the Potomac and dream about rowing in the Sting with my friends- that was what it all was really about- being with great friends."*

**Jim Wilson, President GT Crew '92**

## The 1997 Varsity Men's lightweight 8+...

David "Guery Jones" Jimenez, cox'n

It all started innocently enough for me. I was sitting around the dorm one day my freshman year, when Charles Reed and Dana McAlhany came around recruiting for the crew team. Not knowing anything about rowing except that it could obviously produce such marvelous physiques such as the ones I saw before me, I thought I'd go see what it was all about. They talked it up well, and asked me if I had ever done any sports before.

So, the varsity team had a shortage of coxswains, and I was pulled up from the novice team almost immediately. Coach Rob pretty much showed me which end was the stern, which was the bow, and that it was better to make the shell move towards the stern rather than the bow as fast as possible. That, and a confidence-inspiring, "Oh yeah, I almost forgot, Gary. Don't wreck it." That was the end of my formal training and the beginning of a season of fast rowing and even faster women (Cliff).

Things were going along okay up to spring break. I still didn't really understand what I had gotten into or what the expectations were for this team. Things started to click in PC, people started to hit together, and the boat started moving faster. I started to learn what it was I was supposed to do besides not wreck, thanks especially to the infinite patience of Dan Carroll and Kelly Williamson.

Our first race was at Clemson, in choppy water, with Rob and a couple of officials riding in the launch behind me the whole way to make sure I didn't do too much to kill the boat or some rowers. I didn't, and we even walked away with a silver medal. The next week at Atlanta Rowing Festival we did well again, placing first in the light 8 event, and second in the open 8. Keep in mind that this is the same lineup for both races, 8 lightweights and cox. The open race was a close one, in more ways than one. The winner was determined by not more than a couple of seats, and at the point where the course turned slightly left, we were no more than about 3 inches off of Clemson's blades. Clemson had the inside lane, and we were RIGHT NEXT to them. All the while, I'm scared out of my mind, just trying to make a beeline for the finish and not kill anyone in the process, and say some of that motivational stuff that I'd been told rowers like, and tell them where we were, and tell them where everyone else was. Amazingly enough, we never clashed blades. I attribute this to Cliff "The Bitch" Cantrell and Zack "I Want a Beer" Reed pulling harder on port when they saw how terrible my steering was.

The next week we went to ACCs in Raleigh. The Light 8 was a relatively easy race. We were able to pull out in front at the start and settle at a low rate for the last half of the race. The entire time, Mike Smith was telling me to steer to port. But I was right, the other coxswains were wrong. Curvature had allowed Mike to see all of the other boats, and how they were just rowing straight to the docks, realizing that to chase us was an exercise in futility. The Open 8 event was a different matter, though. By this time of day, it was raining, cold and miserable. So we pull up to the starting area, only to have to wait for five or ten minutes for Duke to show up. Once the race started, Duke took off, since they were still warm and every other crew on the water was cold. By the 1000 meter mark, we were still down to both Duke and Clemson by about half to three-quarters of a length. But as everyone who has ever rowed for Rob knows, "GTCrew OWNS the third 500." We started pulling up. Bit by bit. Now, the finish line at Raleigh is slightly staggered, so by the last 500 it was difficult to say who was ahead, and as a novice coxswain, this made it difficult for me to tell exactly how far we had to go. Rob had told me to call the pop between 100 and 200 meters to go, depending on how



*"They then asked if I wanted to row or cox. Hahaha. Weighing in at a mighty 112 pounds, little did I know that my fate had already been decided. Stupid rowers."*

## The 1997 Varsity Men's lightweight 8+... Cont'd

the race was going. Since it was such a tight race, I called the pop with what I thought was about 200 meters to go. WRONG. I didn't count the strokes, but later on Millard told me that he didn't mind such a long sprint, but next time I should let him know that I want him to pop for 28 strokes. In any case, it was a very close finish, and nobody knew who had won, not even spectators or officials on shore. So we had to wait through the entire awards ceremony to find out, much to the surprise of even the announcer, that we had won both the Light and Open 8.

SIRAs was an equally intense race. The final field that day for the Light 8 included Marietta, Michigan State, UTC, all tough schools. At the beginning of the second 500, all I said was "Get on your bikes and ride!" I've never seen people in such pain look so happy. For those of you who don't know, this is a line from *Fat Bottomed Girls*, by Queen. We won this race with open water, and a new catch phrase had been coined.

This year, we decided to go to the Champion Regatta rather than Vails for what Rob decided was better competition. Despite a tremendous effort on our part we were unable to quite come up with the 0.03 seconds it took to beat a very fast Boston College team in the finals. It was a great disappointment to all of us, especially after such a good season and with the high expectations we had of ourselves.

However, we decided within the next couple of days that it would be worth it to go to IRAs in Camden, which were to be held about 3 weeks later. Crew at Georgia Tech isn't easy for anyone with the kind of classwork that this school demands. However, many people sacrificed a great deal of their time over the next few weeks to get the work done early that would enable them to go to this regatta, which was held the weekend before finals. We stepped up the training, expecting the level of competition there to be higher. We had no idea how much more. In the heats, Harvard (Shakespear readers-thereof, as Jonathan called them) and the other Ivies pulled away at a blinding pace and continued to steadily pull away throughout the race. In the petit finals, we finished third to MIT and Dartmouth, beating every other club team there.

So, the season, while not perfect, had come to a satisfying close. I started out knowing nothing about rowing. The eight rowers who had made it into the fastest boat Tech had produced to date, Gil "Mr Boat Average" Nowell, Josh "The Freshman" Vose, Jeremy "Regulator" Hutcherson, Zack "I Want a Beer" Reed, Steve "Old Man" Georgalis, Cliff "The Bitch" Cantrell, Marcus "Ducky" Millard, and Michael "Smitty" Smith, had shown me what it was to give 100% effort, by giving everything they had and doing whatever it took to become a champion, a lesson I will carry with me forever.

*"The eight rowers who had made it into the fastest boat Tech had produced to date...had shown me what it was to give 100% effort, by giving everything they had and doing whatever it took to become a champion, a lesson I will carry with me forever."*

## Dad Vails 1999 Varsity Women's open pair ... Jill (Hoffmaster) O'Keefe

At Dad Vails 1999, Rhiannon Morgan and I were rowing the pair, which we started rowing only 2 weeks before. Because our feet were too small for the steering mechanism on the shoes, we had taped the shoe to the footplate before the race. At the start of the heats, the starter informed us that we would be disqualified if we cut the turn at the bridge or didn't finish in our lane.

About 500 meters into the race, the follow boat screamed at us, "Georgia Tech, if you cut the red buoy you are disqualified!!!" Because I was rowing bow, I turned around and saw the buoy about 2 boatlengths ahead. I screamed at Rhiannon and she plunged her oar in the water, turning us almost 90 degrees. The buoy went under our riggers, but we made it...

After making it to the finals, we were a little more confident, especially after hearing Harriet's "Powerful Beyond Measure" speech by Nelson Mandela. We had a decent start and made it through the bridge ok. In the last 500 meters, though, we realized that we were several lanes over. We made a mad dash for our lane, while trying to hold our place. We finished 3rd, only inches away from 2nd, which we would have had if it weren't for the 45 degree course towards the finish line.

## Our First Gold...

Karlene Berger

I am just a transfer student. I came from a small school, and I was happy to be surrounded by a great deal more people at Tech. The trouble was, I didn't really know any of these people. I eventually met Brooks and I was pushed into trying to cox. Mainly because the novice team didn't really have any constant coxswains.

Our Fall season was a good start and a good introduction to the "crew life", I suppose if you could call it anything, perhaps a cult. When spring came around, my team got serious about winning. The men's novice team is quite a story of soap opera conflict. I won't sugar coat it, there were a lot of fights between members in the boat. On the water. Fights between me and members in the boat. Towards mid-season, I was scared we wouldn't be able to hold it together as a team.

At SIRAs, our first true novice light eight sprint, when my team had finally gotten our butts into gear, our minds focused, and our hearts had been set on taking home gold, we got beaten by Purdue by .61 seconds. That was an amazing and exciting race, but we weren't satisfied. 0.61 seconds burned. My inspirational speech about prom queens certainly hadn't come through.

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*“Our boat had come to do the job, no more kidding around. Before we set out on the water, the war paint was applied”*

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Dad Vails was going to be ours. It was as clear as the see-through mesh on the side of my spandex shorts.

The day of the race, we weighed in and it seemed like we sat around, waiting for our chance to shine all day. No one was talkative. Our boat had come to do the job, no more kidding around. Before we set out on the water, the war paint was applied. Each of my rowers had .61 on the backs of their necks to remind them of SIRAs. I even had it written on my chest because this is where my stroke's gaze tended to fall. On the way up to the start, my boat was quiet, and while practicing starts they felt as smooth and as fast as they had ever been.

At the start 6-seat, Drew Frisch, looked over at Purdue who was in the lane next to us, and puked. I heard them point at him and say "that's hardcore" and before the race had even started, I knew they were scared. They had seen us launch with our necks ablaze with the glory that was about to be ours.

Equipment does break, though, and for Purdue in the first 100 meters it did. This delayed the race about 20 minutes or so. Which made the tension only build.

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*“it was only Purdue that was in front of us by half a boat's length. They were going to be ours.”*

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The second start was good and by the 30 degree bend at Strawberry Mansion Bridge, it was only Purdue that was in front of us by half a boat's length. They were going to be ours. I waited until just after 1000 meters to call triple sevens, our power move in the middle of the race. After the first 7, something in the boat clicked on - we took off so fast that Purdue didn't even know what hit them. By the end of our triple sevens - they were blown away and didn't recover.

I remember the sprint because of Tech's chant. The calls of "Lets Go Tech" pretty much deafened us – it was the first time ever hearing any cheering during the race. The chant seemed to fuel the fire and, keep the rate up for the rest of the sprint. Crossing the line first felt good and

*(Continued on page 13)*

## ...Our First Gold

*(Continued from page 12)*

my whole boat was overcome with emotion. We actually watched Purdue cross the line, there was enough time that we beat them by.

It hit us all different – the fact that we were the first Tech boat to get a Gold at Vails. Some of us were loud about it (me obviously) and some of us were quiet. Tobias and Drew said nothing. Trevor and Dave did the victory stroke they had practiced all season. Mike O'Toole just beamed in the bow. The rest of the team meanwhile was just as happy for us – they couldn't scream at us enough it seemed.

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*“It hit us all different – the fact that we were the first Tech boat to get a Gold at Vails.”*

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After docking, we went back to the trailer and of course it was time for me to go into the water. All 8 of them were a little too energetic, but at least they let me take my glasses and medal off. Luckily to better coordinate, they let me cox them through the process. “All 8, hands on me! Up-over-heads-and-up!” People tell me when I called up over heads, everyone around us was staring. People stopped what they were doing, little kids stopped crying, the world stopped and stared. I guess a blonde haired girl being carried over heads, not shoulders, but up over heads back to the dock was a sight to see. We made it down to the dock and with the 3 swing salute I took a swim. It was a swim in what I don't remember to be the cleanest water I have been in. Immediately after I was saluted in, so did Coach Ethan - not by his decision and not by a salute, but a little encouraged push in the right direction. My whole team followed us after a minute.

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*“No one moment in their life can make them who they are. But there is always a certain profoundness that one can attach to moments in their life.”*

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I spent my whole life loving swimming and the water, but getting out of the Schuylkill River was one of the best feelings I have had in my life. I never thanked Coach Ethan for getting me there, but he deserves a lot of the credit.

Crew has made me much more of a leader than I ever thought I had in me. I have met so many great people in my only one year as a coxswain.. It made me like team sports again, which I hadn't liked in a long time.

No one thing can define a person. No one moment in their life can make them who they are. But there is always a certain profoundness that one can attach to moments in their life. A significance. The one moment in your life when you shine above those around you. When the light hits you and nothing else. All 9 of us felt it that day so strongly that I think those around us could see it. In fact I could actually feel it radiating off of us. I know its one thing I will never forget in my entire life. Not Ever.

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Karlene Berger,  
Coxswain men's novice lightweight 8,  
2000 Dad Vails Gold

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“I know its one thing I will never forget in my entire life. Not Ever.”

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## Jim Wilson - my experience




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*“There is rarely a day that goes by that I don’t see the water rush by the boat, hear the oars roll in the oar locks, and feel the power of the boat.”*

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I joined GT Crew in fall 1990, when Jim Cooper was coach. Jim had this lightening bolt tattoo on the inside of his forearm- presumably from his surfing days. A real character. He was the one who taught me my first stroke and my permanence in 2 Seat. He’d pile us all into the Eddie Montalvo -the God-knows-how-old wooden eight (“floating leg-press”). The Montalvo was named after a GT Crew member who rowed in the first men’s fours and stroked the National Team Lightweight 8+. I think Eddie was a Cuban guy who could take that last power ten/twenty in a race at a rate of 50. They did pretty well at Vails. Even in the Montalvo, Miguel Maldonado still needed a power sander to grind down his quads so he could clear his hands on the recovery.

Jim Melchioris rowed in six seat. Jimmy and I bickered in the boat a lot. He seemed to be able to channel the Force through his mind to the point of being able to tell that the set for the entire eight was screwed up beyond belief due to my personal hand levels in 2 Seat. One day he mouthed off about the set while Cooper was circling the boat in his launch, and I got so mad I tried to climb over 3 Seat to beat his ass. It was pretty funny to look back on, and we became fast friends later... great memory. Always wondered what ever happened to that guy.

Norm Vickers came to us from ‘Dook’ Crew the following year. He was a terrific coach- he brought solidarity, team spirit, technique and capability, and just plain fun. He was a wiry guy who loved rowing singles... never forget at one party some of my boatmates thought it’d be fun to try and de-pant him in front of everyone. Well, five guys (including Betz) were unable to do it, and he picked up Dave Penn by his ankle-with one hand-and held him above the linoleum floor. Yeow. Norm

### What are we left with after GT Crew?

I loved GT Crew, and it definitely changed my life. I think it was actually the reason I was able to get myself together enough to go to med school. There is rarely a day that goes by that I don’t see the water rush by the boat, hear the oars roll in the oar locks, and feel the power of the boat. Crew stimulated a lot of creative energy.

... In the end, it was about my friends and the awesome people I met while rowing. When I left Georgia Tech and returned to Cincinnati, I tried to get back into the experience with Xavier Crew and with my high school program, Cincinnati Country Day Crew (yes, the same school mentioned by name in the movie “Traffic”- for which they are now being sued). But, it just wasn’t the same. It was about your friends. I hope you’re having the same terrific experience.

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

September 1992 found the lightweight men full of both hope and uncertainty. The uncertainty hinged on the results of last spring's lightweight eight. They had finished dead last in their heat at the regional championships. Hope flourished because of the success of the lightweight fours at regionals. Both the varsity and novice lightweight fours had won SIRAs convincingly and we hoped to build on that success in the new season. In addition, GT Crew was the proud owner of a brand new, top of the line Vespoli 8 and a set of new "hatchet" style oars. It was the first new 8 Tech had ever gotten. Jim Wilson, president at the time, had lobbied hard in the halls of student government to fund the new boat. Christened "The Sting", the new boat proved to be light, stiff and fast! Not wanting to be outclassed by all the flashy cars in Atlanta, we put a fake cell phone antenna on the stern deck and our new boat was ready for action.

There were twelve lightweights coming into the fall season. However, it became rapidly clear who would make up the eight. Heather Shand was the coxswain and left no misunderstanding that she felt that this was a team of nine. She did all of our workouts with us and drove our boat exclusively. She had a light touch on the rudder, was extremely aggressive and would talk to us, instead of yelling at us, as we went down the course. If Heather was yelling, it was at the competition. Chad Markle was our stroke and rowed like a metronome. He would nail ratings targets and had the strength and endurance to lead the boat in all situations. I rowed right behind Chad in the 7 seat. Chad and I were a yin and yang of sorts. I was constantly pushing to bring the rating up, Chad working to keep me from going out too fast. We had a deal; if he got us into the last 500 meters near the front and I would bring us home. Chris Betz, Chris Vail, Oliver Weber and Jim Melchoirs made up the "engine room" and provided the main source of power for the boat. Whenever Heather called for 10's or rating shifts, these guys were the reason Chad and I could stick it. Eric Johnson and Joel Peters rode up front. The bowmen have the biggest impact on the balance of the boat and the smallest flaws in technique by these two will be felt by the entire boat. These guy's consistent technique gave us a stable platform to work from. Our coach for the year was Victoria Mixon. She had just moved to Atlanta after graduating from MIT and volunteered for the job to stay in touch with the rowing community. Vicki brought some new perspectives to the team and had the demeanor to deal with our boat's somewhat obnoxious attitude. I would say that during those nine months, I looked at these people more like my family than my boat. Most mornings, they were the first people I saw after waking up and a lot of nights, the last people I saw before bed.

Our first race of the fall was in Jacksonville, Florida. As is typical for smaller races, they did not have a lightweight eight event and we were to race the open race. The open race was the last one of the day, scheduled for late in the afternoon and we had plenty of time to kill before our race. We rigged up The Sting, went over all the settings with a fine tooth comb, then did it again to bleed some anxious energy. As the day wore on, we got tired of tinkering with the boat and fired up a touch football game in the parking lot. Fun was had by all until Chris "Hands of Stone" Betz got a little overzealous going after a pass, pulled a Superman and tore his hand up on the graveled pavement. Needless to say, that put a quick end to the game. We picked the gravel out of his hand, wrapped it in paper towels and duct tape and explained to him how stupid he was and that under no circumstances was this an excuse not to pull. By the time we got Betz sorted, it was time to launch for the race.

The course in Jacksonville was one of the most fun I've rowed on. It starts out on the St. John's River, a major seaway full of merchant and military traffic, before turning onto a tributary. It is quite daunting to look up from your 18" wide shell at a large container ship. We had three boats entered in the race. Since we liked to pass people, we chose to take the last of our slots, putting us second to last in the start order. The boat following us was "The Sons of the Beach", a masters boat from South Florida with a reputation of being fast. We queued up, set our spacing and were off with the Sons in distant chase. Through the first half of the course, we closed the distance to the first boat. Unfortunately, we had to ease up a bit to follow the boat through two bridges. Once clear of the bridges, we put the hammer down. About 600 meters from the finish, the course made a hard right turn. After we cleared the bridge, Heather set us up on the left and swept into the corner. Coming through, we passed four boats simultaneously, including both of the other Tech boats and made our run to the finish.

Our final count was 6 boats passed on the course and a narrow victory over the Sons of the Beach. When they found out that they had lost to Georgia Tech, they were shocked. For one thing, they had passed two Georgia Tech boats on the course. Unfortunately for them, three were entered. In addition, they weren't too pleased about getting spanked by a

*(Continued on page 16)*

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

*(Continued from page 15)*

bunch of scrawny lightweights. Well that would be something the heavies would have to get used to. Back in Atlanta, somebody stole into the boathouse and put a “Buzz” sticker on the gunwale at the coxswain’s seat. From here on out, a “Buzz” was put on the gunwale for every victory.

The Head of the Chattahoochee was our next race. Held on our home water, this was the focus for our fall season and the largest fall race in the Southeast. The Florida Institute of Technology, a varsity program from Melbourne, was the defending champion in the lightweight 8 and heavily favored to repeat. Based on our poor showings in previous years, we were seeded deep in the race and would start well back in the pack. We felt like this was a good thing, fitting well with our mantra of “Catch ‘em, Pass ‘em, Gas ‘em, Leave ‘em”. In our huddle before the race, we called for passing five boats to win the race, then launched to head down to the start.

Coming through the start gate, Heather had us almost right on the boat ahead of us and was all over us to reel in the first boat. We were rowing well at a 28, closed the gap rapidly and pulled through in the first third of the race. The second third of the course is a long, sweeping right turn. Going wide through this turn can be devastating to a crew’s chance at victory. Heather took us way inside, putting our blades in the mud, sliding our bows just inside the boats ahead of us and forcing them outside to clear our path. Coming into the final straightaway, we were towing four boats up the river. We picked it up to a 32 and it was like we were shot out of a cannon. In the last 500 meters we opened at least four boatlengths on everyone. Our tally in Atlanta: five boats passed, a 35 second victory over FIT, Tech Crew’s first ‘Hooch victory and a second “Buzz” for the gunwale.

Our last race of the fall season was a little bit different than most. The Augusta Rowing Club was putting on their first head race and because of the strong current on the Savannah River, decided to have what they dubbed a “U-turn” regatta. Instead of paddling down to the start and racing back, this race would go upriver a mile and a half, rip a 180 degree corner in the middle of the river and race back down. Interesting concept for a sixty foot boat with a rudder the size of a business card.

Our boat had a rule, “Train like you plan to race”, and it was no different for the u-turn. Before a practice, we hatched a plan for how we could turn an eight around in the width of a river at full pressure. We decided that the best way to accomplish this was to have one side of the boat put on the brakes by holding water while the other side yanked as hard as they could. If we needed the extra turning force, Heather was to put her body in the water and try to use it like a rudder. The first time we tried it, all of us on the port side damn near knocked ourselves out of the boat when the oar handles came flying back. We decided that a little less aggressive “hold water” was in order and soon we were tearing corners like an F1 car. Well maybe not quite that well, but it was in the width of the ‘Hooch.

Spinning around the upriver side of the island one time, we heard this nasty screech from under the boat. We stopped the boat, checked the bilges for water, found none and finished up our practice. We made a horrifying discovery while wiping the boat down after practice. The screech was caused by a submerged stake that had slit the belly of The Sting for over a third of it’s length. The Sting was out for the season and would have to pay a visit to the Vespoli factory to go under the knife. It was pretty sickening to see our boat down for the count.

We ended up racing Augusta in the Long John, a good boat, but not nearly as fast as our baby. Again, there was no lightweight race, so we entered multiple boats in the open event. For this race, we chose the first slot, thinking that we didn’t want to get piled up behind a lot of crews trying to make the corner. Our plan was to stay low on the rating going upriver, tear the corner and take a power 20 to bring the rating up to a 32 for the remainder of the race. Through the first part of the race, the Clemson boat was holding right off our stern and had us a bit concerned, but the concern was unfounded. Heather noticed that the corner was a lot wider than what we had practiced and filled us in on the new plan. We tore through the corner, garnering applause from the referees, and opened up a huge gap on Clemson. Heather called the 20 to bring up the rating and we cruised home for our third victory in three tries. No “Buzz” though; The Sting had sat this one out.

After salvaging our grades through the end of the quarter and enjoying some holiday time with our families, it was time to start doing the serious training associated with head to head sprint racing. Our typical workout schedule was focused on putting miles under the keel with the goal of building endurance, swing, power and, of course, pain threshold. To avoid equipment conflicts, we got our water workouts in between 5 and 7 am every weekday except Monday and two weekend rows at more civilized times.

*(Continued on page 17)*

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

*(Continued from page 16)*

Throw in classes, studying and three afternoon practices a week that involved running, weightlifting or spending time on the erg and you've got a full week. Once spring racing season started, there were only a couple of changes to the schedule; we had to de-rig and load the boat after practice Friday morning, race on Saturday and re-rig before practice on Sunday.

Each year, the crew spends their spring break down in Panama City for a week of intensive training before the beginning of the spring season. Of course, there were a lot of other things aside from training going on in Panama City as well. Each day, we got in a fitness row in the morning, made a beach run around lunch time and finished up the day with a technique row in the late evening. The winter workouts had clearly developed our fitness and were swinging well together, but boat set, that rock solid balance of the boat, continued to elude us.

For one of our technique sessions, Vicki had us rowing on the square with two people out to hold the boat set. These types of workouts are just plain boring...monotony and repetition...just boring. For the whole practice, the only thing we heard about from Heather in the backseat and Vicki in the launch was timing at the finish. Finish together, everybody out clean at the finish, finish timing, finish timing, finish timing. I just wanted some dinner. On the way back home, Vicki had us bring in the bow pair to row all eight on the square. Everyone in boat braced for what would surely be a very painful experience. How wrong we were. Eric and Joel came in, nailed the timing at the catch and the boat set up like it had pontoons. Finally, we had put all of the pieces together.

For the rest of the week, we learned how to trust the set and spend the recovery concentrating on how hard we were going to destroy the catch. To emphasize the finish timing, we started feathering the blades hard at the finish, making a very loud, authoritative "thunk" at the end of every stroke. For the rest of the season, any time the boat would get lax on concentration, Vail or Heather would call for "the thunk" and we'd pull it back together. On the way down to the starting line, we liked to row at a really low rating with the boat set and nailing the finishes really loud. Most the time, it would silence the folks on the shore. Talk about intimidation.

We headed to Augusta for our first race straight from Panama City. The Tech alumni in Augusta had been bitten by the rowing bug and were making a terrific showing for the race. These guys had gone out on the river one night and painted a huge GT on a bridge embankment. The image of these 40+ men sneaking around on the river at night just cracks me up. In addition, we all crashed in alumni houses that night and were treated to a great spread of snacks at the race course. It was great to have that sort of support for a race.

Quite a few northeastern schools take spring training at Augusta and the invitational is usually a display of Ivy League speed. Vicki decided to enter us in the Open Dad Vail race instead of the lightweight race. She figured we didn't need to see the big boys yet. We got a pretty clean start and chased Jacksonville's boat down the course to finish second. Not the result we were looking for, but something to grow from.

The next weekend, our boat was excited about getting to display some speed on our home water at the Atlanta Rowing Festival. We were really looking forward to making a big contribution toward the overall team trophy by rowing both the lightweight and open 8 races, as well as breaking the boat to cover the open and lightweight 4 races. We all arrived at the race course early to weigh in after skipping dinner and in some cases, running to drop a few pounds. After weigh-ins, we found out that everyone had scratched from the lightweight 8 race and that our head coach wasn't going to let us row the 4's even though it would substantially increase the team's chances of winning the overall trophy. We tried to get anyone to race in the lightweight 8 by offering a boat, oars and entry fee to anyone who'd show up. Nobody took the offer, including Augusta College, who had two lightweight 4's entered. We were furious and spent the whole day stewing about it.

By race time for the open 8, we were all pretty hot from the day's events. In our huddle, we decided to row the 2000 meter course in under 6 minutes. There was a buoy at what we thought was the halfway point. At the buoy, Heather was to check our elapsed time on course and decide what to do from there. On the water, we lined up against the Clemson 8 and Tech's open 8. We had convinced the Technique, the student newspaper, to do an article on the team and had managed to place a photographer on the judge's boat following our race. The flag dropped and within the first twenty strokes, we had pulled open water on both boats. The judges launch wouldn't follow us for fear of waking the other two boats, so no pictures of us. At the buoy, we had

*(Continued on page 18)*

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

*(Continued from page 17)*

been racing for well over three minutes and Heather uttered four of my favorite words, “Let’s take it up!”. We kicked it into gear and finished the race at well over 40 strokes per minute...elapsed time, 5:42. It turns out that the buoy was almost three quarters of the way down the course and we were moving well to begin with. Kicking it at the end was just icing on the cake. Tally showed one more “Buzz” for the boat and a picture of the Open 8 for the Technique.

About the only interesting thing at the Clemson race was the wakes thrown up by bass boats being driven by guys in crash helmets. During one of our races, we had a pair of boats pass us, one on each side, then both crossed in front of us. Heather saw this and called, “Wake on starboard...wake on port...oh SHIT!” The wake was easily a foot over each side of the boat and smacked Mel-choirs in the back of the head. Even so, we cruised to easy victories in both the open and lightweight 8 races and affixed two more bees to our baby.

A new race was planned for this season. Called the Champion International Intercollegiate Regatta, it was an invitation only race and was to serve as a sort of Division II championship race. Chad found the announcement. We chatted about it and decided that if we won at regionals, we should go. Chad brought this up at one of the officer’s meeting and was rebuffed. The head coach said, “We all know that the Women’s Novice Lightweight 4 is our most competitive boat. Why don’t we pay to send them all over the country?” Chad was livid. We had lost only one race going all the way back to the fall season compared to a crew that had one two races during the spring. He got home, walked into the living room and said to me, “I want to make SIRA look like Atlanta!” I just looked at him in shock. I’m supposed to be the excitable one, not Chad and here he was all fired up. I stood up, grabbed him on the shoulders and told him there was only one response, win SIRA and qualify for the race.

Coming into the Southern Regional Championship (SIRA) race, we had a chip on our shoulders and something to prove. Whether it was to ourselves or to the world was unclear, but a convincing win would take care of it either way. We checked the heat and lane assignments as soon as we arrived in Oak Ridge on Friday night. We found ourselves slated way outside in lane 6 based on results from the previous year and realized that we hadn’t raced any of the other crews in our heat before. This added a lot to our anxiety, led to a lot of nervous banter, even more quiet contemplation and, for me at least, a very restless night.

There is one good thing about being assigned an outside lane. You only have to look to one side to keep an eye on the competition. Of course, I would never look out of the boat during a race. The way the course is set up, we were the last crew to get on the stake and sat ready for what seemed like an eternity while the starter polled the crews in preparation for the start. I could feel a nervous tension in the boat that had never been there before. A few of us were shaking, the rest focused on the starter waiting for the flag to drop. It was finally time to find out if we really had some speed. The flag went up, then down again. Three quarters, half, half, three quarters full and on for 20, we left the line in frenzied rush of abbreviated strokes. Just as we started to settle, a couple of boats in the middle of the course got tied up and the judges called us back for a restart. I looked over at the other crews and realized that WE ALREADY HAD OPEN WATER ON THE FIELD! The bowman of the second place crew was looking around with a satisfied look on his face...until he noticed us well in front of him. He tapped his two-man on the shoulder and pointed at us. When he saw us, he just dropped his head. My only thought: “We own you!” We got lined up for the second start, rowed the first half at race pace, then cruised the last half to qualify easily for the afternoon finals.

For the finals that afternoon, we lined up right in the middle of the action in lane 3. The crew from Marietta college had won the other heat and were placed on our left side in lane 4. Although there was some nervousness about the race, it was nothing like the heats. We got on the stake, got set and made a clean start. We settled in with about half a boat on both Marietta College and the University of Florida. Over the first half of the course, we were able to open up a couple of more seats on Marietta and push Florida of our stern. We made our big move near the halfway mark, and Marietta was still there. What was this? There wasn’t supposed to be any boats close to us this far down the course! At least that’s what I think was the question being asked by the boat psyche. Our boat set fell apart. We were rowing like a bunch of freshmen. It was ugly. Fortunately, we managed to hold off Marietta at the finish with a display of will and take the win. That day, we brought home GT Crew’s first SIRA eights gold, put a “Buzz” on the boat, qualified for the Champion Regatta and added more fuel to our “confidence” fire.

After losing to us at SIRA, the University of Florida crew wanted to get another shot at us and invited us down to the FIRA Florida Championship regatta in Tampa. We knew the Florida heat and humidity would be different than rowing in Atlanta in the spring-time. To acclimate ourselves a little, we decided to add some noon-time stadiums to our schedule. I will tell you this: running sta-

*(Continued on page 19)*

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

*(Continued from page 18)*

diums in the middle of the day, after a two hour row in the morning, is grueling and not something I would recommend to my friends. Robbie, the novice men's coach, managed to get us beds and a boat from the University of Tampa, so we piled into a couple of cars on Friday night and headed down I-75.

The race was unusual in that it was scheduled for a Sunday instead of Saturday. It was a good thing too as the boat we were given needed some serious adjustments before we raced it. She was an old sectional boat, one that was cut in half and bolted together for use. She had been rowed in saltwater her entire life and all of the hardware on the riggers were seriously corroded. After spending a couple of hours trying rig the boat, we managed to get the oarlocks pitched between -2 and +6 degrees and spread within 2 cm of each other. Not ideal after rowing a tightly set boat like The Sting, but it would have to do.

The free time on Saturday gave us a little time for mischief. The University of Tampa plays host to quite a few northern schools that come down to train during their spring breaks. One of the favorite pastimes is to "decorate" the seawalls around the boathouse with displays of school spirit. Thinking that this would be a great way to spend a Saturday night in Tampa, we loaded up and headed to the Home Depot to acquire the necessary supplies. While waiting for night to fall, we found that Yale left a launch at the boathouse for their spring training. As a special gift to our friends from Connecticut, we decided to treat the launch to a new coat of bottom paint that looked strikingly similar to our blade design. Once the sun had set and traffic died down on the river, we paddled across and painted a striking black and yellow mural on the seawall directly across from the boathouse. Jacket faithful had now left two marks on the rivers.

We were scheduled for two races on Sunday, the lightweight and open eights. The University of Miami men's eight was clearly the 800 lb. gorilla of southeastern rowing and we had come to Tampa with our sights set on them. Our nonchalant attitude toward our lightweight competition almost cost us that race.

We knew that both Florida crews would come out really high, settling into a base rate of 40 or higher. Even so, at SIRAs, we took the start easily and then settled in at a 32 with a six seat gap on the field and expected to do the same here. The announcer following the race made the call for the spectators near the finish line. "At the 500 meter mark, it's bow ball, to bow ball, to bow ball. UCF at a 42, Florida at a 40 and Georgia Tech making it look easy at a 32." The tired, old sectional didn't have the pop off the line that we were accustomed to in The Sting and we found ourselves in the middle of a race. We managed to open up about a half a boat on both crews through the middle 1000 meters and looked to hold that through the finish. In our huddle, we'd decided that we wouldn't sprint for the finish to save ourselves for the open race and managed to take the win by a seat without really opening the throttle.

The open race was a disaster. There were 7 boats in the race and since we were the exhibition crew, we drew "Lane 0", which had a rock jetty extending across it 700 meters down the course. Either we would have to get enough open water on the crew next to us to move over and clear the jetty or shut down and fall in behind them. We didn't get the open water, finished the race near the end and were unable to avenge our earlier loss to Jacksonville or take down Miami. No "Buzz", The Sting stayed home on this trip.

One of the side benefits of going to FIRAs was the feedback some of the coaches down there had for us. They were all friends of Robbie's and were happy to give us some constructive criticism. The basic message was build your base rate to 36 and lengthen out the front end of the stroke. Once we got home, we started to do just that and learned the evil of three minute pieces. During one of the practices, I was riding Chad pretty hard about the rating and length. In between pieces, he turned around and yelled, "You're asking me to do the impossible! You can't lengthen your stroke and bring up the rating at the same time!" I just screamed back, "If we don't, we're going to get our ass kicked." By the time we left for Vails, we had added six inches to the front end of our stroke at a base rate of 36.

Our trip to Philadelphia for the Dad Va il Regatta started like any other. Most of the crews loaded their boats after their Tuesday practice, but we wanted to get some starts and some short sprints in and loaded up after a short Wednesday morning practice. In the afternoon, we picked up the van on campus, hooked up the trailer and headed out for Philadelphia. Things started to get interesting once the sun went down. We flipped on the lights and started blowing fuses. Driving a rowing trailer down the interstate in the dark with no lights is a bad thing. After blowing through a couple of boxes of fuses, we managed to set it up where we had

*(Continued on page 20)*

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

headlights and hazard lights. We were off, with the driver holding a flashlight in his mouth to see the dash and the following van close behind the trailer.

At 3am Thursday morning, I was looking forward to finally getting some rest and pulled the trailer into a gas station somewhere in North Carolina. I hopped out, took a restroom break, then crawled into the back seat of the van for a well deserved nap. The next thing I knew, I was being carried out of the van like a suitcase. Eric got me out of the van, stood me up in the parking lot and pointed up at the boats. Two feet of The Sting's bow was dangling from the boat. Chad had tried to knock down the Exxon sign with the boats. He had severely underestimated the signpost. I was in shock. Was this the way the season was going to end? We had found out in Tampa what it's like to row borrowed boats and none of us wanted to contemplate racing the "big one" in whatever we could scrounge up. I sent Joel into the woods to get some sticks, rummaged some duct tape from the trailer and climbed up on top of the van to put a splint on the boat. We piled back into the vans and set off again.

We finally arrived in Philadelphia late Thursday morning and sprung into action to repair the boat. We had contacted Vespoli from the road and Dave Trond was ready to resurrect our baby. We unloaded the hull, set it up under the eaves of the Temple boat house and got to work. We put in the new structure, then headed out on the river for our practice. That row left a lot to be desired and added significantly to the anxiety I already felt about our chances in the race. We spent the rest of the day and a good part of the night with some bondo, sandpaper and a hairdryer putting the finishing touches on the boat. Friday morning, we had a little ceremony to have Dave sign the repair and "The Dave Trond Signature Model" Sting was ready for action. We took to the water, again with a whole lot to prove, and cruised through our heat and semi-finals to qualify for the finals on Saturday.

The course at Vails is odd for a regatta of this caliber; it has a turn in it. Start the race, under the Strawberry Mansion bridge, short right turn, past the Temple Boathouse, then pull past the island and the grandstand to the finish. Based on our performance in the semi-finals, we were assigned lane 6 on the inside of the corner. Although the distance through the corner is shorter, there is significantly more current on the outside of the turn, which tended to slingshot crews into the lead. In our huddle, we discussed a few things. Nobody expected us to make it out of the heats, nobody expected us to make the finals, nobody expected us to medal and nobody expected us to win. We had nothing to lose and decided that we would not go down without a fight. When we passed Temple's boathouse, if we weren't in the race, we would start sprinting and let the chips fall where they may.

We started the race, came through the corner, passed the Temple boathouse and found ourselves firmly planted in fifth place, well out of the race. We sprinted from 1200 meters out. Now this wasn't a sprint like you do in practice where the rating builds as you go down the course. No, this was a reckless abandon, wind it up and let it all hang out push to the finish line. The only thing I remember from the rest of that race was FEELING, not hearing, but FEELING the impact from the cheering crowd at the grandstand. It was amazing. We managed to get back in the race, pulling through the Drexel boat in front of all their friends and getting edged by Georgetown by 0.6 seconds at the line to take the bronze, Georgia Tech's first Vails medal.

The first thing I remembered after the race was Melchoirs squealing like a school girl. "I love you guys! I love you guys! I can't believe it. We did it!" And he was right. As a club program, we had finished third behind Western Ontario, aka the Canadian National Team and Georgetown, a strong varsity program. We pulled up to the medal dock to a rendition of "Ramblin' Wreck from Georgia Tech" being sung by the rest of the team. It was almost surreal rowing along the seawall back up to the take out dock. Our friends from the other crews were yelling congratulations. The team was running along side us and all of the southern crews were cheering as we went past. We had been working toward this day for 9 months, our mantra being "every mile you row, every meter you erg, every stair you climb, every mile you run brings you one step closer to success at the Vails." Now as I rowed with my crew after the race, feeling the weight of that medal around my neck, I realized that effort had not been a waste and we weren't finished yet.

We were the only Tech boat that qualified to go up to Massachusetts for the Champion Regatta. As such, we had to pay our own way to the race, including airfare, boat transportation and housing. The damage to the boat did turn out to have a sunny side. It had to go back to the factory for repairs and the Vespoli guy promised to have it fixed and delivered to Massachusetts in time for the race. As far as housing, one of our rowing friends from the University of Tampa grew up near the race course. His parents generously opened their house to us, exhibiting the friendliness that is part of the rowing community. We were all set. Friday night, we headed to Hartsfield and boarded our flight to Boston.

When we arrived at the course on Saturday, we were greeted with some stereotypical northern hospitality. Vicki and MIT's light-

## A look on the 92-93 Vmen Lightweight 8+, the boat that started the next chapter

*(Continued from page 20)*

weight coach had some history and the MIT crew was loudly referring to us as “GIT, ‘git’ off the water.” We’d see who needed to get off the water. Chad was looking to spend the summer at the US National Pre-Elite camp and took the opportunity to talk with the camp’s director, the coach of the Coast Guard Academy’s crew. After listening to Chad about his rowing experience and erg times, the guy told Chad he needed to work on his times and try again next year. Chad was the strongest oar in our boat and would spend a successful summer at the Potomac Rowing Club’s camp instead. But to us, it seemed as though the guy had an issue with rowers from the South and club programs in general. Add one more item to the list of things to prove.

We headed out for our heat as the only club program in the 18 boat field. We drew lane 4 and followed the Fordham crew down the course to qualify for the finals later that day. We got a great start in the finals, settling in with almost a half boat lead. Through the first half of the course, we pulled out to almost a full boat. However, Fordham was not finished yet. They took their big move in the middle and took a half boat back from us. We took our move and barely opened up a seat. Through the third quarter, they pulled ahead and continued to open. We mounted our sprint. Sitting in second place, we couldn’t chase with the wild, recklessness that we had in the Vails and Fordham was able to hold us off and take the victory. On the positive side, we put a severe beating on both the MIT and Coast Guard crews. I guess actions do speak louder than words. With a mixture of joy and disappointment, we collected our silver medals, loaded The Sting on Miami’s trailer and caught our flight back home.

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*Looking at the milestones we broke and success we had at the national level, I think this is truly one of the special boats in Tech Crew’s history. Since MIT finished 6<sup>th</sup> in the lightweight national championship race and we put a pretty thorough whipping on them, I feel comfortable saying that we were one of the ten fastest lightweight crews in the country that year. Damn! I also think this boat created within Tech Crew the “winning attitude”: the expectation of success at the regional and national level, that has lead to its many current successes. I hope that every novice that comes to the boathouse for their first practice eventually gets to row with a group of folks as good as the ones I rowed with.*

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Submitted by Jeff Woodard

Feel left out? Please write me for the 2nd edition to be printed in the fall.

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What does the Future Hold?

Head of the Hooch...  
Please remind yourselves to reserve the first weekend of every November in order to come back to our hometown regatta.

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