

Henley Update #1: Wheels Down in England, Oars in the Thames

Will Robinson, Jun 15 2011

The following update was provided by Boys Varsity Crew Coach Lindsay Brown. The Boys Varsity 8 is training in England gearing up for the Henley Royal Regatta taking place June 29 - July 3. You can follow their adventures via updates from Morgan Scoville '00 on [Twitter](#).

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

I hope you are all following Morgan's twitter. In a haiku way, he is capturing many essential moments of our adventure.

We are now in Henley and have rowed on the Thames. So much has happened over the past 5 days, I can hardly believe that previous sentence is accurate. To start, we had an epic trip to Tennessee, raced beautifully, and demonstrated that this team is exceptionally fast. It was a great confidence boost for us, and showed that our physical, technical, and psychological preparation was all on track.

Our racing ended on Sunday afternoon, and we left the regatta site at 3:45pm. 11 hours later, in the wee hours of the morning, we arrived back at St. Andrew's, and got a few hours sleep. We were up at 9am to get to work. We ate a quick breakfast, enjoyed a last row on Noxontown Pond, and then set about cleaning and packing. Monday bedtime was early, because at 2am Tuesday the bus picked us up from the front of Founders and took us to Newark International Airport for our day flight to Heathrow. All was running smoothly, it seemed, until the airline told us we could not take our box of carefully packed oars. I had called ahead and confirmed that bringing our oars would not be a problem, but the people on the ground at Newark said it was impossible. After some frustrating arguing, we got on the plane and flew to Heathrow, leaving our box of oars at the Newark airport. Our English shuttle picked us up from the airport and took us to our home here – Foxhaven –and we arrived by 9pm. This part of trip – moving the 13 of us – went flawlessly. Our host had a nice dinner of soup and sandwiches waiting for us, and we enjoyed the meal before going to sleep.

We are staying at a beautiful old brick farmhouse on the Remenham side of the river, across from the town of Henley. We have an easy 10 minute walk down through a wooded path to the regatta site, and after breakfast this morning we went to look over the scene. It's very quiet now in the boat tent, and only about five crews are here. One of them was St. Paul's School from Concord, NH, and I am good friends with the boys coach. They were there when we arrived, and upon hearing of our oar situation, my friend instantly offered us the use of their oars any time they weren't using them. Just then the Empacher boat representative arrived with our boat, and we rigged it up while St. Paul's was practicing. St. Paul's came in, let us take their oars, and we went out and had a nice row up and down the course a couple of times. There is something about Henley that encourages the generosity and kindness that St. Paul's demonstrated, and I hope I can offer a favor to them or another crew at a later time.

Greg Doyle worked from the USA side of the pond, talking to our airline, and they finally realized they could in fact send the oars. We believe that they are in flight now, due to arrive Thursday morning, and I will rent a van to go pick them up. Let's hope it all works out!

The boat we have is very nice, and we are making small rigging adjustments to make it more comfortable for

us. It's a different brand of boat than what we are used to, but it is considered the world's best. So far the boys like the feel, and we will row twice tomorrow.

The highlight of the day was upon our return to the regatta site after lunch, we continued our adjustments to the boat, and then noticed that a TV crew was interviewing Sir Steven Redgrave in front of the Leander Club, right next to us. Steve Redgrave is considered the most accomplished rower (and I think athlete in general) in the history of sport – he won five Olympic gold medals in rowing over five Olympiads. The boys were so excited to see this living legend in person. The TV crew noticed us lingering and staring, and asked us to come shake Steven Redgrave's hand while they filmed! So we did, and he was gracious and offered us best wishes in the regatta, and then posed for a picture with us. Morgan was also interviewed by the TV crew about the regatta and what we knew about Steven Redgrave.

We returned to our home, ate a delicious meal, and now the boys are all playing RISK and Hearts. We are tired and happy, and tomorrow we will start preparing for our race Saturday at Marlow. Information about the Marlow Regatta can be found here:

<http://www.themarlowregatta.com/>

This regatta site will host the 2012 Olympics, and so we are all excited to compete on this course.

That's all for now, and thanks as always for your good wishes!

Yours,

Lindsay

Henley Update #2: Silver at Marlow Regatta

Jun 20 2011

I have finished a delicious dinner provided by our host here in Henley, and it has been a long and productive day. The boys raced today at the Marlow Regatta, and it was a big adventure from start to finish. For Morgan and me, the toughest part of the day was driving the vans to the racecourse safely – we each assigned one boy to ride up front with us and tell us at every intersection and roundabout, “Stay to the left!” “Look right!” “Stay in the left lane!” We managed to get to the course safely, locate our boats, which had been transported there the night before, rig them up, and get ready to race. The 8 had a heat of 4 with 3 to qualify for the finals. The boys raced very well and finished second to Eton. This was the Eton boat that won the British Schoolboy championship a couple of weeks ago, so we were pleased that we were close with them. Club and university crews were in our event as well as the fast high school boats, so it was a very competitive field.

Normally we have a difficult time with this regatta because we are still struggling with jetlag and not yet fully used to the equipment we've rented. These boys have been remarkably resilient, and I've gotten wiser over the years about how to best arrange the trip. We did not take any hard strokes until Friday morning. We therefore entered this race today without a proper lead-up or taper. We were just looking forward to a good race and the chance to see some of the teams we will face at the Henley Regatta. An added benefit of the Marlow race is the venue. It's held on Dorney Lake, which is where the 2012 Olympic rowing events will be. So the boys will be able to watch the Olympics and tell everyone, “I've raced there!”

The pair event had only 5 teams, so our pair had just one race – the final. There was no high school pair event, so they had to race in the “senior” division against university and very experienced club teams. The goal for them was to complete their first 2,000 meter race, steer a straight course, row well, and have fun. They had a good warm-up, made it to the start, latched on, and then one of their oars popped out of the oarlock and they flipped right there before the race even started. After getting their boat turned over and emptying it of water, the official asked, “Do you still want to race?” They said, “Of course!” and so they got back in and had a good, solid row down the course. They impressed me with their good spirits, and they have a tale to tell for the rest of their lives!

The 8 launched for their race just as the pair was finishing, and not too long after, the rain started pouring down. It was miserable! The boys were cold and numb by the time they started, but so was everyone else. They had a good start, and Radley College (a top British high school team), jumped to a lead they would never relinquish. St. Andrew’s matched Eton all the way down the course and then sprinted and put their bow ahead for a second place finish. This is the best I’ve seen SAS do in this particular regatta. Eton was very upset since they had beaten Radley just a few weeks earlier. To me, it looks like we are among a top group of crews who all have chance of doing very well at Henley.

We will have an easy day tomorrow, and then get back to hard work on Monday. Our plan is to row early Monday morning, and then we will pack up and go visit Shrewsbury School. The coach there is a friend, and he is going to host our group for two nights. We will practice with Shrewsbury, and go sightseeing in the area. My friend tells me there are many Roman ruins and old castles in the area that are fun to visit, as well as beautiful gardens (but he tells me that teenage boys tend to find gardens boring, so he doesn’t recommend them as a destination for us!).

That’s the update for now. Thanks for all your support of our crew!

Lindsay

Henley Update #3: Shrewsbury School, Sprint Tuneup, Alumni Visit

Jun 23 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

It’s early in the morning here in England and the boys are all still asleep. I’m making various plans in my head for “things to do” this day, and I’m enjoying the peace and quiet of a sleeping house. We are now less than a week away from starting our Henley racing, and we’ve been here in England a little over a week. Much has happened in that short time, and much is yet to come. The time is full and busy.

We traveled to Shrewsbury School, a two and a half hour drive to the northwest, and spent time with their crew. It was an instructive set of workouts for our team, navigating the winding stretch of river that they use for practice and doing good, hard pieces with them. During the day we went on a tourist trip to a nearby town that has the ancient ruins of a castle, ate lunch at a pub that began serving meals in the 14th century, and walked the narrow streets, imagining that Shakespeare might have walked those same streets long ago. Our boys got to know and made friends with the Shrewsbury team, and when it came time to leave, they did a lot of swapping of “kit”, as they call their unisuits. We returned here to our home base at Henley late at night and were able to wake up and get in two rows the next day.

The boat tent at Henley that used to be nearly empty except for us and St. Paul’s School is now full and

buzzing with activity. We feel comfortable and at home in the space and on the river, and that seems to be the best reason for coming over here a little early. It's exciting to see the big colleges from the USA on the river now – to row next to the IRA Champion lightweight 8 from Yale, or to observe Virginia brushing Leander is helpful to our boys as they get to see what rowing looks like at the next level.

Looking ahead, on Friday, we will row our boats through the locks upstream in order to get them to the site of the Reading Town Regatta. Past crews have enjoyed the 8-mile trip to the race, and it makes an adventure out of the whole thing. We race on Saturday, and it's a mad-dash 700 meter course with a maximum of three crews racing side-by-side. The final bit of polishing we need as a crew is to be a little sharper on our start, and so this race will help us since it's over almost as soon as it starts! I can't tell you where results will be posted, but Morgan will cover it on the twitter feed. The 8 faces a good club crew from Seattle – Greenlake – in the first round, and if they win they will be in the final. The pair will race a college spare pair in their heat and would go to the final if they win.

Yesterday Henry Palmer, SAS 2002, came by the boat tent to talk with our group. Henry was on the SAS 2002 Henley team, he won a Henley championship rowing for Trinity College, and then he went on to row for Leander Club for several years and win two other Henley Championships. He gave us all invaluable advice about how to prepare mentally for a dual race, and where on the course to make moves to best advantage. Henry has been one of many alumni who have stopped by to see the crew during the past weeks, or who have sent words of encouragement, and we all feel the strong support from the St. Andrew's family. It gives us great pride to represent the school, and thank you all for cheering us on.

That's all the news for now. We send you best wishes from England!

Lindsay

Henley Update #4: Reading Regatta CHAMPIONS! (x2)

Jun 25 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

My day started with an early morning trip to the Laundromat and a small, personal victory over the complexity of the various machines and British coins. It's amazing how much laundry 11 teenage boys generate, especially ones who are exercising twice a day. I drove our van, full of odiferous clothing, up to the launderette as they call it here in the UK, and stuffed five of the jumbo machines to full capacity. A transfer to the dryers, another 30 minute wait, and then I returned to the house just after the crew finished breakfast. We all needed clean clothing, and clean racing gear, for the Reading Regatta held today.

Yesterday the boys rowed the 8 and the pair through three locks, travelling 8 miles upstream, and got their boats into place for the race. "Long and boring" was the report on the trip. As a coach, boring is fine – no collisions or wrong turns on the winding river. The pair had the first race of the day, a heat vs. the Hobart College pair. With a clean and sharp start, Marco and Peter took control of the race and won by open water. On to the finals. They faced the spare pair from St. Joseph's Prep, Philadelphia, and again won easily. The Prep boat was a little less experienced it seemed, and they went off-course at the start, nearly into the bank, and "after extricating themselves from the bushes" (the verbatim call from the race announcer – no joke) they returned to racing. But by that time the SAS pair was lengths ahead and cruised to a win in the event. With great pride and joy, the pair collected their trophy mugs and now have a great memento of the Henley trip. They will race one last time this Tuesday in the Henley spare pair race, and they are looking like the team to beat at this

point.

The 8 raced an hour later. Originally four boats entered the event, but one scratched, meaning that the boys would race only a final – three boats across. It was an all-American event with St. Andrew's, Greenlake Crew from Seattle, and St. Paul's School from Concord, NH. We have learned now not to take anyone lightly, and the boys had a good start and then a better settle. By the halfway point of the short race they had control. At the finish they were open water ahead of Greenlake and couple of lengths ahead of St. Paul's. Again, with great pride, the boys collected a set of winners' mugs.

Another nice part of the race today was seeing two St. Andrew's alums there on shore – Rob van Mesdag, SAS 1948, and Frank Reynolds, SAS 1998 both made the trip from London to cheer the boys on. Frank was in 1997 Henley crew, the first I took as head coach, and he is the 2k erg record holder for St. Andrew's. That fact made the boys look at him with extra respect! Rob was a Henley finalist in 1950 in the Diamond Sculls, and his charm and grace impressed the boys.

There was no time to savor the victory, however, because they had to immediately get going back to Henley, retracing the 8-mile trip from the day before. The rush was because the locks closed at 6pm, and we were setting off at 4:30. Going downstream turned out to be much faster, and they made it to the final lock with 10 minutes to spare. The boat went back on to its rack in the Henley boat tent, the boys trudged up the hill to our house, and now they are all showering, waiting for another delicious dinner from our amazing host family.

So it has been a day of small tasks such as laundry, great racing by both boats, travel by road and water, and good meals throughout the day. Each night we watch a video, usually something with explosions and car chases, but some selections have an England theme. Last night we saw "Robin Hood", starring Russell Crowe, and it met with generally favorable reviews from the group. Tonight the choice is going to be "Unstoppable" or possibly "Age of Heroes". Both titles seemed appropriate to me for this group!

A final note – the draw for the Henley Regatta is now posted. St. Andrew's is a selected crew, meaning we are one of the 8 crews the regatta thinks are among the fastest. There is no specific ranking among the selected group, but the selected crews are separated throughout the draw. By doing it this way the racing tends to be more predictable in the beginning. We drew a good British School, St. Paul's from the UK, who will give us a very good challenge, and it would be a big mistake to expect anything other than a close and difficult race. Every team races "up" at Henley, so past results don't mean much, and we will have our hands full. Keep an eye on the Henley website for results, and Morgan will keep his twitter feed going.

In the meantime, we have a few more days of preparation, and then the big show starts! Thanks for all your support.

Lindsay

Henley Update #5: Reflections On the Eve of Round One

Jun 28 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

Last evening I walked into town to return our collection of videos from Blockbuster, not wanting to pay late fees, and then paused on the Henley Bridge as I returned to home base. I took a moment to look over to the Henley boat tents, it with the late light of the summer sun. The blue and white vertical stripes on the face of

the tents were there, just as you see them in every photograph and drawing of the scene, the rows of docks angling into the Thames were quiet and free of boating activity at that later hour, and the river was calm and flowing easily around the corner and up the course. It was a peaceful and contemplative moment, and I've been here enough times before to know that I needed to soak in the scene and appreciate how special it is to be in England, rowing at this special place, and representing the school in this greatest of rowing regattas. This moment of calm was a chance for such reflections before the very busy days of racing begin.

The spare pair has their big day today, competing in the spare pair race, and we will all be there at 10:00am to cheer them on. Then they will put away their boat, return it to the team that kindly lent it to us, and get to watch as the 8 begins their racing tomorrow. Many of the parents are now in place and will also be there at the boat tents this morning to add their voices to the SAS contingent cheering on Marco and Peter.

I have acquired the tickets to the Stewards' Enclosure for the parents, and the boys, Morgan, and I all have our overseas competitors' badges – those beautiful medallions that you must display from your blazer to gain entry to the boating tents and spectator areas. These medallions become great keepsakes of the regatta and are highly prized.

The work has all been done on the water at this point. We had a good brush with another crew yesterday morning, doing a piece to the barrier and another 90 second piece at race cadence. In the afternoon yesterday they boat did a steady-state row up and down the course twice, and they said it was their best row ever. "The blades never touched the water the whole way down the course" one of them reported to me. It seems we are peaking at the right moment. Today we will go for one final row, practicing our start a little more, and then feeling the rhythm of steady rowing at low ratings. We are ready.

The big show begins tomorrow!

Lindsay

Henley Update #6: Boys Top St. Paul's School (UK) in Round 1

Jun 29 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

I am enjoying a quiet moment after a successful first race at Henley, listening to the banter of the boys downstairs in our house as we wait for dinner. The first race is in many ways the toughest – all the expectation has built up, the physical energy is stockpiled after a careful taper and rowers tend to be jittery as a result, and you are racing an unknown crew without any previous, direct means of comparison. After the first race, the crew understands what is required in both a physical and psychological sense. Plus they are able to see how the other teams handled the course: who was fast at the start, who pushed through the middle of the race, and who needed to sprint to hold on to win. The basic question marks have been answered, and now it's down to business.

We had a very good day today, racing St. Paul's School from the U.K. They were a helpful opponent for us in that they were quick at the start and held even with us, forcing us to race well to the "Barrier," the first timed checkpoint. Then the boys held their speed while St. Paul's could not sustain their effort, and we steadily pulled out to a solid lead. Having that lead we were able to settle our rating and hold the margin to the finish. Now we know that we will face Monmouth School in the second round tomorrow. Monmouth looks to be similar to our opponent of today in that they are a good team, well coached, and will be able to pressure us down

the course. We will have to stay sharp and focused.

Once the race ended, the SAS crew came to the dock to receive hugs and congratulations from all the parents and friends who are here cheering them on. We could feel your best wishes across the miles as well! With the boat put away, the boys showered and then had some time to eat a snack with their families and enjoy the pageantry of this regatta. I'm not qualified to comment on the dresses, hats, blazers, and other accoutrements of fashion that are on display here, but I can say that it is quite a show on land! Racing stops for a very civilized length of time at noon in order to allow for luncheon and then again at 4:30pm for tea, and the food and drink are an essential part of the whole regatta experience. I would love for someone to explain to me exactly what "Pimms" is, but it is ubiquitous at all the vending booths, along with champagne and strawberries, tea and scones, and other more substantial fare.

I allowed the crew a couple of hours to walk the banks of the river and watch the sites on water and land with their families. "Curfew" was 5:00pm with dinner to be served at 6:30. We won't know the time of our race with Monmouth until later, so we will follow our routine after dinner of card playing (hearts is the favorite at this point), facebooking (I can't believe I'm turning a web site into a verb), and playing various on-line games such as tetris. We will watch a movie to end the evening and then make our plans for tomorrow once we know our race schedule.

Keep the cheering coming! Every day is a gift, and we appreciate that we get to race again tomorrow.

Lindsay

Henley Update #7: Boys Top Monmouth School in Round 2

Jun 30 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

Wow – another great day of racing for our crew. We have now made it to the "elite 8," and this is a great accomplishment for this group. At this point, 75% of the crews have been knocked out and there will be no easy verdicts on the racecourse for the remainder of the regatta. The St. Andrew's boat took command of the race today early, built their lead, and then settled into a rating and rhythm sufficient to hold the other team off. They looked smooth, calm, and powerful as they went past the enclosures. The jitters and nerves of yesterday had been replaced by the confidence of experience. This group has yet untapped speed, and we will start finding that speed tomorrow against a very good Hampton School. The race tomorrow will be fierce and close from start to finish. Send us all the good vibes, cheers, prayers, and encouragement that you can!

Mr. Porter worked with the crew throughout the season and gave them many good words of advice on rowing. He introduced a new stretching routine that we are using here, and he spoke to the group about the essential, critical importance of having faith in each other in the boat. After the race today he emailed all of us a beautiful reminder of this advice and quoted from the end of Beowulf. Beowulf is facing a dragon and all his friends except one run away in fear; Mr. Porter counseled the boys that "The dragon, to me, is a metaphor for doubt, the kind of doubt that can only be destroyed with good teammates. Listen to Jameson, feel what your teammates are willing to give you in the race, and eliminate any doubts." And then here is the end of the epic poem as Beowulf's friend Wiglaf joins in the battle against the dragon:

“Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything
you said you would and vowed you would;
never let your name and fame
be dimmed while you live. Your deeds are famous,
so stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now
with the whole of your strength. I shall stand by you.”

Unlike Beowulf, the boys have had the constant and unyielding support of friends, family, SAS alumni, and the school community. We feel so blessed to have had this support, and we thank you for standing by us, sending us your strength, and helping us as we face our dragons.

Lindsay

Henley Update #8: Saints Win in Quarterfinals, Face Eton College Next

Jul 1 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

If you haven't yet seen the results of today's race against Hampton School, please stop reading this note and go listen to the radio highlights of the race available [here](#).

In fact, even if you do know the result of the race, go back and listen again to the highlights. It's all so exciting and such a testament to the character of this crew. With that spoiler alert, I will proceed.

The boys told me after the race that they had a terrible start, with the boat lurching to one side on the fifth stroke, forcing them to a near standstill before they could recover and get the blades in the water again. That missed stroke at the very beginning was devastating, and the good, quick Hampton crew took full advantage, pushing their boat out to a full length lead by the barrier. Listening to the announcer from the shore, I was disheartened to hear that Hampton had taken such a big lead so early. I also knew, and we had talked through the possibility, that this would be their strategy. Our counter-strategy was to use the middle of the race, our strength as a crew, to work away and pull ahead. All of a sudden, we had to desperately fight just to pull even.

So I said a small prayer, closed my eyes, and waited for the announcer to give the next position check. The report came back, “Hampton leads by three-quarters of a length.” And then at the next marker, “Hampton by half a length.” So we were clearly fighting hard and making an impression. The usually calm voice of this nameless and faceless voice on the P.A. system raised a tiny bit – just the slightest warble indicating his rising excitement – as he announced that “at Remenham Club, Hampton leads by a third of a length,” and then by just a “canvas.” With each announcement of the gap closing, the crowd began to react – at first a few murmurs, then a collective “oohh...”, and finally a surge to their feet from their deck chairs and enclosure seats. When the announcer called out “St. Andrew's has taken the lead by a canvas”, there was a roar and rush to the edge of the river as people looked out over the course.

I had only a glimpse of the boats going by, with St. Andrew's holding the smallest edge, and it was whirl of color and movement driving to the finish line. I ran out of the Stewards' Enclosure and around the corner to

the dock area without even knowing the final result. During the time I was making my way to the boat, there was a lengthy pause without any information, and then I could hear the announcement of the verdict but I could not make it out. As I made my way to the dock I grabbed a man walking past and with a crazed look in my eyes asked, “Who won that last race?!” His startled wife must have decided it was important to the safety of her husband to give me an answer because she pulled out her program in a rush and stuttered, “Oh...yes...it was the American crew – St. Andrew’s.” I felt like hugging her but held back, made some guttural sound of victory, and rushed on to the dock where I found Morgan and we high-fived and then hugged each other. St. Andrew’s won by a canvas.

Immediately upon landing I had the boys leave their oars in the boat and walk right over to the next dock to shake hands with Hampton. It was an epic race, one that this group, all of us, will remember forever. Regardless of what happens in the future, this boat has demonstrated the highest level of racing courage and trust in each other. Jameson told me he made a call at the half way point: “We’re six seats down – we’ve got them!” He exuded confidence, the boys all believed in each other, and the result was in our favor at the end. Our time was just one second off the course record for our event.

Tonight we will rest, eat, recover, and then get ready to do it all again tomorrow! Keep the cheers coming our way. And thank you as always for your support.

Lindsay

Henley Update #9: Boys Beat Eton in Semis. Will Race for Championship!

Jul 2 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

I couldn’t think of anywhere else in the world I would rather have been this morning than in the Henley boat tent, surveying the scene of the regatta, preparing the crew for their race, and looking into the eyes of these exceptional young men representing our school. This was the pinnacle of high school rowing: the Henley Royal Regatta, racing two-time defending champion and British Schoolboy Champion crew Eton College. I believe that as an athlete you always want the opportunity to test yourself against the best, and we had that opportunity today. We were surprising loose and relaxed, ready to go to the battleground and give our best effort.

As has been the habit of the crew, they were a little slower to the first marker, the Barrier, than their opponent. When we raced Eton two weeks ago at Marlow, we were actually the faster crew for the first 500 meters, so I was slightly surprised to hear the announcer call Eton up half a length. I was standing in the Stewards’ Enclosure directly across from the progress board where they move wooden plaques with the crews’ names on them to display their relative position to one another. Just before that first call, the man dressed in all white had carefully slid the “Eton College” board half way ahead of the “St.

Andrew's School, USA" board, so I knew what was coming. Eton must have decided to work hard at the start in an attempt to jump ahead, I thought to myself. They must be hoping that they can get a lead, hold it, and break our crew.

The next time the man at the progress board slid the markers, Eton was placed ahead, but not so much. Then the voice confirmed that Eton's lead had slipped to a third of a length. Next to me, Morgan let out a "go Saints!" This crew has shown such character and courage, and I knew that if Eton's lead continued to slip, we were going to be in a position to push past them and make them pay for the gamble of going out so hard at the start.

For a third time, the boards moved, and Eton was just a fraction ahead. We were moving. This was the part of the race where we have been strongest all week. And then another adjustment and suddenly St. Andrew's was ever so slightly ahead! "Let's do it Saints!" Morgan called out. I was just pacing and making small grunts through a dry mouth, my nerves too taught to articulate any sentences much less a single, coherent word.

"At the enclosures, St. Andrew's leads by half a length" the announcement came almost simultaneous with the change on the progress board. They are going to do it...I could feel it, knowing this group that having taken that much of a lead with 300 meters to go, they would hold it to the finish. Eton pressed in the final strokes, but it was not enough, and St. Andrew's had done it. We were in the finals of the Henley Royal Regatta!

Slightly stunned, both Morgan and I made our way to the docks and were there to pull the boat in. There were hugs and tears, and then boys once again walked right over to the dock where Eton had landed and shook hands with their great crew.

This whole trip has been such an odyssey, and the friendly mobs of parents, friends, faculty, alumni, and well-wishers that were on site today to see the race lifted our already soaring spirits. The many thoughtful, funny, and inspirational emails Morgan and I have received have meant so much to us all. I apologize that I have not been able to respond directly to every one, and thank you for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers.

Each day is a gift, and we are so happy that tomorrow we will be there to race in the finals.

Best wishes from Henley-on-Thames,

Lindsay

Final Henley Update: Saints Find Respect and Admiration From Around the World

Jul 5 2011

Dear Friends of SAS Rowing,

This will be my final report, and it is a bittersweet moment. I am back from a wonderful dinner, organized by Elizabeth Pesce, for the crew and all the parents, siblings, alumni, SAS faculty, and friends of our team. It was an impressive gathering, and we were all there to salute the marvelous, amazing, and inspirational accomplishments of this group of eleven young men who have represented St. Andrew's with such distinction here in England. I don't think I can make clear enough how proud all St. Andreans should be of these athletes.

The sadness and disappointment at not winning the entire regatta had already begun to dissipate, and the realities of their accomplishments were sinking in. If nothing else, this group has repeatedly demonstrated their resilience, and once again, for a final time, they were showing how they could hold their heads high, reflect on all they had achieved, and be happy and content with giving their absolute best effort.

I took a moment to talk to everyone at the dinner about my reflections on this Henley odyssey, and used as a prop a sheet of paper I had scrawled notes on several weeks ago. I met with the boys when we first began the Henley camp, and I had written down my goals for them. At dinner tonight I reviewed those goals, and assessed how well we had done reaching them.

The first of my goals was that I wanted to represent St. Andrew's with honor – to display the highest sportsmanship, to carry ourselves with dignity on the racecourse and even around town, and to be polite and kind in the house where we were going to be living.

My second big goal was to have fun – it seems so simple, but it's so essential. Rowing is a blast, and racing here is as good as it gets. I wanted the boys to appreciate and enjoy each other as we traveled across the USA and overseas. I wanted them to look back with happy memories of time well spent together.

My last goal was to pursue excellence. We talked about how excellence is not one single act, or a sudden flash of accomplishment. It is the accumulation of many small efforts and an attention to details pursued consistently over time. We wanted to chase excellence, to improve our rowing technique, to push ourselves physically and mentally to be tougher racers, and to do these things over and over during our training so that when it came time to race we would have practiced being our very best.

We not only met, we surpassed these goals.

Finally, I had to thank the parents for their support and for lending me their children for these weeks. I had to thank the alumni body and the St. Andrew's community who all have been so generous and supportive of us. I had to thank Mr. Morgan Scoville for giving so much to us during these weeks, and the years preceding this trip. Morgan was the freshmen coach for all of these boys, and when he led the current senior class to their bronze medal finish at Stotesbury when they were freshmen, he told me, "This is a special group. They will go to Henley their senior year. I want to go with them!" He was right on all counts. Morgan's twitter updates have been an essential part of bringing this trip alive for all of us, and I can't thank him enough for his guidance and wisdom and positive energy that he brings to us.

My final words of thanks are to my wife, Louise, who has endured me in my crew-coaching mode for this extended time. I am a little obsessive about rowing, and so it is a sacrifice for her to let me extend her status as a “crew widow” for another five weeks. She helped with critical details such as ticket sales for the parent group, and she did important, unseen things during this time such as managing our home life so that I could focus on the coaching and planning for the trip. She kept me grounded and whole so that I could be my best self with the boys.

Today the boys raced a piece worthy of Henley final, pushing Abingdon every stroke down the course. They gave all they could and can only be deeply proud of their racing here in England. We are all taking deep breaths, full of gratitude for the gifts of life and health, comradeship of teammates, and the love we share with friends, family, and community. Thank you St. Andrew’s for joining us on our journey.

Lindsay