

## The 2020 Season

Despite a difficult year, there was still plenty of success for Coleraine athletes, past and present.

Due to reasons we are all intimately aware of, the 2019/20 season, and 2020 in general was a struggle for the rowing club but as you would expect Jeremy, the athletes, coaches and parents made the best of the opportunities available.

Having said that the season started well with Molly being awarded 'Junior Sportswoman of the Year' off the back of her fantastic performance in Tokyo at the 2019 Junior World Rowing Championships, where she finished 5th in the Junior Woman's Double Sculls for Rowing Ireland. She is also the current all Britain and Ireland National Schools Regatta Junior Woman's Single Scull Champion and the course record holder.

The first event was the Portadown Marascull. This is a slightly different event to the standard fare. The club travelled to Bannfoot (where the Upper Bann enters Lough Neagh) and here the crews were launched and then raced for a total of 16km upstream to Portadown Boat Club. CGSRC picked up a number of winning medals including MJ 15 1x, WJ 16 4x+, MJ18 2- and WJ181x. COBRA member and ex-CGSRC club captain Matthew Boyce also competed in the Men's J18 1x and set a very respectable time finishing in second place in the category.

The event of the year was the fourth annual dinner and awards, held at the Royal Court Hotel. This year's guest speaker was Team GB Olympian and CAI



Old Boy, Alan Campbell. It was fantastic to see a record number of parents, grandparents, friends and pupils in attendance to celebrate another great year of rowing at Coleraine Grammar School.

The new club captains, Angus Bryce and Kirsty Dalzell were appointed and several trophies and awards were given out including Jonathan Brown, Megan Browne and Tony Boyce receiving most improved boy, girl and adult (!) respectively. Crew of the year went to the Women's Junior 15 8+.

The last race of 2019 was Carrick-On-Shannon for their two-day Head of the

River event. The highlights from day 1 were two second place finishes for the MJ18 2- and WJ18 4x, the boys by only half a second. The course was shortened by 700m on the second day due to stormy weather, but despite the conditions, wins were recorded in three single scull events; Club 1x, WJ18 1x and WJ16 1x. Wins were not the only achievement during the weekend as many athletes experiences Head of the River racing for the first time which is always a shock to the system.

Just before the new year, Olympic Silver Medallist Richard Chambers took some time out of a visit home to call in for a mornings training. Richard was able to share his vast knowledge and experience

with the senior squad, and it was a great opportunity for the pupils to ask valuable questions. The boys and girls always appreciate Richard for giving up his valuable time over the holidays.

The first event of 2020 was the Irish Indoor Rowing Championships in Limerick, and even though it was indoors, it was the last 'away trip' due to the Covid 19 restrictions, albeit for only two athletes, Fergus Bryce and Rachel Bradley in the J16 and J18 events. Fergus pulled a huge 6:39.3 putting him into 2nd place while Rachel also did a very credible 7:25.8 to place 8th. Also in attendance was new COBRA member Hugh Moore. Hugh was competing in the Under 23 Lightweight category. He pulled an impressive 6:21.0, a split of 1:35.2, giving him the Gold Medal.

In April even rowing could not escape Zoom, with the first 'Virtual Regatta', organised by NUI Galway. Due to the restrictions only four boys and four girls were able to compete, and the concept involved them logging into a conference call for their given race and completing a 1500m erg under starters orders with their other competitors. The team event then averaged the scores for the four athletes to calculate the team time. CGS achieved wins in the MJ16 and WJ18

individual events, and 3rd and 4th in the Girls and Boys team competition.

The virtual event then caught on, with the next being hosted by Rowing Ireland where the aim was to erg/cycle/run as far as you could each day, this would then be averaged over the number of entries from the club to get the club average distance.

Coleraine GS Rowing Club had a fantastic turn out over the 3-day regatta with athletes of all ages taking part and laying down some serious mileage. Our club total at the end of the regatta was a very impressive 1.8 million metres, or 1800 km. For some perspective, that's a similar distance to travelling from Coleraine to Valencia, a huge effort by all who took part. Despite being a virtual regatta, the prizes were decidedly real, with the club winning a brand-new Concept 2 Erg for covering the largest distance in Ulster courtesy of Rowing Ireland and Kinetica. There were also spot prizes for Fastest Junior Boy 2k and Best Female Rower in the J17 and U21 categories.

Hugh Moore also competed with his old club mates and set a new Irish record for a half marathon on the erg, an absolutely fantastic result. For reference a half marathon is 21km, a little longer than the standard 2k!

Carlow was next to host a virtual regatta



with over 320 entries in 1k and 2k run and 5km cycle. Virtual regattas have really opened up the doors for creativity at rowing events. Coleraine GSRC entered over all age groups and various events, and produced some fantastic performances with a win in the Men's Masters erg, Men's J16 erg and two second places in Woman's J18 ergo and Woman's J18 cycle.

Finally, Fergus Bryce competed at the British Rowing Virtual Championships. The Year 11 athlete competed in the Men's 6-minute event. He race in heats on Saturday and then qualified for the A Final on Sunday. He put in a fantastic performance to finish 5th overall in the event with 1812m covered in the time.

There was still some time for the athletes at the elite end with Irish Trials in July, for which only a limited number were invited to attend. In fact CGS supplied 2 of the only 6 junior girls. Rachel Bradley had a great week on her first trials experience. She drew nothing but praise from the Irish coaches and fellow athletes. She came 5th out of 6 in the single scull but unfortunately just didn't make the



percentage time required for selection on this occasion. A great experience none the less which will be invaluable for the future.

More experienced Molly Curry had a fantastic race in the single scull and won outright. Off the back of this performance the remainder of the week was spent trying to find suitable crewmates and Rowing Ireland would go on to select a quad to compete in Junior European Rowing Championships in Belgrade, Serbia in September.

Hugh Moore came 3rd in the U23 Lightweight Scull trial. He then continued to have consistently strong performances in the double sculls throughout the rest of the week and he was selected to compete in the U23 European Rowing Championships in Duisburg, Germany in September along with athletes from Shandon RC, University College Cork and NUI Galway in the U23 Lightweight Quadruple Scull.



Thankfully both these events were able to continue. Hugh's crew placed first in their Heat to put them into the A-Final where they finished 5th overall, whilst Molly and her crew had to fight through a repechage to reach the A-Final where she also

finished 5th.

A huge thank you must go out to all who have helped CGS through this difficult year including the coaches, parents and supporters. In addition, many individuals, local groups and businesses have

supported the club through equipment purchase or end-of-year awards sponsorship which is very much appreciated and helps the club train, attend the events, and achieve the results that it does.

## New Steps

As anyone who has been down to the club in recent years will know, the steps have been badly in need of refurbishment or replacement for some time. This was always going to be a large financial and engineering challenge so it's great news that the Grammar School has commissioned the work to be done. Work began in October with the 60 year-old steps being ripped out unceremoniously and at time of writing the new replacements are in the middle of installation.

It's great to see the continued investment from the Board of Governors in the rowing club and the commitment to rowing at Coleraine GS into the future. We all look forward to seeing the project progress in early 2021.

