

# 1986

## GIRLS FIRST BOAT (39-0)

Bow	Julie Dickson Dillon '87
2	Sonya Elizabeth "Liz" Driscoll '86
3	Audrey Ann Barnett '87
4	Abigail Brigid Kinney '86
5	Suzanne Marie Egloff '87
6	Jennifer Mary Casazza '86 (Captain)
7	Melissa Leslie Holcombe '87
Stroke	Ellen Skomedal Austin '87
Coxswain	Jennifer Claire Tesoro '87



*Bunnell, Means, Dillon Driscoll, Barnett, Kinney, Tesoro, Egloff, Casazza, Holcombe, Austin, Maloney, McWhinney*

First Boat Shell: *Francis X. Lucarelli* (Vespoli, 1986)

Coach: Mark Calder McWhinney '75

Assistant Coach: Deneen Maloney

Co-Manager: Danyelle Kae Means '86

Co-Manager: Thomas Weipert Bunnell '86

Kent 14.21 seconds ahead of Phillips Academy Andover

First of 5 in Noxontown Regatta (9 seconds ahead of T. C. Williams High School)

Kent 4.88 seconds ahead of Northfield Mount Hermon School

Kent 2 seconds ahead of Simsbury High School

First of 14 in Stotesbury Regatta (6.0 seconds ahead of Denis Morris Catholic High School)

First of 10 in New England Interscholastic Regatta (9.6 seconds ahead of Northfield Mount Hermon School)\*

First of 11 in National Women's Rowing Association Regatta, High School Eights (2.96 seconds ahead of Green Lake Crew)\*\*

\* course record

\*\* event National record



William Hartwell Perry Jr. Bowl: Andrea Ann Moalli '86

Mark C. McWhinney Award: Jennifer Claire Tesoro '87



See 1985 for background on the new First Boat shell *Francis X. Lucarelli*.

**McQ:** “When the *Lucarelli* arrived, my hands were trembling as I rigged that beautiful craft, blue hull and gray interior, for the very first time. It was a labor of love—Kent’s first honeycomb shell for girls, significantly lighter than Vespoli mono-hulls, harder to row, but faster if you rowed it well—and my heart was pounding the entire two hours it took to rig it.”

For 1986, McQ again configured his First Boat as starboard-stroke with a 6-7 port tandem.

First Boat 7-oar **Melissa Holcombe:** “The *Lucarelli*, we soon found out, was lighter and tippier than other boats we had used. It magnified both our strengths and our weaknesses, demanding more from us, but giving more if we earned it.”

First Boat stroke-oar **Ellen Austin:** “I remember being in awe of the *Lucarelli* when I first saw it and thinking we needed to respect it, use it, honor where it came from, and make it go fast.”

**McQ:**

*As you know, the '86 Crew would go undefeated, winning every Saturday race or regatta. Each Sunday evening, I would go into the boathouse and re-rig the Lucarelli, making the load ratio very difficult for high school girls to handle. So every Monday, the Second Boat would hold onto or even beat the First Boat. My goal was to prevent the First Boat from developing any sense of overconfidence or cockiness. If Kent's own Second Boat was beating them, they had to really buckle down the rest of the week before squaring off against other schools' First Boats. Then, of course, I would re-rig the Lucarelli on Monday evening, making it possible for the girls to start rebuilding their confidence and egos on Tuesday.*

*It meant a spring full of late Sunday and Monday nights for me, what with math quizzes and tests to grade and classes to prepare for . . . but I'd give anything to be able to do it again.*

*The girls wouldn't know any of this until I confessed it to them twenty years later during their Kent School Athletic Hall*

*of Fame Induction Ceremony weekend in 2006.*

*On the Thursday before Stotesbury, we practiced on the Housie, de-rigged, loaded the equipment on the truck, and the girls were allowed to attend evening chapel on the boys' campus rather than having to return to the girls' campus before we hit the road. Kent was celebrating Ascension Day, so the entire school climbed up to Numeral Rock for the service.*

*I warned the girls in both boats to take extreme care both climbing up the steep slope and coming back down. First Boat bow-oar **Julie Dillon** heeded my warning until the last ten or so feet coming down when she picked up speed, rolled her ankle, and badly sprained it. It quickly turned that nasty shade of purple.*

*That night, we kept her ankle packed in ice all the way to Philadelphia. Once we got to the Schuylkill River for Friday's heats, Julie, with fresh bags of ice from the motel, had to use crutches to get from Camp Kent to the launching area, our manager taking her place carrying the *Lucarelli*. Once on the dock, I had to carry Julie and slowly lower her into the bow-seat. The dock manager was somewhat bewildered by this spectacle . . . and got steadily more bemused as I lifted her out after the heat, back in again for Saturday morning's semi-final, out again, then finally in again for the Saturday afternoon grand final.*

*After the final when I lifted Julie out of the boat one last time, she had a Gold Medal around her neck. The dock manager, who had become a Kent fan thanks to Julie, just shook his head and said, 'You have got to be kidding me!'*

*Julie and her teammates were in no hurry to get off the dock, and the dock manager allowed them to mingle and celebrate. His grin was as wide as Julie's!*

The only time the 1986 First Boat did not cross a finish line in first place had been in their Stotesbury heat against Denis Morris Catholic High School of St. Catharines, Ontario.

**Melissa:** “We had not rowed our best in that heat for we had forgotten to lengthen out. We made the necessary changes in our style, won our semi-final, and

went on to win the final. The feeling of losing that heat gave us the determination to row what was probably our best race of the season.”

**McQ:**

*The girls who had won the 1985 New England Championship had been mostly Fourth Formers. To fulfill their potential, to establish and solidify their legacy of winning, to convince those who were still skeptics, these remarkable young women would have to repeat. Making that task even more challenging was that for the most part these girls were not “crew specialists” per se, but rather also cross-country runners, soccer players, basketball players, and swimmers.*

*Add to all this the increasing whispers of competing at the **National Women’s Rowing Association Championships** . . .*

*It would be nearly unprecedented for such a young coach and new program to believe that it was ready to compete at the national level. Our program was still only in its fourth year of competing in the spring, but in 1985 **Sue Egloff** and **Jen Casazza** had shown us the way in two NWRA events.*

*More than a little hubris was attached even to raising the question of competing at the national level, but as we won races each and every weekend, the momentum continued to build. Once we had completed our undefeated spring with our third New England Championship [1983, 1985, 1986], the members of the crew elected to postpone their summer plans to make a run at the National Championship.*

*Two days after Prize Day, the nine girls in Kent’s First Eight plus our spare, Second Eight stroke-oar **Andrea Ann Moalli ’86**, and manager **Tom Bunnell ’86** returned to Kent to train for the historic final NWRA Championship Regatta before the US men’s and women’s rowing federations were scheduled to merge (see 1971).*

*Double sessions allowed us to place an extra focus on technique in the afternoon heat as we lengthened out the mileage rowed each morning in the cooler temperatures to accommodate the demands of a 2000m race. (Regular season races had been either 1 mile or 1500m.)*

*Finally it was time to travel. The NWRA’s were being held on Hammond Lake, near Corning, New York.*

*Interestingly, back in the fall of 1973 when Kent Girls Rowing was born, one of the girls who showed up on that first*



**McQ waiting for the First Boat to pull into the Stotesbury Awards Dock after their win**

*day had been a Fourth Former named **Lizanne Thatcher “Tiz” Sutherland ’76**. She ended up rowing in the First Boat her Fifth and Sixth Form years, and after college, she came back to Kent as an assistant dean and science teacher.*

*When Assistant Coach Denny Maloney couldn’t make the trip to Corning, even though Tiz hadn’t been involved with the rowing team, she volunteered to drive the van while I drove the truck with the boat.*

*Tiz had been there at the very beginning. Now, coming full circle, she was playing a role in our first trip to the National Championships thirteen years later [see Fall 1975].*

*Our opening heat was on Thursday afternoon, and we won, granting us passage straight to Sunday morning’s grand final. This was a mixed blessing, for while other crews had to compete in repêchage races on Saturday midday, we would have to confront staleness before our last chance to race together in three long days’ time.*

*The other crew to win a heat, Green Lake Crew from Seattle, was undefeated on the West Coast, so the final would truly decide who was best in the entire country. We began with eleven crews in our event, five in our heat and six in Green Lake’s.*

*Bob Ernst was the University of Washington’s Women’s Head Crew Coach back then, and the night after the heats we found ourselves in the same bar a couple of blocks from where we were staying. Having watched both Green Lake and Kent win, he shared his opinion that we would win the final. I asked*



why—I was only twenty-eight years old and had no National Championship frame of reference—and he simply said, “You row better. Better technique, better control.”

I think those few words gave me the self-assurance I needed to give the girls confidence in their own abilities. We had two more days to wait until the final, so we rowed twice a day, in the early morning and very late afternoon once the racing had finished. Major taper, just “skills and drills.”

Finally, Sunday morning arrived. Very early Sunday, that is. Our grand final was scheduled for 7:45 a.m., and we had to allow for breakfast, dorm checkout, travel to the race course, and warm-up time. I don’t know how much sleep we collectively managed, but I know this coach tossed and turned until the alarm clock finally reached 4:30 a.m.

From that moment, adrenaline dialed us all up to eleven on a scale of ten. Despite our excitement and anticipation, the ride to the lake was remarkably calm and subdued—bagels and peanut butter, raisin bread and oranges, and lots of bottled water.

**Melissa**, describing the race from the 7-seat:

Our nervous energy lasted for about 500m of the 2000m race. To my right, I could tell that Green Lake was close by. To break the monotony of the middle 1000m, Jen called a succession of ten leg drives by each pair in the boat. When Jen called a set for the bow pair, I could feel the whole boat pulling harder, not just those two. We all drove our legs down as we did sets for 3 and 4, 5 and 6, and for stern pair. As we did those leg drives, I realized just how important each girl was and how well I had gotten to know them because of Crew.

Lastly, Jen called a set for Mr. McWhinney, and the boat

really accelerated, whether it was from our truly great respect for him or from the pent-up frustration of hearing him say things like “Duck Tape Quack Quack!” every time we packed the boat.

Finally, Jen called “Paddle,” and we had won. We rowed off into the quiet morning mist, away from the other boats, away from the crowd onshore. It was our last chance to row together.

**McQ**, reminiscing to the team in 2020:

Once the race was over, a few pictures taken, the boat derigged, and the truck packed up, the girls went their separate ways with their parents. No special celebration, just a couple of hugs and good-byes.

It was a very lonely drive in the truck for me back to Kent.

If I could recapture one memory of how completely focused and amazing your 1986 Crew was, and you probably don’t even remember it because it was a “coaching thing,” it occurred earlier that spring about 400m upstream of the dam. When we finished a power piece, I instructed coxswain Jen Tesoro through the megaphone to glide and not to “let fall” the oars. You remained balanced, oars off the water and feathered.

One minute on my stopwatch. Two minutes on my stopwatch. Three minutes on my stopwatch. A couple of giggles. Four minutes on my stopwatch. Very quiet now. The most amazing looks of determination and pride on your faces that I had ever seen. Five minutes of perfect balance! And then I gave the command, “Let fall!” Screams and squeals of delight. That may have been the moment when we won the National Championship, long before driving to Hammond Lake.

As you turned the boat around, I realized I was the



*Crossing the finish line (orange buoys)*



*“...our last chance to row together.”*



*Bunnell, Dillon, Kinney, Driscoll, Egloff, Tesoro, Casazza, Barnett, Holcombe, Austin, McWhinney*

*luckiest man alive to have had the privilege to coach you and your boatmates, a transcendent collection of athletes that set the standard for all future KGBC/KSBC Girls Crews.*

At the end of the 1986 Nationals, the First and Second Boat win streak going back two years stretched to 136-0.

**Hart Perry:** “The accomplishments of the Girls Crews of 1986 are a magnificent tribute to the unique strength and character of Kent School—selfless dedication, unceasing effort, true sportsmanship, and a true sense of the meaning of teamwork. The entire squad had these in abundance and as champions embodied the best of a tradition known as Kent Rowing.

“Well done, ladies!”

Ever the traditionalist, just months later Hart would respond emphatically to a member survey on the question of admitting women to his beloved **Leander Club** in Henley: “I am not against women and their part in the sport of rowing, but I hate to see something so special undergo what I envision to be a major change in

‘personality.’ While I can be accused of being an MCP, Leander has a unique atmosphere and tradition that would change *dramatically* [with the admission of women].

“Respectfully, *NO!*”

By the end of Kent Rowing’s First 100 Years, Hart had long since come around, and even Leander Club, like Kent School, was no longer discriminating at all against women in rowing. In recent years a woman even served as Leander Team Captain.



*Leander Club in the 1890s*