

Lazy Summer? Here's how to jump-start your fall fitness. Page 40

Rowing News

the magazine of rowing

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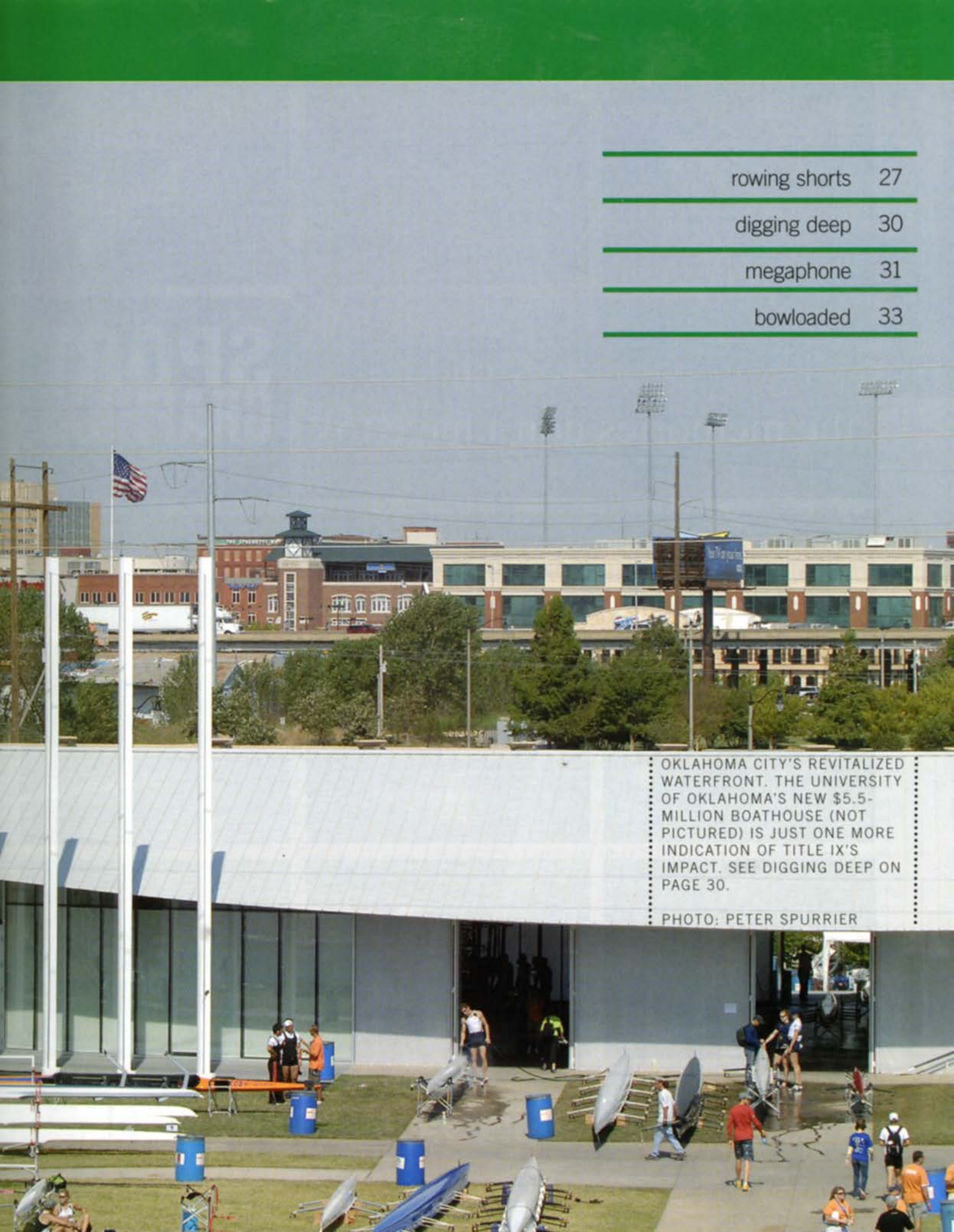
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OKLAHOMA CITY'S REVITALIZED WATERFRONT. THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA'S NEW \$5.5-MILLION BOATHOUSE (NOT PICTURED) IS JUST ONE MORE INDICATION OF TITLE IX'S IMPACT. SEE DIGGING DEEP ON PAGE 30.

PHOTO: PETER SPURRIER



JUST ADD WATER

Oklahoma's instant rowing program

SAY YOU'RE A BIG-TIME COLLEGE FOOTBALL POWERHOUSE looking for a women's rowing program to meet your Title IX gender-equity requirements in a hurry. How do you proceed? How about going to another, slightly less big-time football school that has had success in women's rowing, and hiring away that school's head coach and most of her staff?

That's how the University of Oklahoma Sooners (who finished the 2007 football season with an 11-3 record and a trip to the Fiesta Bowl)

OPEN BAR • FOOD • DANCING

slide bites

2008 Head of the Charles

Source: www.hocr.org

52

Number of events

69

Number of entries in the men's grand-master 50+ single

5

Number of entries in the senior-veteran 70+ women's single

50

Number of additional doubles entries accepted in 2008

Title IX ensures women's rowing should continue to see steady growth.

brought rowing coach Leanne Crain, two assistant coaches, and five athletes from the University of Central Florida (10-4, Auto Zone Liberty Bowl). Oklahoma's fat checkbook made it pretty easy. The Sooners are getting into rowing in a big way, with 20 scholarships, a \$325,000 first-year equipment budget, and two brand-new buildings—a \$5.5 million boathouse on Oklahoma City's revitalized waterfront and an 11,000-square-foot on-campus training facility.

The challenge for Crain and her transplanted coaching staff is to turn those resources into results. "Oklahoma would like all their programs to be not even in the top 20, but in the top 10," Crain says. "There's a lot you can do when you have a successful athletic department."

The instant women's rowing program is not a new phenomenon. When women's rowing became an NCAA-sanctioned sport in 1996, well-funded programs sprung up almost overnight at schools like Virginia and Michigan. Others, like the University of Southern California, invested anew in their women's rowing teams. Before long these programs joined the likes of Brown, Yale, and Cal at the top of the collegiate women's rowing food chain.

These schools all got into rowing for the same reason—to meet gender-equity requirements stipulated by Title IX of the 1972 Education Amendments to the Civil Rights Act. When applied to college sports, the law requires that men and women have athletic opportunities proportional

Erin O'Connell

ERIN O'CONNELL, WHO WAS NAMED INTERIM ATHLETIC DIRECTOR AT SEATTLE PACIFIC UNIVERSITY IN JULY, HAS AN UNUSUAL BACKGROUND FOR A SPORTS ADMINISTRATOR: ROWING. THE FORMER GENDER-EQUITY COMPLIANCE ADMINISTRATOR AT SPU ALSO CHAIRS THE NCAA DIVISION 2 ROWING COMMITTEE, AND SAYS SHE'S HAD EVERY ROLE IN COLLEGE SPORTS EXCEPT THAT OF HEAD COACH. SHE COXED FOR FOUR YEARS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON, GRADUATING IN 1996 WITH THREE PAC-10 CHAMPIONSHIPS. THE NEXT FALL SHE JOINED LEGENDARY U-DUB COACH JAN HARVILLE'S STAFF AS AN ASSISTANT, HELPING GUIDE THE HUSKIES TO THREE NCAA NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIPS AND MENTORING A PAIR OF ATHLETES—ROWER ANNA MICKELSON AND COXSWAIN MARY WHIPPLE—WHO STRUCK OLYMPIC GOLD THIS SUMMER WITH THE U.S. WOMEN'S EIGHT IN BEIJING.

Q: Do athletic departments understand rowing?

A: There are a lot of administrators out there who don't know much about rowing, and I've actually taken calls from some of them who've had their coaches say, "Why don't you call Erin O'Connell about that? She knows it from both sides." That for me has been very fulfilling, to help bring people along who have not had much exposure to the sport. But the rowing committees—there's one for D1, D2, and D3—are the people making the decisions. Those committees have coaches on them, they have administrators. It's a good cross-section of people. It's not like they're operating in a vacuum.


Q: Do you see a place for men's rowing in the NCAA?

A: I think it would level the playing field to some degree. By joining the NCAA and becoming a sanctioned sport, they're going to get a cap on their scholarships, and I think that's fair. Coaches have to be smart and they have to know how to train their crews and they need to have the right horses, but when you have a lot of money, those things come easier. So I think it would be a good thing for men's rowing to become an NCAA-sponsored sport, though it may be hindered a bit by gender equity in terms of squad size.

Q: That's a diametrical contrast to women's rowing, where gender equity has driven growth. Do you see that continuing?

A: I think there are a lot of institutions that are still out of compliance and could be looking to add rowing, simply because it's easy to add big numbers. Rowing is an interesting sport to throw into the NCAA because of our traditions, and there have been some growing pains. But I think certainly it's been for the better. Rowing allows up to 20 scholarships—that's the largest scholarship count for any women's sport—and that's a big deal, to be able to fund female student athletes to go to college. Anna Mickelson was a walk-on at Washington. By the time she was done rowing at Washington she was having her full education paid for, and look at her now.

Q: She's wearing an Olympic gold medal around her neck, and another Washington athlete, Mary Whipple, was in the coxswain's seat. Did you see the race?

A: Oh, I was up at 2:20 in the morning—I set my alarm. I thought, "I don't want to jinx this, but I feel like there's no way they can't win," and seeing them come off the line I thought, "this is it—the race is over here." It was awesome to see that happen. 

8,500

Number participating athletes

to their representation on campus. Almost across the board, that meant universities had to add roster spots and scholarships for women. When rowing became an NCAA sport, it immediately became an attractive solution for schools looking to balance football and other men's programs.

The result was a boom in women's rowing. According to the NCAA, from 1989 to 2006, 168 varsity women's programs were added at Division-1, -2, and -3 institutions. However only 18 of those were added after 2000, and no women's rowing team was added in 2006.

The boom has subsided, but it's not yet over. The way the Title IX law is written ensures that women's collegiate rowing should continue to see steady growth: Universities that don't yet comply on sheer numbers can satisfy the letter of the law by showing progress in the right direction. In practice, that means adding a women's sports team, or cutting a men's team, every few years. Rowing isn't necessarily a shoo-in at these schools; last year the University of Oregon chose to add a competitive cheerleading squad rather than a women's rowing team, and roster-heavy women's sports like soccer and lacrosse are also frequent beneficiaries of Title IX. When it's time to add a new women's sport however, rowing is on every athletic director's short list of cost-effective options.

At Oklahoma, the choice came down to swimming, equestrian, and rowing. It didn't hurt that University President David Boren rowed at Yale. So Crain has the enthusiastic backing of Oklahoma's well-heeled athletic department, and will soon hold the keys to the two gleaming new facilities now under construction. "We're developing the budget as we go," she says. "They're allowing me to tell them what I need."

Right now, that would be recruits. While money does indeed make the world go 'round, Crain is starting almost from scratch when it comes to athletes. "Our target is to have 55 to 65 rowers," Crain says. "We're hoping for a big turnout at

the organizational meeting." She has 12 recruits now, including the five UCF transfers. Crain also is hopeful that some rowers from Oklahoma's club crew can transition into the varsity, though she says her emphasis will be on building a strong freshman squad and molding that group into a powerhouse varsity over the next few years.

The Sooner rowing website is already up and running with a page devoted primarily to attracting raw talent. The site contains FAQs on rowing, and carries one central message: You don't need prior experience to become a Division-1 rower.

"We're targeting every audience. We want to tap swimmers, basketball players, and runners from the state of Oklahoma," she says. "There are so many great high school athletes in the state, and we want them to know that they can be an NCAA Division-1 athlete."

These are the same strategies that Crain used at UCF, when she helped build the Knights program into a regional rowing power. In 2007, her fourth year, they started the season on a 9-0 tear and climbed as high as ninth in the USRowing poll.

Though the en-masse departure of Crain and assistants Andy Derrick and Kris Muhl may look like part of a master plan to steal away the ingredients of UCF's recent success, Crain says the truth is a little less dramatic. "I'd worked with both Andy and Kris, and they were just a good fit," she says. Still, the suspicious smell of corporate-style head-hunting remains, especially since Crain did not finish out the 2008 season at UCF—a decision she says came from the UCF athletic director. Crain asked to finish the season with the Knights and Oklahoma agreed to let her, but the UCF administration had no interest in a lame-duck coach. Cramer took over the reins this spring, and Crain moved to Norman and began the imposing task of starting a Division-1 rowing program from the ground up. **□**

1998
VOLUME 5 NUMBER 9

Head of the Charles

1998: The Head of the Charles draws more than 5,000 competitors, including 1997 sculling world champion Jamie Koven and crews from 14 countries. John Riley wins the Head of the Housatonic and Head of the Connecticut in preparation for the Charles, despite being ill for the previous week and switching to his old shell.

Since: Koven repeats as champion at the 1998 Head of the Charles in summer-like conditions that make up for the 1996 "100-year storm" rain-out. Many of the then-record 5,700 entrants call it the best Head ever, but gusty winds safeguard most of the course records. Julia Chilicki won the women's single title, with two-time lightweight world champion Sarah Garner about a minute back with a shoulder injury. Most of the world champion U.S. men got back together to win the men's eight and a throw-together crew of Dutch elites upstaged the U.S. and Canadian national teams for the women's eight title.

2003
VOLUME 10 NUMBER 13

Miki Teti: 2003 World Rowing Championships

2003: Though they raced to the best of their capabilities, the United States men could only hold Canada's eight to a quarter length as the Canadians defended their world title at the 2003 World Rowing Championships in Milan. "This year was a struggle for us," said U.S. men's coach Mike Teti. "I thought our guys rowed about as well as they could and Canada's faster than we are right now."

Since: Teti's eight found the top of the podium in 2004 at the Athens Olympics and again at the 2005 World Rowing Championships in Gifu, Japan. They finished third at the worlds in 2006, and fourth in 2007, and third at the 2008 Beijing Olympics.