

Hounds on Three: Rowing at Loyola

By Ariana Pearson

Did you ever dream about playing sports in college? Or perhaps you just want to try something new? Imagine that opportunity was available to you. If so, rowing could be the perfect sport. Trying new hobbies can be daunting, but college is the perfect time to push yourself to find something new. Although it may sound crazy, Loyola's rowing team has an entire program dedicated to teaching students how to row; did you see all the posters around campus during pre-orientation and orientation weekend? Regardless of if you have no experience at all or a minimal background in the sport, all are welcome to join.

Before coming to Loyola, I already knew about the program. In the spring of my senior year, I decided to give rowing a shot at my high school. A few of my friends were on the team, and because I wanted to try something new, I joined. Although I didn't have much experience, after a great spring season, I hoped that I would have the opportunity to row after high school. Conveniently, choosing Loyola was the perfect decision to continue that interest! In May, I got the chance to meet one of the coaches, Maggie Rabenberg, during a high school race, and decided then that I wanted to walk on. This made me even more excited to arrive on campus in the fall because I felt like I was already a part of something. When I moved into my dorm back in August, the rowing team was already on my radar and seeing the posters only made me more excited to join.

During my first few weeks at Loyola, I anticipated being much busier than I actually was. In fact, in the beginning of September, once I had settled into a routine with classes, I found myself having a lot of free time. College is all about trying new things and finding a balance between school and other activities. So, if you're looking to fill empty time, this is your opportunity to do so. When I asked some of my teammates why they joined the walk-on group, they shared the same sentiment as me; there was just too much time and we wanted to create new experiences. Oceana Duffy, a freshman and one of my friends I met through the program, said that she wanted to join the team because she "thought it was a good sense of community, and... thought it would add some structure and organization to [her]

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schedule and daily life." When practice started, there were no more empty afternoons; instead we had somewhere to go, and something to do.



Be aware, it's a time commitment, but a rewarding one. We practice five days a week, with Sundays and Tuesdays off, and on the days we go on the water, which becomes more frequent as the fall progresses, practices span about three hours. Unfortunately, we're not practicing the entire three hours. Instead, there is a thirty-minute commute to the boathouse, and we have to set

up all the equipment before practice and put everything away once we're done. From the description so far, the sport may sound quite easy, but don't be fooled. Rowing is a late entry sport— meaning a large percentage of athletes join it later in life—but it takes a lot of dedication and motivation to improve. In fact, a significant number of athletes on the current team, both men's and women's, began as novices. The novice program has been a part of Loyola's rowing team since the sport was introduced. As Maggie Rabenberg mentioned in an interview, "it's pretty common across collegiate sports, in general, because of the nature of rowing being a late entry sport. It's really limited by how much access to water you have, where you live and how much access you have to the ability to create a boat house and spend money on that." This shows that although many athletes join later in life, it doesn't prevent them from achieving future success in the sport.



Novice Practices

Novice practices began a few weeks into September, giving time for everyone to get situated and comfortable in their new routines and lives at Loyola. While the varsity had already started their training, all the new rowers, called novices, had a separate practice schedule. As novices, we formed our own community within the rowing team. It was easier to start something new knowing that we were all relatively inexperienced at the sport. This was so everyone could learn the techniques and get up to speed with conditioning. Eventually, in December, the novices join the varsity practices, but first, we took it slow, so we didn't get overwhelmed. The coaches wanted to ensure that we had fun and enjoyed the experience to set a positive tone during the beginning of our rowing journey. In the first few weeks, every practice took place at the FAC where we used the ergs. The erg, also known as the rowing machine, is a way

that rowers train on land. During this time, we learned the techniques and what it means to have splits and go at a certain stroke rate. A split measures the amount of time it takes to cover 500 meters, while the stroke rate refers to the number of strokes taken in one minute.



At the end of September, we headed out to the boathouse for the first time. This was our chance to transfer the skills we had learned on land into the boat. Although the general technique is the same, there's more to consider once you're on the water. There are many different types of boats, but during our time as novices we learned how to sweep in

both eight-person and four-person boats. Sweeping is when everyone has one oar, either on starboard (left), or port (right). If you think that seems backwards, you're not totally wrong; we're facing the other direction when rowing, so it's the opposite from traditional boats. Rowing requires precision and teamwork to ensure the whole boat is synchronized, and each oar connects with the water simultaneously. But rowing cannot be possible without an additional person in each boat: the coxswain. They are sort of like a mini coach: leading warmups, making calls during races, and steering the boat. Coxswains are crucial to the team, as they require strong leadership skills, and the ability to keep everyone motivated.

Even though the novices are separated in the fall, they get to travel with the varsity members to two races in the fall, one in Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River and the other in Fairfax, Virginia, on the Occoquan River. These are called head races and span approximately 5000 meters. The novices actually compete in a category specifically for us, which includes athletes either in their first year of rowing, or freshmen in college. It is so rewarding to race in a sport when you've only just begun learning. Connor Romano, another freshman novice, was excited for his first race on the Occoquan River, and felt that "we came a long way from where we first started,



and we didn't flip." The fall was a learning curve for everyone, but the first race was a chance for everyone to see how much they had truly improved since the beginning of September. However, the fall season hasn't come to a close quite yet. There are still two more races. The first is class day, when each class year races against each other in costumes. The second is novice race day, when the first years close out our time as beginner rowers and are joined by older members of the team that began their rowing career in the same place as us.

Once we put the boats away at the end of November, it will be time to train over the winter in preparation for the spring season. This is when the novices join the varsity and get a feel for how their practices are run. But the novices aren't a part of the varsity team quite yet. To continue rowing past the fall, everyone must pass a certain erg standard, with a specific split differing for the men's and women's teams. While it may sound intimidating and will be difficult, the training throughout the fall will hopefully pay off and most people make it onto the team.

Walk-on Rowers FAQs

So, if you want to learn more, there's a whole section of the [Loyola Rowing](#) team website dedicated to walk-ons, titled [Walk-On Rowers FAQs](#). You may instantly fall in love with the sport, or it may take some time to adjust. Either way, joining Loyola's rowing team as a walk-on is an exciting and rewarding experience where you can learn new skills and find a sense of community in your first few months at Loyola. Making new friends is a pivotal part of the experience and I have been able to connect with people who I maybe would not have met otherwise.

I encourage you to take a look at the website and contact the coaches or someone on the team!

