

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

# To the readers of *www.row2k.com*

As we begin the New Year, I am happy to announce that all four volumes of my book, the culmination of seven years of research, will be available for purchase on this website in October of 2011. Details will be forthcoming in the coming months.

This latest excerpt on *row2k* is the first of four that touch on the **women's rowing** in the 1970s and 1980s.

The subject of this draft chapter is all rowing at the **University of Wisconsin**, where men rowed for three-quarters of a century before women joined them on Lake Mendota. But after they arrived in early 1972, Badger women quickly transformed women's collegiate rowing in the United States and laid a foundation that brought an Olympic Gold Medal fourteen years later.

The following .pdf is in the format intended for the final printed book. It is from the third of four volumes.

### **I need you!**

If you find any typos in this chapter, or if you have any questions, comments, sug-

gestions, corrections, agreements, disagreements, additional sources and illustrations, etc. please email me at the address below. Your input will be an essential contribution to what has always been intended to be a joint project of the rowing community, so please contribute. If you and I end up finally disagreeing on some relevant point or another, I will be thrilled to present both alternatives so the readers can decide for themselves.

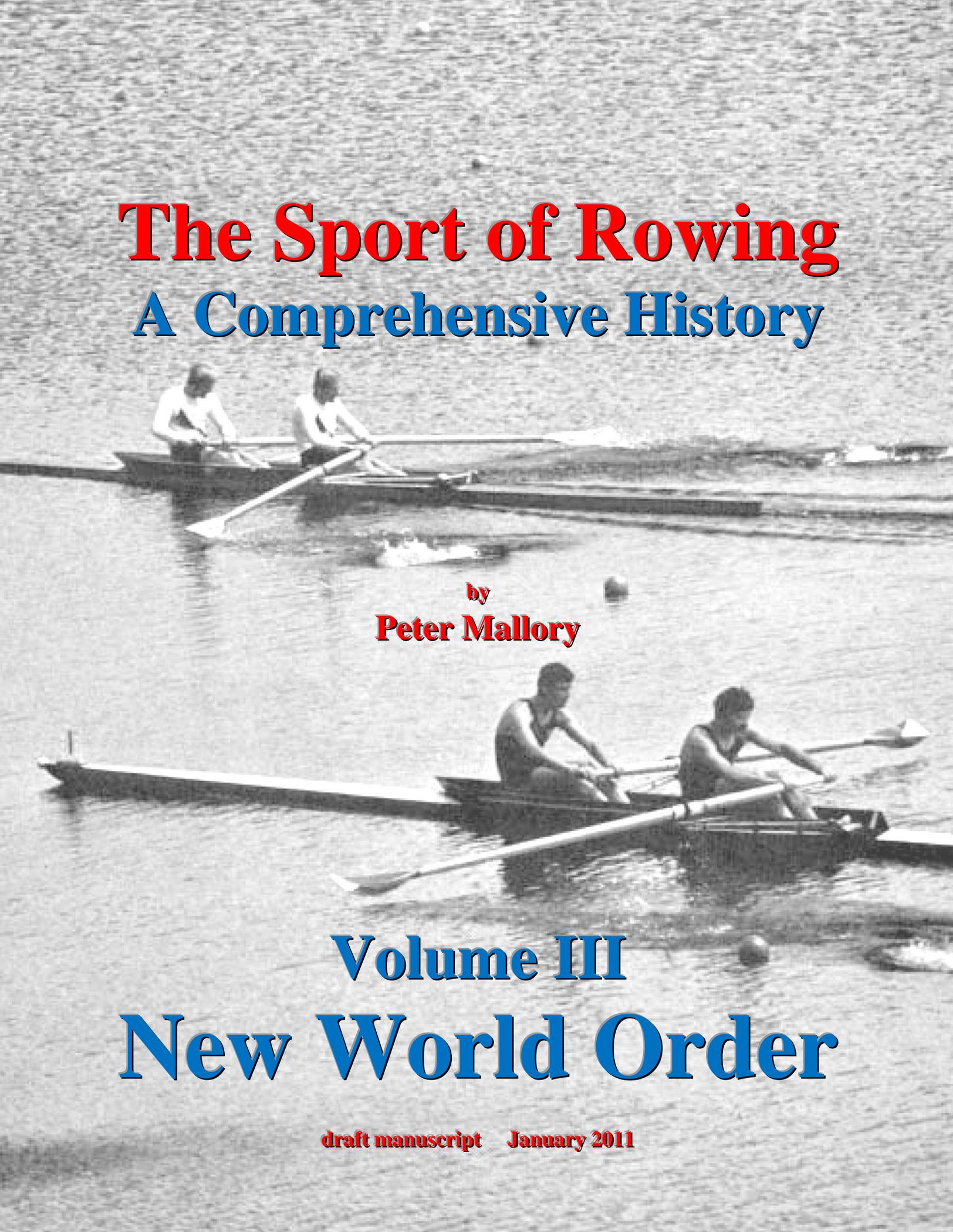
Incidentally, many thanks to all who wrote to thank me and to make corrections and add comments, photos, anecdotes, etc. to the recent postings on the 1984 U.S. men's scullers and on Ted Nash. Drafts with all the updates are now posted for you on row2k.

All my contact info is at my website. I will be at the **World Rowing Coaches' Conference** in London in January, 2011.

Or you can email me anytime at:

***[pmallory@rowingevolution.com](mailto:pmallory@rowingevolution.com)***.

Many thanks.



# **The Sport of Rowing** **A Comprehensive History**

by  
**Peter Mallory**

## **Volume III** **New World Order**

**draft manuscript January 2011**



## THE SPORT OF ROWING

### 106. Wisconsin, Where They Row *Kernschlag*

*Berry Crate Crew – Randy Jablonic – Wisco Women*

After the European discovery of North America, “civilization” got a first foothold along the Atlantic coast while the massive continent was perceived as dangerous forest primeval, sparsely populated with indigenous aborigines. As the centuries went by, civilization slowly and inexorably pushed westward, but the perception long remained that any settlement more than a few miles from the ocean was peopled by Indians, frontiers-men and farmers.

#### Location

During the early 1870s, the focal point of the American collegiate rowing universe was a population corridor hugging the East Coast. The **Massachusetts Agricultural College** in Amherst, eighty miles or 130 km inland from Boston, was considered foreign, a crew of farm boys from “**the West**,” the rural interior of the still relatively new United States. They won the first **Rowing Association of American Colleges** annual regatta in 1871, and the second regatta was won by Amherst College, just down the road from them.

But it was the **Cornell** Aggies, one hundred miles or 160 km *further* to the west, who really offended Yale’s Bob Cook.<sup>4635</sup>

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<sup>4635</sup> See Chapter 27 ff.

Starting in 1876, the Cornellians made a habit of beating their elite coastal brothers.

By the time the Intercollegiate Rowing Association was formed in 1895, Cornell was a founding member, but in 1896 the IRA refused an entry from the **University of Wisconsin**, an unimaginable six hundred miles or 1,000 km *further* into the uncivilized continental core from the ivy-covered halls of the other founding IRA members, Penn and Columbia.

Wisconsin had been founded in 1848, decades before Cornell but 94 years after Columbia and 108 years after Penn. Wisconsin athletic teams had adopted the **badger**<sup>4636</sup> as their mascot in 1889.

Perceptions gradually changed. In 1898, Wisconsin became the first non-founding school other than Harvard and Yale to be invited to participate in the IRA, and early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, crews such as Stanford and the University of Washington from the Pacific Coast, a whole world away from Boston, New York and Philadelphia, began to arrive in Poughkeepsie.



[www.UWBadgers.com](http://www.UWBadgers.com)

Wisconsin Badger

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<sup>4636</sup> Wisconsin was dubbed the “Badger State” because of the lead miners who first settled there in the 1820s and 1830s. Without shelter in the winter, they had to “live like badgers” in tunnels burrowed into hillsides. – [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

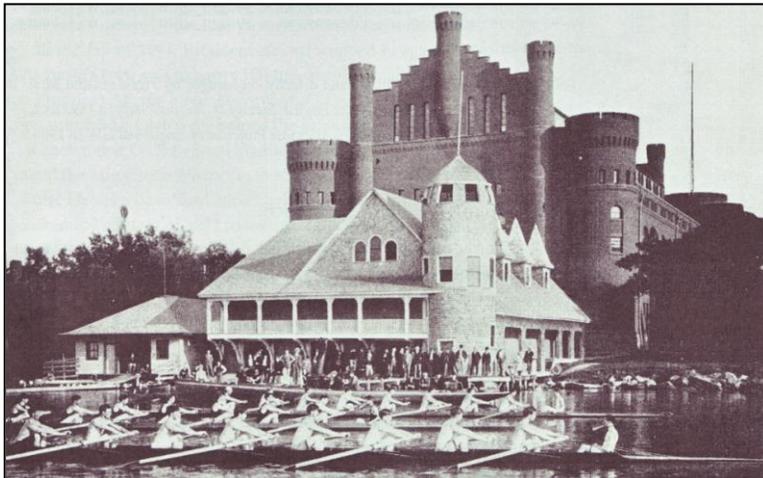
Wisconsin rowing's entire history has been to a large extent dictated by its location.

First, like Harvard, the U.S. Naval Academy and later the University of Washington, the Wisconsin campus in Madison was situated immediately adjacent to a body of water. The boathouse could be located right on campus, and the activities of the crew were visible to all. Around the world and throughout history, this has always provided a tremendous advantage.

Second, like Cornell (and Syracuse and Dartmouth), Madison's winters are long and severe. During its first century of rowing, on average the waters of Lake Mendota in front of the boathouse were not free of ice until around April 6, so the crew tended to get a late start every spring compared to many of their opponents.

Third, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Wisconsin was indeed isolated from other rowing programs, and it remains somewhat isolated today. Even as urban civilization reached to the American West Coast, the Midwest remained largely rural, with daunting distances separating regional populations. This isolation would eventually have an important impact on the evolution of a distinct Wisconsin approach to boat moving.

Rowing came to the University of Wisconsin in 1892, and it was encouraged by University President Charles Kendall Adams, who had learned a thing or two about the value of crew as President of Cornell University early in the Charles Courtney era.<sup>4637</sup>



*Taylor*

**University Boathouse** with the Red Gym behind, c. 1904

In 1893, a beautiful boathouse was built adjacent to the imposing Red Gym on campus, and an indoor tank was added in 1897.

In 1894, Adams hired **Amos Marston**, a former captain of the Cornell crew who had rowed four years under Courtney, to be Wisconsin's first rowing coach. A few months later, Adams replaced him with **Andrew M. O'Dea**, a former professional sculler from Yarra Yarra Rowing Club of Melbourne, Australia, who had been coaching in Minneapolis.<sup>4638</sup>

Wisconsin historian **Bradley F. Taylor**: "To stay in condition over the winter, the training included work on rowing machines in the new boathouse or in the balconies of the Old Red Gym. Other times, O'Dea had the boys push a red boat cart across the ice from the boathouse to the mouth of the Yahara River between Lakes Mendota and Monona, and then unload the shells and row on the open water of the river."<sup>4639</sup>

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<sup>4637</sup> See Chapter 31 ff.

<sup>4638</sup> Taylor, p. 23

<sup>4639</sup> Ibid, p. 24

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O'Dea reportedly taught what he called "the Kangaroo Stroke."

**Harper's Weekly**, July 18, 1896: "They sat up to their work with good backs, caught the water hard and together, left it neatly, and withal had an excellent body swing with the leg drive."<sup>4640</sup> Not unexpectedly, this sounds reminiscent of the **Ellis Ward Stroke** of the time.<sup>4641</sup>

When Wisconsin finished a respectable third behind Penn and Cornell in their first trip to Poughkeepsie in 1898, "Harvard promptly hired away O'Dea!"<sup>4642</sup>

The tenure of his successor, '98 Wisconsin grad **Curran McConville**, is most often remembered for the fate of his crew during his first year.

### The Berry Crate Crew

In 1899, Wisconsin sent a crew to Poughkeepsie averaging 165½ pounds, the same as Columbia's and outweighing Cornell's (162½) and Pennsylvania's (159).<sup>4643</sup> The race brought out the best in sports journalism of the era, worth excerpting at length.

*The New York Times*: "The town is in fever tonight, the tooting of horns, the ringing of bells, the shouting of college cries and all other evidences of student exhilaration between drinks. It is estimated that 20,000 persons saw the greatest race ever rowed on any course in America.

"At just six minutes past 7 o'clock, the four shells [IRA members **Pennsylvania**, **Cornell** and **Columbia** and guest **Wisconsin**] had lined up and had given answer to the referee that they were ready for the struggle, when the sharp click of a

pistol announced to the oarsmen that they were to start for their four-mile journey.

"All the crews seemed to catch the water well together, but the more powerful strokes of the Pennsylvanians and Wisconsinians enabled them to get a slight advantage in the first half dozen strokes. Then, just as the strangers from Wisconsin were forging to the front, No. 2 in their boat unshipped the slide of his seat and went over on his back with his oar shooting upward toward the sky.

"A dozen shrieks from the whistle of the referee's boat brought all the crews to a standstill. Slowly the boys turned their shells up the river and again lined up for another start.

[What followed were two more attempts to start the race, one aborted when Columbia was not ready, and the next when a huge side-wheel steamer came bearing down on the race course.]

"It was a trifle after 7:30 o'clock when the crews lined up for what proved to be the last attempt to make a fair start for all. It was a fair start they got, too. All caught the water when the pistol snapped this time, and all seemed to catch with the same force, deeply and well.

"For the first dozen strokes there was no perceptible advantage for any one of the eights. Cornell's crew had the outer course, which was supposed to be the most advantageous. Columbia was next to her. Then came the brawny Pennsylvanians, and on the extreme western course were the unknowns from Wisconsin, the crew without friends before the race was rowed, but with as many friends after it was over as had any of the crews.

"If those fellows from Milwaukee<sup>4644</sup> can do anything in their position against the fast Cornell boys, with the best place on the course as theirs, then they are simply

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<sup>4640</sup> Qtd. by Ibid, p. 30

<sup>4641</sup> See Chapter 36.

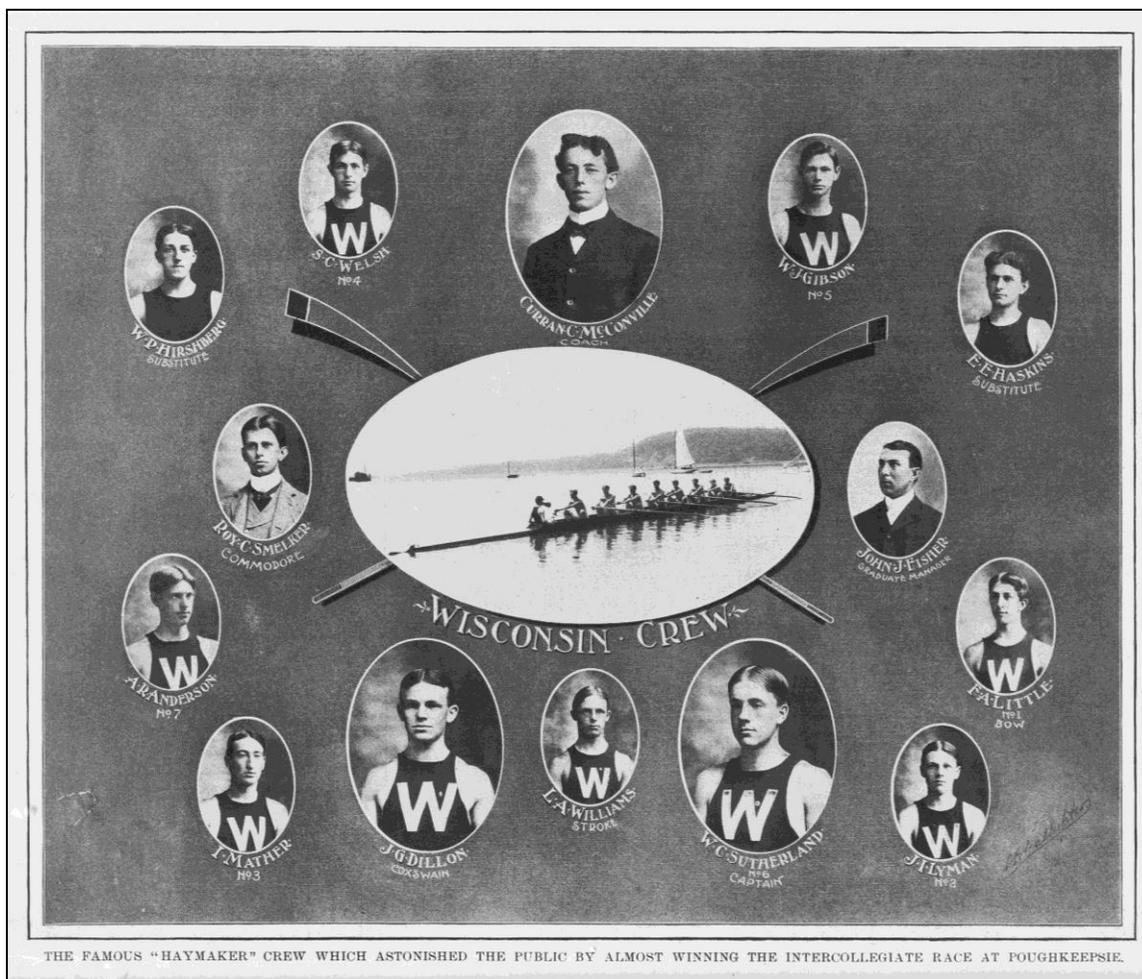
<sup>4642</sup> Taylor, p. 31

<sup>4643</sup> 75, 73.5 and 72 kg respectively.

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<sup>4644</sup> Apparently, the Eastern press was only aware of a single Wisconsin city.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



THE FAMOUS "HAYMAKER" CREW WHICH ASTONISHED THE PUBLIC BY ALMOST WINNING THE INTERCOLLEGIATE RACE AT POUGHKEEPSIE.

*Leslie's Weekly*, July 27, 1899

### 1899 University of Wisconsin "Berry Crate" Crew

Coxswain **Joseph Dillon** 112 lb. 51 kg,

Stroke **Lynn Williams** 155 lb. 70 kg, 7 **A.R. Anderson** 177 lb. 80 kg,

6 **William Sutherland** 164 lb. 74 kg, 5 **Will Gibson** 170 lb. 77 kg,

4 **S.C. Welsh** 178 lb. 81 kg, 3 **Israel Mather** 165 lb. 75 kg,

2 **J.I. Lyman** 160 lb. 73 kg, Bow **Frederick Little** 155 lb. 70 kg

wonders,' remarked a veteran of Pennsylvania who had rowed in the crew that was swamped on the course in 1895.<sup>4645</sup>

"Hardly had the words been uttered than the stroke of the Wisconsin boat hit the time up from 32 to the minute to 36 or possibly a little better. His men answered his call for

about twenty strokes with all the strength and vigor in their well-trained bodies. Like a projectile fired from a high-powered gun, their shell went through the water, which was cut asunder as cleanly as if done with a knifeblade by the razorlike prow of their boat. Before the spurt was ended, Wisconsin had actually outstripped the other boats and had a lead of a full length of her

<sup>4645</sup> See Chapters 32 and 36.

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shell and just a bit of clear water over the Pennsylvania crew, which had a trifling lead over Cornell, with Columbia lapping the latter, and with no decided advantage in favor of any of the three last named.

“Wisconsin will come back to the other shells as soon as she stops her spurt,” shouted the partisans of the other crews in the intervals between their shouts of encouragement to the crews from the Eastern colleges. But just then, as though to prove the foolishness of such remarks, Wisconsin lowered her stroke to 32 to the minute, and with every one of those strokes took such a good grip on the waters of the Hudson as to send her shell flying along on an even keel and at a pace that meant serious business for every one of the other crews if the Milwaukee lads could only keep up such perfect blade work as they were doing.

“Captains of each of the other crews were forced to make a spurt thus early in the race, and so upset all their previously made calculations as to how the race was to be rowed, all of which had been made with Wisconsin figured as a crew that was of no account in the race.

“Spurt as they would, however, and try as hard as they did, Wisconsin refused to allow them to cut down by even the least trifle the lead that she had attained thus early in the race, and so it happened that as the mark of the first half mile was passed, Wisconsin had a length to the good over her rivals. Cornell’s boys, spurting through their lane on the outside of the course, had secured second place by about a quarter of the length of their shell from Pennsylvania, whose men, rowing steadily and well, were about the same distance in front of Columbia. The latter’s boat seemed to sag and hang a bit even in this early stage of the race. But Columbia was by no means done at this point, for under call from her coxswain, her eight young men bent themselves to their work with vigor and

force enough to enable to creep up on the leaders.

“Between the half-mile and the mile mark, Cornell had been doing such effective work that as the mile mark was reached she was in second place. The Wisconsin lads had eased up a trifle at their slow stroke so that their lead was reduced to half a length.

“Pennsylvania had taken things so coolly and easily that at the mile she was absolutely last, Columbia leading her by about a quarter of a length. But once that mile post was passed, there was renewed life in two of the boats. The lads from Wisconsin under their cool-headed captain had kept at their 32 stroke, while Pennsylvania and Cornell were both rowing about 34, trying at this lively rate to get the lead away from the Wisconsin boys, who, they had now decided, were the ones they had to reckon with before they should know the taste of victory.

“Cornell spurting and Pennsylvania spurting, and, save for some trifling splashing on the port side of the Wisconsin shell, all of these thirty-two young men in the shells moved in unison like some splendid piece of machinery.

“At the end of the mile and a half the spurting was over, and all the crews had settled down to business and rowed steadily and without any fancy work for the next mile. In that distance, Wisconsin had recovered its lead of a length. The exertions of its rivals had told on them, while the Wisconsins, taking things easily and saving themselves for the final brush further down the river, had simply held their own.

“The Pennsylvania boys gradually bettered their position, and at the two-and-a-half-mile mark got their shell into second place, being but a foot ahead of Cornell, which was now a good length ahead of Columbia. The latter never showed plainly that she would be a factor in the race, though her boys held pluckily on to the end.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

“It was just at this point that there happened a little incident, hardly noticed at the time of its occurrence, that in all probability had much to do with the final result of the race. Right in the path of the Wisconsin shell was a floating fish crate or box of some kind that the coxswain had to turn far to the right to pass in safety. This brought his shell over too near the west bank of the river, and from the time of this trifling incident the shell of the Westerners was never in its proper water, but well to the right of it.”<sup>4646</sup>

Wisconsin coxswain **Joseph G. Dillon**: “Just as we were passing the big bridge, I noticed a large **berry crate** floating right ahead of us, hard on our port bow. In a few seconds we would have struck it, and in order to escape from a disastrous collision, I veered sharply toward the shore, going so far out of our course that I realized that if I were to attempt to get back again the movement would probably cost us the half length that we were then in the lead of Pennsylvania, and looking down among the small boats [outside] of the course and seeing what I thought was a chance to pass them and reach the finish line, I resolved to keep the shell as she was then headed and take the chance.”<sup>4647</sup>

*The New York Times*: “It was just at this point, too, that the Pennsylvania boys put themselves into a good position for the final struggle. Either because of weariness on the part of the Ithacans or by reason of a heart-breaking spurt on the part of the Quakers, the latter managed to get a lead of a good half length over the Cornell lads. From that point on, Courtney’s pets were as much out of the game as were the Columbians. All hope of the honor of victory was gone, and there remained for them only the chance of saving the money

that had been bet on them to beat Columbia. There was little heart in their work, and they did not like the sound of the Pennsylvania cheers and yells that came ringing across the water in their ears.

“Columbia’s yells had died away a mile further up the river. Cornell’s were silenced at this point near to the big bridge which marked the beginning of the [fourth] and last mile of the race.

“For the quarter of a mile immediately before reaching the bridge and a quarter after passing it, Pennsylvania’s crew rowed as it never has rowed before. They were desperate at the way in which the despised Wisconsin boys held on and answered spurt after spurt and held their lead doggedly and persistently. Shake them off they could not. To catch them was a task apparently impossible. But the Pennsylvanias kept at it, and from that half mile they and the Wisconsin boys rowed like madmen, though each crew managed to keep its form and steadiness.

“Pennsylvania was well over to the east of the course, where there was all the benefit possibly to be got from the tide, while the Wisconsins were pulling away in dead water, and their coxswain had either lost control of the boat or of his head, for he kept running the shell in toward the west shore.

“The officials on the referee’s boat shouted at him and did everything possible to prevent him from making the grandest race ever rowed the fiasco that it turned out to be – fiasco not because the Wisconsin did not do their best, but because they threw away a victory they had almost won.

“Everybody but the unlucky coxswain could see just what was going to happen, and just what did happen by his getting out of his course. The sympathy of the crowd was plainly with the Westerners who had come here without any bluster and had shown themselves to be oarsmen of the very best type.

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<sup>4646</sup> Pennsylvania Wins in Poughkeepsie, *The New York Times*, June 28, 1899

<sup>4647</sup> Qtd by Taylor, p. 38

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

“Even as the shells of the first two crews reached the very last half-mile mark, the Wisconsin still had a half length to the best of it, and but for the erratic course followed by their coxswain would in all probability would have taken back with them to Wisconsin the trophy and the honors of beating a splendid lot of oarsmen, probably the very best in the East.

“At the foot of the last half mile of the course there had been packed in between the shore and the open lanes kept for the [shells] a lot of small sailing craft and steam launches. Directly down into this mass of boats the Wisconsin coxswain steered his craft while the Pennsylvania boys kept down the straight course that led to the finish line.

“Whistles were screeching, guns booming, and all the noises that man has invented for use on such occasions were making themselves heard as the pair of shells rushed down to where the judges at the finish were stationed. Perhaps this rattled the Wisconsin. Pennsylvania, by holding to its course after the bridge was passed, gained an advantage of at least a length, maybe more.

“At all events, it was a sufficient amount to get its shell first passed the judges by but a trifle more than half its length in spite of disadvantage the Wisconsin were under.

“Wisconsin finished away out of their lane, back even of the inshore boat that marked the finish line, and where, even had they finished first, it would have been doubtful if they would have gotten the benefit of a victory.

“While the guns were booming and the whistles screeching, Cornell passed through its proper lane three lengths and a half behind Pennsylvania and, according to the time of the race, nearly three lengths behind Wisconsin. Columbia, well fagged out, brought up the rear of the procession, a couple of lengths behind Cornell.

“Oarsmen generally believe here tonight that had Wisconsin been able to keep her

boat on the proper course it would have resulted in a victory for her. Up to the point where Wisconsin’s shell first got so hopelessly out of her proper course, the Wisconsin crew was in the lead. Wisconsin’s men were as fresh and apparently rowing with as much power as those of the Pennsylvania crew, but once the strangers got over among the interfering craft they were attacked with nervousness.

“This was shown that twice between that time and the finish, No. 4 of their boat ‘caught a crab,’ which, of course, interfered with the impetus of the boat. These two accidents alone would have accounted for the second and a half of time between the finish of the Pennsylvania and Wisconsin crews, and so a well-earned victory for Wisconsin was lost.

“After the race, **Ellis Ward**, the coach of the victorious Pennsylvania crew, said: ‘I had no idea that the Wisconsin were the powerful crew that they proved to be. I thought they could beat Columbia without much difficulty, but *their form had been so ragged in practice* that I did not see how they could beat two crews like Pennsylvania and Cornell. This is one of the cases, however, where splendidly conditioned men, fitted physically for their boat, can often beat crews whose rhythm and form are absolutely perfect.’

‘I had told the men to pay no attention to any crew but Cornell. They followed their instructions implicitly and with almost fatal result. Had we known that we were going to have such a crew to race as Wisconsin proved to be, we would have kept with them all the way. [my emphasis]’<sup>4648</sup>

“I would like to make one statement right here about that floating box that is said to have blocked the Wisconsin boat. The box was just below the two-and-a-half-mile mark, instead of the three-mile as has been alleged, and it was not in Wisconsin’s way a

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<sup>4648</sup> *The New York Times*, op cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

particle. The whole cause of their veering at that point was a weakness of their starboard side. It has been said that Wisconsin caught a crab, and that lost them the race. I did not see any crab caught, although they splashed a good deal.

“The catching and passing of Wisconsin was one steady series of gains. My brother, who was at the four-mile line, says Pennsylvania finished four lengths ahead instead of the half a length allowed by the judges. I believe that.

“The Wisconsins are nice boys, but they cannot beat Pennsylvania’s crew this year.”<sup>4649</sup>

This story would perhaps have been soon forgotten by Wisconsin had it been followed by IRA wins to ease the pain of such a narrow loss, but it would be fifty-two long years before the University of Wisconsin would finally bring home the Intercollegiate Rowing Association trophy for varsity eights. Through all that time, the 1899 Varsity was remembered as the **Berry Crate Crew**.

### Professional Coaches

Unhappy at Harvard, Australian professional **Andrew O’Dea** returned to Madison after just a year. In 1906, he was succeeded by **Ned Hanlan Ten Eyck**, son of James Ten Eyck, the coach at Syracuse University.<sup>4650</sup>

One memorable event of Ned’s short tenure at Wisconsin was a win over his

<sup>4649</sup> Qtd. By Than V. Rank, Why Pennsylvania Wins, *Leslie’s Weekly*, July 20, 1899, p. 50

<sup>4650</sup> See Chapter 41.

father’s Syracuse varsity in Madison in 1907, “but Badger shells finished at or near the bottom of each of the four years’ (1907-10) Poughkeepsie Regatta results.”<sup>4651</sup>

Shortly thereafter, Ten Eyck was succeeded by professional sculler and Harvard graduate **Harry Emerson “Dad” Vail**.<sup>4652</sup>



Wikipedia.org

Dad Vail

**Taylor:** “The *Wisconsin State Journal* of March 18, 1911 reported, ‘All of the crew men like the strapping giant, who peels off his citizen clothes and gets into a gym suit to show them how to operate an oar in the shell.’”<sup>4653</sup>

Vail coached the Badgers from 1910 until his death in 1928, but except for second places in 1912 and 1924 and a third in 1925, IRA results were disappointing.

Despite that, he was much beloved in the rowing community. In 1934, Penn coach **Rusty Callow**<sup>4654</sup> “contributed the first place Dad Vail Trophy to a regatta he encouraged for small colleges and new crew programs in Marietta, Ohio.”<sup>4655</sup> The annual **Dad Vail Regatta** continues today. It has been most often held on the Schuylkill River

in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

The Wisconsin crew moved through the next two decades under a number of coaches, most notably **Allen W. “Skip”**

<sup>4651</sup> Taylor, p. 48

<sup>4652</sup> See Chapter 43.

<sup>4653</sup> Taylor, pp. 50-1

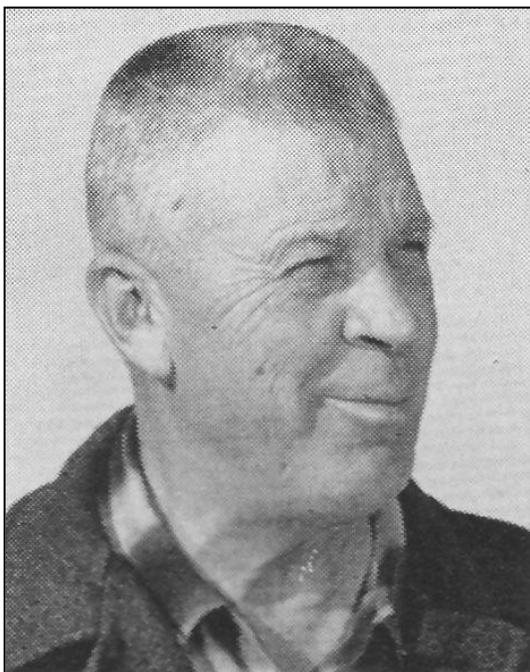
<sup>4654</sup> See Chapter 64.

<sup>4655</sup> Taylor, p. 60

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**Walz**<sup>4656</sup> (1940-42, 1945-46), culminating in a varsity win the first Eastern Sprints Championship, held in Annapolis on May 13, 1946. After fifty-four years, this was the first-ever Badger championship, a true testament in patience and endurance.<sup>4657</sup>

### Norm Sonju



1964 Eastern Sprints Program

### Norm Sonju

After Walz moved on to Yale in 1946, Wisconsin joined the majority of American collegiate rowing programs on both coasts by hiring a University of Washington graduate to coach them,<sup>4658</sup> **Norm Sonju** '27. He had rowed on the 1926 IRA

Champion crew coached by **Rusty Callow**<sup>4659</sup> with future Washington Coach **Al Ulbrickson**<sup>4660</sup> at stroke and future Cornell Coach **Stork Sanford**<sup>4661</sup> at 7. Sonju was team captain in 1927, served briefly as an assistant coach at his alma mater and then in 1936 went to Cornell with Stork.

**Taylor**: "Apparently, no head coach decision had been made. Future Badger assistant **Randy Jablonic** remembers Sonju telling the story several times that, following their arrival in Ithaca, Sanford and Sonju flipped a coin to determine who would coach the varsity and who would guide the freshmen. Sanford ended up with the varsity. As a result, many would say the two acted as 'co-coaches' of the Cornell crew."<sup>4662</sup>

**Jablonic**: "Norm liked long practices. He also would not frequently change the varsity boating arrangement. Sometimes he would watch the same guy for two or three days, counting how many bad strokes out of several hundred a rower would make. Five out of six hundred was good. Norm liked consistency."<sup>4663</sup>

According to **Allison Danzig** of *The New York Times*, in 1951 Sonju was coaching "the powerful, short-swinging Badgers,"<sup>4664</sup> suggesting that Wisconsin was rowing a version of the limited-layback **2<sup>nd</sup> Generation Conibear Stroke** originated by Al Ulbrickson and Tom Bolles.<sup>4665</sup>

**Eric Aserlind '75**: "I got the feeling that for Norm Sonju in Wisconsin's relative isolation, the emphasis was on beefy

<sup>4656</sup> See Chapters 65 and 81.

<sup>4657</sup> It would not be until 2002, fifty-six years later, that Wisconsin would win the Eastern Sprints again. Coming in mid-May, the regatta is only about five weeks after the ice breaks in Madison.

<sup>4658</sup> See Chapter 50.

<sup>4659</sup> See Chapters 53 and 64.

<sup>4660</sup> See Chapter 59.

<sup>4661</sup> See Chapter 70.

<sup>4662</sup> Taylor, pp. 90-1

<sup>4663</sup> Qtd. by Ibid, p. 92

<sup>4664</sup> Allison Danzig, *Race Cut to Two Miles*, *The New York Times*, June 17, 1951

<sup>4665</sup> See Chapter 59.

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*Syracuse Herald American*

**Randy Jablonic**  
with his team and the IRA Trophy

oarsmen and mile upon mile of sustained rowing.”<sup>4666</sup>

Sonju coached at Wisconsin for twenty-two seasons from the fall of 1946 to 1968, winning three IRA varsity titles, the first in the 1951 flood in Marietta,<sup>4667</sup> and later in 1959 and 1966 on Onondaga Lake.

Sonju’s teams tended to be manned by tall Wisconsin natives of Scandinavian descent recruited on campus. His crews had some of the same characteristics that Penn Coach Ellis Ward had seen in the Berry Crate Crew a half-century earlier: “Their form had been so ragged. This is one of the cases, however, where splendidly

conditioned men, fitted physically for their boat, can often beat crews whose rhythm and form are absolutely perfect.”<sup>4668</sup>

### **Randy Jablonic**

Three-seat on the 1959 IRA Champion Wisconsin Varsity was **Randall T. Jablonic**. After he graduated in 1960, he became Sonju’s Freshman Coach.

**Aserlind:** “Jabo comes across as exactly what he is – a jovial Northern Wisconsin farm boy with beefy hands, bulbous calves and an earthy charm. This decidedly un-Ivy persona was precisely what appealed to his targets in the registration lines at the

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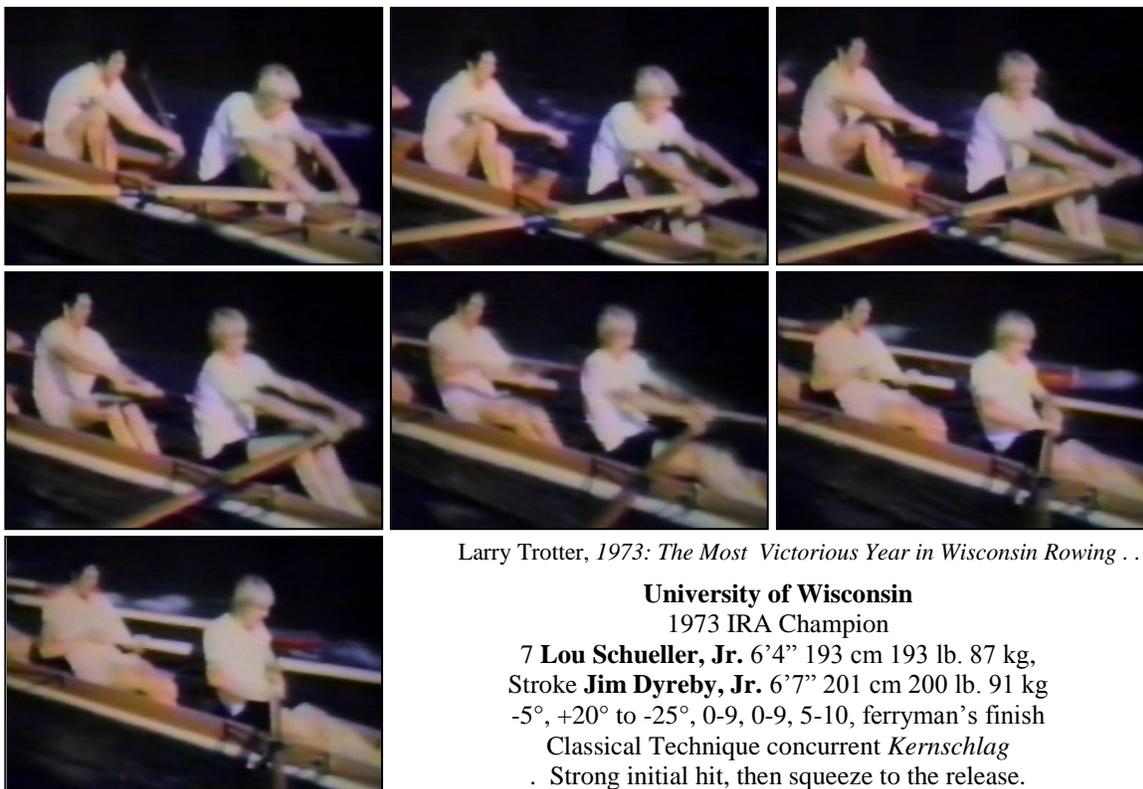
<sup>4666</sup> Aserlind, personal correspondence, 2010

<sup>4667</sup> See Chapter 64.

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<sup>4668</sup> Pennsylvania Wins in Poughkeepsie, *The New York Times*, June 28, 1899

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Larry Trotter, 1973: *The Most Victorious Year in Wisconsin Rowing . . .*

### University of Wisconsin

1973 IRA Champion

7 **Lou Schueller, Jr.** 6'4" 193 cm 193 lb. 87 kg,  
Stroke **Jim Dyreby, Jr.** 6'7" 201 cm 200 lb. 91 kg  
-5°, +20° to -25°, 0-9, 0-9, 5-10, ferryman's finish  
Classical Technique concurrent *Kernschlag*  
. Strong initial hit, then squeeze to the release.

University of Wisconsin, the rangy, homegrown boys from the farms and towns of the state. Very few of his recruits had ever even heard of rowing, let alone set foot in a shell. In fact, in the five years I spent rowing in Madison, I think I only rowed with one guy who had any pre-college crew experience.<sup>4669</sup>

When Sonju retired at the end of the 1968 season, Jablonic moved up to Head Coach. This represented a confluence of evolutionary forces: an isolated population seeking guidance from within, increasing the isolation.

Result? Inbreeding? It didn't happen. The 1960s were a fertile period of new ideas in rowing. If Sonju remained a traditionalist to the end, his freshman coach did not. When Jabo took over the reins, it was at the

height of **Harry Parker's** explosion onto the American collegiate scene,<sup>4670</sup> and Jablonic obviously studied carefully the technique of the all-conquering Harvard crews of the mid-1960s,<sup>4671</sup> which he would have seen each spring at the Eastern Sprints.

**Tim Mickelson '70:** "I had Jabo as my Freshman Coach and then again as a junior and senior. My sophomore year of 1968 was under Coach Sonju. That spring, we were well trained as a long distance crew even though it was a 2000m race that year at the IRA.

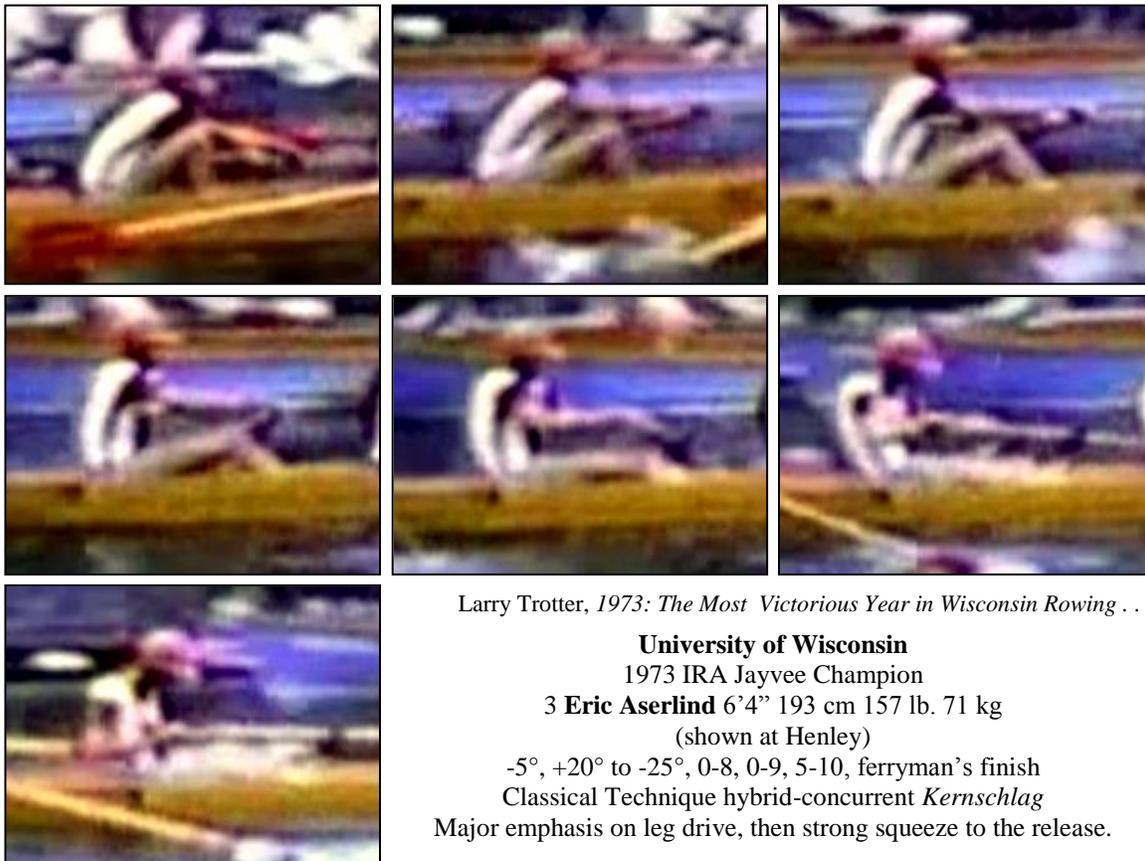
"During the summer of 1968, there were three Wisconsin oarsmen trying out for the National Team in Boston at a camp set up at Union Boat Club, near Harvard. I think

<sup>4669</sup> Aserlind, personal correspondence, 2010

<sup>4670</sup> See Chapter 105.

<sup>4671</sup> See Chapters 101 and 102.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



Larry Trotter, 1973: *The Most Victorious Year in Wisconsin Rowing . . .*

### University of Wisconsin

1973 IRA Jayvee Champion

3 Eric Aserlind 6'4" 193 cm 157 lb. 71 kg

(shown at Henley)

-5°, +20° to -25°, 0-8, 0-9, 5-10, ferryman's finish

Classical Technique hybrid-concurrent *Kernschlag*

Major emphasis on leg drive, then strong squeeze to the release.

Steve Gladstone<sup>4672</sup> coached it. I was also training in Philly.

"Harvard's success certainly had Jabo's attention in the late '60s. When we came back that fall, with Jabo's encouragement we just kept rowing the way we had in the summer. He also started having the freshman coach teach a harder catch with the back opening up right away in unison with the legs.

"Both Jay Mimier and I were also in the 1969 U.S. Eight coached by Gladstone, who at that point had a philosophy similar to Harry Parker's.

"The end result was that I never felt coming into Harry's 1972 Olympic Camp

that I had to change anything from the Wisconsin style."<sup>4673</sup>

Under Randy Jablonic, Wisconsin recoveries were a subtle but unmistakable copy of **Stop & Shop**,<sup>4674</sup> a brief hesitation at the finish followed by a mild acceleration to an instantaneous entry.

**Aserlind:** "Starting with the recovery, the emphasis was on a slow slide with arms almost fully extended and body angle established early on. Then, for lack of a better term, there was an 'attack' at the catch – a firm, almost violent impaling of the water. The legs and back came on to drive the boat, followed by the last vestiges of

<sup>4672</sup> See Chapter 105.

<sup>4673</sup> Mickelson, personal correspondence, 2010

<sup>4674</sup> See Chapter 102.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

power from the finish of the arm pull to a quiet release from the water.

“Repeat dose as needed.”<sup>4675</sup>

Force application was *Kernschlag*, at least as aggressive as any of the mid-’60s Harvard crews,<sup>4676</sup> but the Badger athletes were big, strong, talented and committed. Having long winters and no serious competition closer than 500 miles, Wisconsin trained like demons and were more than prepared to outwork their opponents when they finally got to race each spring.

**Aserlind:** “Jabo told us what he wanted us to do, but our job was just to pull hard, and the rest would come. Maybe that was the genius of Jabo. For better or worse, it seemed to work for this particular group of guys.”<sup>4677</sup>

By the early 1970s, thanks perhaps to the influence of small boat rowing and seat racing, which rewarded boat moving,<sup>4678</sup> force application had become a solid, continuous effort from entry to release, but the emphasis remained on a very strong, attacking effort at entry. A similar evolution was taking place at Harvard.<sup>4679</sup>

**Mickelson:** “By the time Eric came along, I believe the strong lift at the catch with the shoulders had smoothed out somewhat so that you saw the bodies moving up and down throughout the drive, followed by a definite pause at the finish.”<sup>4680</sup>

### 1973-1975

During twenty-seven seasons under Jablonic, the Badgers won the IRA Ten

Eyck team trophy nine times and the varsity eights race four, including three in a row, 1973, 1974 and 1975, putting Jabo in the exclusive company of Ellis Ward, Charles Courtney, Ky Ebright, Stork Sanford and Joe Burk.<sup>4681</sup>

The three seasons beginning in the fall of 1972 were Wisconsin’s best ever, including two wins in the Championship Eights at the Head of the Charles, second, second and third in the Eastern Sprints varsity race, three Ten Eyck team trophies and three firsts in the varsity eight at the IRA, including a sweep of all three events in 1973. That year all three IRA winners, the Varsity, Jayvee and Freshmen also competed at Henley.

All this was accomplished during a minor lull for **Harvard**,<sup>4682</sup> but **Northeastern University** was at its height.<sup>4683</sup> In fact, the Huskies won the ‘73 Sprints before the Badgers came back and beat them at the IRAs. Then Northeastern eliminated Wisconsin by a length in the semi-finals of the Grand Challenge Cup before they in turn were put out by the Soviets in the final.

**Aserlind:** “One of my favorite memories was at the 1974 IRA. The June culmination of our collegiate season fell after a week of final exams. Because of exam schedules and Jabo’s desire to get in some small boat work, the Varsity Eight had

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<sup>4681</sup> Courtney had three three-in-a-row runs and then won it four times in a row from 1909 to 1912. Sanford won four in a row between 1955 and 1958. Rusty Callow would also be included in the three-in-a-row list, but his 1954 IRA Champions were disqualified on a technicality. See Chapter 64.

In the decades since 1975, Harry Parker won three consecutive IRAs for Harvard between 2003 and 2005, and Steve Gladstone won four in a row for California between 1999 and 2002.

<sup>4682</sup> See Chapter 104.

<sup>4683</sup> See Chapter 116.

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<sup>4675</sup> Aserlind, op cit.

<sup>4676</sup> See Chapter 102.

<sup>4677</sup> Aserlind, op cit.

<sup>4678</sup> See Chapter 101.

<sup>4679</sup> See Chapters 102 and 103.

<sup>4680</sup> Mickelson, personal correspondence, 2010

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



Eric Aserlind

### University of Wisconsin Men's Varsity 1974 IRA Champion

Stroke **Jim Dyreby, Jr.** 6'7" 201 cm 200 lb. 91 kg, 7 **Jim Ricksbecker** 6'3" 191 cm 180 lb. 82 kg,  
6 **Bob Espeseth** 6'5" 196 cm 188 lb. 85 kg, 5 **Lou Schueller, Jr.** 6'4" 193 cm 193 lb. 87 kg,  
4 **Loren Bartz** 6'4" 193 cm 195 lb. 88 kg, 3 **Karl Newman** 6'5" 196 cm 195 lb. 88 kg,  
2 **Jim Swanson** 6'1" 185 cm 178 lb. 81 kg, Bow **Eric Aserlind** 6'4" 193 cm 157 lb. 71 kg,  
Coxswain **John Bosio**

**Aserlind:** "I think Jabo was embarrassed to have somebody in his boat that weighed less than 160, so he put me as 164 in the IRA Program. I remember the Kansas State coach, Don Rose, engaging me in a conversation in the elevator at the Syracuse dorms because I was wearing a Wisconsin jacket. He proceeded to go on and on about coordinating a 'pickle boat' race with K State and Wisco.

I must have had a blank look on my face because he finally stopped and asked,  
'You *are* the Wisconsin team manager, aren't you?'

I replied that I was in the V8, and he just shook his head . . ."

**Eric Aserlind** and **Bob Espeseth** would both go on to become World Champions for the U.S.

spent the week rowing only in fours and pairs.

"We climbed onto the bus for our two-day ride (with an overnight stay at the fabled Toledo Turnpike Motel) to Syracuse and arrived tired, stiff, hungry and cranky on a stifling afternoon to rig the eight and row on the Erie Canal. After 'friggin' with the riggin'" for what seemed an interminable time, we pushed off and pulled away, rowing by pairs as people tied in and warmed up.

"Finally, the coxswain ordered 'Ready all. Row!' The boat leapt like it never had

before. The next stroke, the same thing. Again and again. For perhaps twenty or thirty strokes we rowed like that, long and low. The boat was flying, and we were barely at half pressure! We stopped with our oars off the water, in perfect balance as the water hissed by. Many meters later we floated to a stop. No one said a word.

"Finally, stroke **Jim Dyerby**<sup>4684</sup> exhaled' 'Holy [cow]!'

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<sup>4684</sup> one of just a handful of athletes in history to win the IRA four times. Besides stroking the

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

“Nobody else said a word as we continued on, afraid to disturb the magic. We had reached rowing nirvana.

“It held, and four days later we won the varsity eight championship on Lake Onondaga.”<sup>4685</sup>

Wisconsin’s men’s team during this era had a substantial influence on U.S. National Team rowing. **Randy Jablonic** coached the U.S. Men’s Eight in 1981 and 1982,<sup>4686</sup> and various Badger rowers made the National Team over the years, most notably **Tim Michelson ‘70**, 5 in the 1972 Olympic Silver Medal Eight<sup>4687</sup> and bow in the 1974 World Champion Eight,<sup>4688</sup> **Eric Aserlind ‘75**, 5 in the 1974 World Champion Lightweight Eight, **Bob Espeseth ‘75**, stroke of the 1986 World Champion Coxless-Four,<sup>4689</sup> and **Beau Hoopman ‘03**, 7 in the 2004 Olympic Champion Eight.<sup>4690</sup>

Under current Coach **Chris Clark**,<sup>4691</sup> the Wisconsin Men’s Varsity has recently reestablished itself in the top echelon of American rowing, winning the IRA in 2008.

### Wisconsin Women

The University of Wisconsin has actually had an even greater influence on American mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century rowing on the women’s side.

Even during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, participation by females in anything even resembling competitive sport had been limited to parlor games and social lawn sports like croquet. For the British aristocracy and their counterparts

worldwide, ladies were being prepared for a life of afternoon teas, and for everybody else it was the prospect of a life of domestic servitude.

Those women around the world who actually rowed prior to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century tended to do so at first recreationally and later with far less intensity than men. When women’s events were added to the European Championships in 1954, they were only allowed to row 1,000 meters, half the men’s distance, in consideration of the inherent frailty of their sex.

Wisconsin rower **Carie Graves**: “When I was in college, some women were afraid to tap into things like the aggressiveness it takes to realize one’s athletic potential. Because women were discouraged by the connotation of ‘jocks,’ athleticism wasn’t something young women talked about.”<sup>4692</sup>

The emerging women’s movement of the 1960s demanded gender equality in all things as a basic human right, and that included athletics. In the United States, **Title IX**, passed in 1972, mandated gender equality in collegiate athletics, and it was into this atmosphere that the Wisconsin women’s crew emerged in January of 1972 and left its mark on rowing history.

**Kathy Wutke**, formerly a member of the Badger swim team and founder of the modern Wisconsin Women’s Crew: “The inspiration for the women’s team began in the fall of 1971 based on a statement made by one of the male crew members when I was out on a date with him: ‘Women were not built to row too short, not strong enough, physiology all wrong, etc.’ That was all it took! I loved a challenge and was going to find a way to prove him wrong.”<sup>4693</sup>

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1973-75 Varsity, he was 6 on the 1972 IRA Champion Freshmen.

<sup>4685</sup> Aserlind, op cit.

<sup>4686</sup> See Chapter 124.

<sup>4687</sup> See Chapter 103.

<sup>4688</sup> See Chapter 111.

<sup>4689</sup> See Chapter 132.

<sup>4690</sup> See Chapter 156.

<sup>4691</sup> See Chapter 144.

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<sup>4692</sup> Qtd. by Taylor, p. 203

<sup>4693</sup> Kathryn Smith (Wutke), personal correspondence, 2010

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



Kathryn Wutke Smith

### Kathy Wutke

Wutke quickly recruited co-founder **Sue Ela**, and practices began the following semester.

In the 1970s, there were only a few serious American collegiate women's programs, and the brand new Badger squad was immediately among the very best. Why?

I believe it was the coaches. Men's Head Coach **Randy Jablonic** was supportive from the beginning, coaching the women in the tanks the first week, and successful Men's Freshman Coach **Doug Neil** soon took on the task of guiding the women during their first year.

**Wutke**: "After three months of working under the coaching of Doug Neill, we had our first race in spring against two boats from the University of Minnesota and one from the Minnesota Boat Club. We won the race and unofficially broke the national record, which really shook our coaches up! It was a great day for us as we showed everyone for the first time what Wisconsin women can do. We would have gone to

Seattle that spring for the Nationals, but we were short one starboard."<sup>4694</sup>

In the fall of 1972, they placed second overall and were the first collegiate finisher in the Championship Women's Eight at the **Head of the Charles**.<sup>4695</sup>

**Wutke**: "After the race, Sue Ela and I spent the evening explaining to Easterners that not all women from Wisconsin live on farms and know how to milk cows. After a wild night, we almost missed the plane back to Madison."<sup>4696</sup>

**Ela**: "I cannot say enough about the contributions Doug Neil made to our program of upstart women. He was a true artist, and his approach instilled in me and others (including those great frosh men's crews of the early '70s) a sense of flow, rhythm, and that indescribable aspect of rowing and team that technical discussion cannot touch."<sup>4697</sup>

### Jay Mimier

When Neil's responsibilities with his men's team began to require his full attention, he turned the women over to **Jay Mimier**.<sup>4698</sup> Jay had rowed in the Wisconsin Varsity from 1968 to 1970. With Tim Mickelson, he also rowed 3-seat in the 1969 Union Boat Club eight that placed 9<sup>th</sup> at the European Championships in Klagenfurt under then-Harvard Lightweight Coach **Steve Gladstone**.<sup>4699</sup>

**Ela**: "We were heartbroken to learn that Doug would no longer be our coach, but

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<sup>4694</sup> Smith, op cit.

<sup>4695</sup> See Chapter 116.

<sup>4696</sup> Smith, op cit.

<sup>4697</sup> Ela, personal correspondence, 2010

<sup>4698</sup> pronounced "**Mim**-E-A" by his rowing friends. As a Dane County Assistant District Attorney, he is known as "**Mim**-E-er."

"When someone says my name, I can tell immediately where they know me from." –

Mimier, personal conversation, 2010

<sup>4699</sup> See Chapter 105.

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when Jay started coaching us . . . the artistry and the beast met!

“We learned to pull *hard!*”<sup>4700</sup>

Neill had given the women a firm foundation in organization, discipline and technique. Mimier then came in and, taking a page from the Wisconsin men of the era, put the focus on effort as well. It never occurred to Jay to approach women’s rowing any differently than men’s rowing, and in so doing, he empowered his woman athletes to be *athletes* in every sense and laid a foundation that changed the American college rowing scene forever.

During history, women and men have not always gotten along well in the same boathouse, and at Wisconsin there were indeed frictions over funding, facilities and equipment in the early days.

**Ela:** “No bathrooms for women, no locker rooms for women, barely enough space for the men’s rowing program, and office space eventually lean-to’d onto the tank room floor with leftover lumber.”<sup>4701</sup>

But the rivalry between the two teams seemed to be a healthy one. At Jay’s urging, the best women began challenging the tail end of the men’s ergometer scores. The competition spurred both sides to improve.

### Technique

The Wisconsin women under Mimier rowed with posture, discipline and authority. The technique was similar to that of the 1965-68 Harvard men as filtered through Jabo and passed down to Jay.

What was perhaps lost in translation was that by 1968, the Harvard Olympic Eight had for the most part evolved into a *Schubschlag* crew.<sup>4702</sup> Mimier’s women most certainly did not.



Sue Ela

**Jay Mimier**  
**University of Wisconsin Women’s Coach**

The Stop & Shop recovery of the Wisconsin women would accelerate into explosive contact with the water. Force application was sudden, extreme *Kernschlag*, and like their Badger male counterparts, the Wisconsin women tended to beat their opponents on sheer force of will and aggressiveness.

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<sup>4700</sup> Ela, op cit.

<sup>4701</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4702</sup> See Chapter 102.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



Arthur Grace

### Carie Graves

1975 Varsity Stroke  
6'0½" 184 cm 170 lb. 77 kg

Seven National Teams  
One Olympic Bronze and three World Silver Medals  
1984 Olympic Champion in the Women's Eight

**Carie Graves:** "I was a wild and willful rower. I was all over the boat. I was very strong and very, very intense. This had much more to do with exploring my own limits and honoring my teammates by not letting them down – than about winning.

"Of course, we did win a lot, but to me at that time, winning was a secondary outcome. The process was paramount for me."<sup>4703</sup>

Under Mimier, the team rowed **Modern Orthodox Technique**, overlapping-sequential body mechanics with legs going flat at 50-60% of the pullthrough. This is similar to that of Steve Brooks on the 1968

Harvard men's Olympic Eight, but not to any of his teammates.<sup>4704</sup>

### 1975

By 1975, the Wisconsin women's team was an official varsity sport and finally had sufficient budget to participate in the **Eastern Sprints** for the first time. The Varsity finished second in an unfamiliar new shell delivered to the regatta site, and the Novices won easily by two lengths of open water.

A month later with three novices moved into the Varsity, they won the **National Women's Rowing Association Open Eights Championship** on Lake Carnegie

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<sup>4703</sup> Graves, personal correspondence, 2010

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<sup>4704</sup> See Chapter 102.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



*Look at . . . Badger Women's Sports*

**University of Wisconsin  
Jackie Zoch**

1975 Varsity 4-seat  
(in practice, Spring, 1976)  
5'10½" 179 cm 170 lb. 77 kg

Three National Teams  
1975, 1976, 1977  
1976 Olympic Bronze Medal

+5°, +20° to -30°, 0-7, 0-10, 5-10 Modern Orthodox Technique  
Overlapping-sequential *Kernschlag*, Stop & Shop recovery  
Major emphasis on initial hit, then strong squeeze to the release.

(At the Olympics, several months after this film, Zoch's legs went flat at 50% of the pullthrough.)

with Carie Graves in the stroke-seat rowing 39 down the course.

**Graves:** "Winning in 1975 was unbelievably satisfying, mostly because we weren't supposed to win. Several of the other women's college crews in 1975 were good, as were several club crews, including Vesper and the National Team development camp boat.

"And we'd only raced three or four times that year and lost the Sprints. Back then, sitting on the line was always a bit

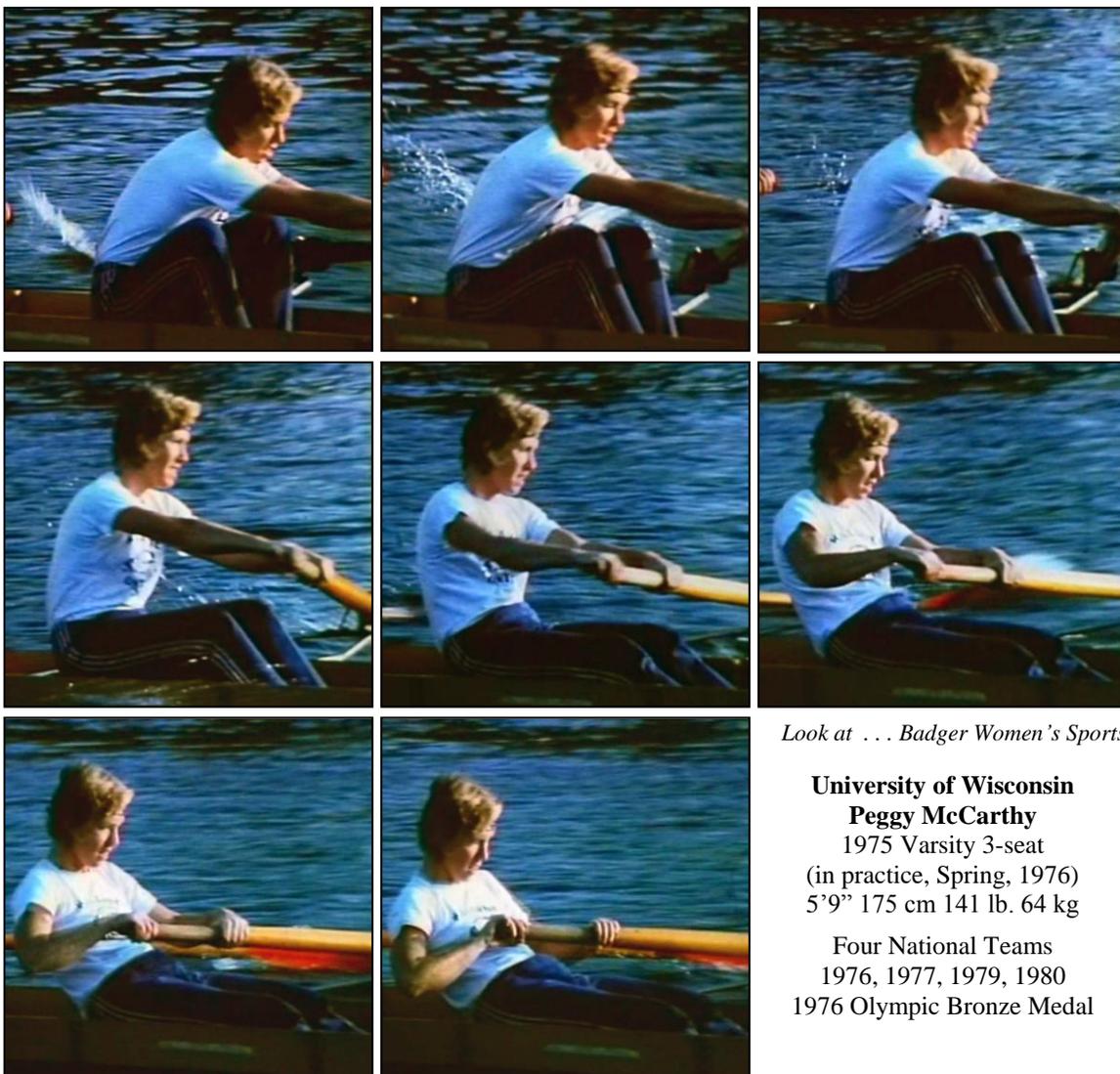
scary since one was never sure if you'd fall out of the boat on the racing start."<sup>4705</sup>

**Ela:** "I remember being given a bottle of champagne by the Princeton team right after the race, and after a swig or two, lying flat on my back looking up at the sky with, I am sure, a silly sloppy-happy smile on my face."<sup>4706</sup>

<sup>4705</sup> Qtd. by Taylor, p. 212

<sup>4706</sup> Ela, op cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



*Look at . . . Badger Women's Sports*

**University of Wisconsin**

**Peggy McCarthy**

1975 Varsity 3-seat

(in practice, Spring, 1976)

5'9" 175 cm 141 lb. 64 kg

Four National Teams

1976, 1977, 1979, 1980

1976 Olympic Bronze Medal

+5°, +35° to -40°, 0-6, 0-10, 5-10 Modern Orthodox Technique

Overlapping-sequential *Kernschlag*, Stop & Shop

Very strong leg drive.

As one of the shorter members of the crew, McCarthy laid back further than some others.

In the coming years, a succession of Wisconsin woman rowers would move on to U.S. National Women's Squads and set the team standard for strength, commitment and competitiveness for the following decade.<sup>4707</sup>

After the Nationals in 1975, Graves and teammates **Jackie Zoch** and **Sue Ela** were invited to the first National Eights Selection Camp, coached by Harvard men's coach **Harry Parker**, as will be described in Chapter 126.

**Ela:** "With three ports from Wisco and with the likes of Carie and Jackie, strength-wise I didn't have a chance. I was cut, but a

<sup>4707</sup> See Chapters 126 and 148.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Sue Ela

### 1975 University of Wisconsin Women's Eight

National Women's Rowing Association Champion, Lake Carnegie

Bow **Karen Ela** 5'10" 178 cm 135 lb. 61 kg, 2 **Mary Grace Knight** 5'9" 175 cm 155 lb. 70kg,  
3 **Peggy McCarthy** 5'9" 175 cm 141 lb. 64 kg, 4 **Jackie Zoch** 5'10½" 179 cm 170 lb. 77 kg,  
5 **Deb Oetzel** 5'10½" 179 cm 170 lb. 77 kg, 6 **Sue Ela** 6'0½" 184 cm 165 lb. 75 kg,  
7 **Mary Connell** 5'7" 170 cm 150 lb. 68 kg, Stroke **Carie Graves** 6'0½" 184 cm 170 lb. 77 kg,  
Coxswain **Beth Traut** 5'0" 152 cm 100 lb. 45 kg

visit from **Tom McKibbin**<sup>4708</sup> and **Tim Mickelson**<sup>4709</sup> while I was still in Boston resulted in an invite to attend the sculling camp in Long Beach the next year in '76.

"I raced a single, borrowed from Harry, in the Head of the Charles that fall and then headed to Long Beach. Though I made it through the selection trials and into the

camp, I had worsening back issues, and finally had to pull out."<sup>4710</sup>

**Carie Graves** would win an Olympic Gold Medal nine years later.

**Graves:** "I was fortunate as a new rower to have as my first two coaches . . . Jay Mimier and Harry Parker!

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<sup>4708</sup> See Chapter 127.

<sup>4709</sup> See Chapter 103.

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<sup>4710</sup> Ela, op cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



Sue Ela

### 1975 University of Wisconsin Women's Eight

NWRA Champion, Lake Carnegie

3 Peggy McCarthy, Stroke Carie Graves, 6 Sue Ela, Bow Karen Ela, 4 Jackie Zoch,  
7 Mary Connell, Coxswain Beth Traut, 2 Mary Grace Knight, 5 Deb Oetzel

“For someone like me, they were perfect. They were taciturn. They didn't talk when they didn't need to. They essentially allowed to me take the bit between my teeth and run with it. That was just as well since during those first two years of my rowing I was probably more or less uncoachable.

“I don't recall either one of them ever telling me anything about my rowing or

trying to change anything. If they had, I probably would not have paid attention.

“Jay and Harry did not get in my way. I felt they were fair and coached with honor. (I love that word, ‘honor’) I trusted them both totally. I was very fortunate to have them as coaches.

“The only downside for me was that, upon becoming the Radcliffe Head Coach at age 24 after three years of rowing at

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

Wisconsin with Jay and with Harry for two summers ('75 and '76), I had no idea how to coach. I knew what I wanted to accomplish in terms of a team culture, but I knew very little about rowing.

"I was the Head Coach at Radcliffe for six years. The first year was a challenge, difficult, not a lot of fun for anyone. The last five were fine, and the program was successful.

"Some years into the program I found out that my nickname during my first year was 'old stone face.' Apparently, I had done a good job of imprinting myself on my two role models – Jay and Harry."<sup>4711</sup>

### The Ela Era

**Sue Ela** became Mimier's Freshman Coach and later succeeded him as Wisconsin Varsity Women's Coach when he left to pursue his legal career.

**Ela:** "A good number of us from 1975 became coaches, and the women's rowing world came alive.

"I feel that things generally happen for a reason . . . and had I not had back problems and had I been able to keep rowing, I might have missed out on all of the wonderful women and men that I had the privilege to meet through coaching.

"You know all this, Peter . . . Life is as it is. I'm happy."<sup>4712</sup>

**Kris Thorsness**, member of the 1984 Olympic Champion U.S. Women's Eight: "I had the honor and benefit of having been coached by Sue all four of my Wisco years (1978-82). Sue brought a quiet dignity to a rough and tumble program, and we would have walked on fire for her (and some might say we did).



University of Wisconsin

**Coach Sue Ela**

"The closest I ever heard Sue come to shouting was when a group of us went swimming off the steel boathouse dock during a thunderstorm, and she said, "Damn it." We were thunderstruck, at least figuratively, and fairly flew out of the water at such strong language coming from Sue. (It made my later interactions with Bob Ernst<sup>4713</sup> all the more impressive to me.)

"Sue had a way of assuming the best of us, so that we expected it, too. She never told us that we should lose to the well-funded, well-equipped Eastern crews, so we rarely did. We were too short, too skinny, not from appropriate high/prep schools, and our uniforms were downright ugly, but we

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<sup>4711</sup> Graves, op cit.

<sup>4712</sup> Ela, op cit.

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<sup>4713</sup> See Chapter 148.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

were Wisco, and that counted for a great deal.

“The varsity crews made sure that the underclassmen were well informed about the team’s history and the successes of its alumni. The names of Carie Graves, Jackie Zoch, Peggy McCarthy and others were invoked often, years after they had graduated. With examples like those, we knew that we were supposed to compete at the very highest level in order to honor that tradition.

“In 1982, the University of Washington Varsity (under Bob Ernst<sup>4714</sup>) was loaded with national teamers and had destroyed the competition all year, usually by lengths of open water. When it came time for Nationals at Lake Waramaug, the other coaches were all talking about racing for second, but Ela thought that was silly and said that we were there to win.

“Just watching that Washington boat paddle out to practice was impressive. While we knew that we might not beat them, we resolved that they would not get open water on us, so, to borrow a phrase from Bob Ernst, we ‘sold the farm’ from the start and were down 5 or 6 seats at the end of the race, but there was no open water.

“We were utterly spent but happy, so happy. You would think that we had won. While our crew had as yet unrealized potential – Mara Keggi, Chari Towne, Heidi Grutzner and I all ended up on U.S. Teams – back then we were a bunch of nobodies who gave the ‘big girls’ a run for their money.

“But we rowed for Wisco, and we rowed for Sue.

“Later that summer, I was at development camp at Lake Placid with several of those same Washington rowers. I was admiring their national championship

trophy, and one of them said, ‘I’d trade that to row for Wisco.’

“I was a bit shocked that she said it out loud, but I smiled, knowing that I wouldn’t trade rowing for Wisco for a pile of trophies.

“I attribute much of my later success in rowing to the foundation I gained at Wisco. The Wisconsin traditions, the expectation of excellence and the acceptance of doing the work that was necessary to win; those things prepared me to compete on the world stage.<sup>4715</sup> In addition, rowing at Wisco gave me a passion for my sport that enabled me to face the pressure of international competition.

“After I left Madison, Sue continued to develop top flight crews, including National Champion teams, and many of her rowers and coxswains went on to row for the U.S. at World and Olympic Championships, where they earned many medals: Sara Gengler, Carol Feeney, Mandi Kowal, Kim Santiago, Cindy Eckert. The list goes on!”<sup>4716</sup>

### Postscript

**Jackie Zoch Major** and **Peggy McCarthy Bailey** are still forces to be reckoned with in masters’ rowing.

**Carie Graves** coached Radcliffe Crew from 1977 to 1983 and Northeastern University from 1988 to 1998, and since then has been serving as the Women’s Coach at the University of Texas.

She is a two-time inductee to the National Rowing Foundation Hall of Fame, and she was named one of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century’s Most Notable People by the American

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<sup>4714</sup> See Chapter 148.

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<sup>4715</sup> Kris Thorsness was a member of six National Teams, won three Silver Medals in World Competition and rowed with Carie Graves to Olympic Gold in the Women’s Eight in 1984.

<sup>4716</sup> Thorsness, personal correspondence, 2010

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

Rower's Almanac, and she is No. 16 on the University of Wisconsin's list of the "Top 100 Athletes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century."

Today **Jay Mimier** and **Sue Ela** have been married for 28 years. They have raised

their two children in Madison, Wisconsin.

The 1975 Badger Women's Varsity still gets together regularly to row in the U.S. Masters' Nationals.