



ROWING GROWING

Rowing is Growing – 2017 Junior and Scholastic

Rowing continues to grow across the United States. People of all ages are joining this ultimate team sport, embracing a lifetime of activity and competition. Launching the “Rowing Is Growing” series is our youngest group of athletes, junior and scholastic rowers.

Scholastic (high school) crews as well as clubs offering junior rowing made up over half of the more than 1,300 USRowing organizational members in 2017. Approximately 330 of our organizational members in 2017 were high schools, more than 120 clubs focused on only youth rowing, and well over 200 clubs offered rowing for both youth and masters.

In 2017, 12,917 Championship members—just over 50%, of USRowing’s Championship membership—were junior rowers. Total Championship membership among juniors grew by 8 percent in 2017, in part as a result of growth in the number and size of regional regattas for juniors over the past few years. For example, the Central Youth Regional Championships held in Oklahoma City, OK, became a new USRowing-hosted Youth Nationals qualifier in 2015, and the Southwest Masters Regional Championship near Berkeley, CA, added U16 and U17 races to provide local juniors with additional racing opportunities.

Youth National Championships

The 2017 USRowing Youth National Championships were yet another example of the expansion of junior rowing. In 2017, Youth Nationals—held at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota, Florida—brought together a record number of competitors: 380 entries for 1,678 athletes from 154 different clubs. Some of these athletes and clubs even travelled as far as 3000 miles to compete!

Wondering how quickly Youth Nationals has grown? Back in 2003, the number of competing clubs was 70, nearly doubled to 136 by 2006 and in 2017 reached as high as 154 clubs. When considering individual athletes, numbers grew from just over 700 to around 1600 athletes in its final year in Ohio, with similar numbers in Oak Ridge, TN, (2011-2013) and Rancho Cordova, California (2014), before landing a new event best with 1678 competitors in Sarasota earlier this year. Youth Nationals has more than doubled in size in the last decade, independent of location.

Regional scholastic events

The growth of the Youth National Championships can be attributed to several factors. It is important to note that the event is an invitational regatta and crews qualify at regional championships, thereby, limiting the amount of competing crews and athletes eligible to compete. Nevertheless, growth in athletes and clubs attending Youth Nationals is in part due to an increase in rowing's popularity, but also a result of an increase in races and entries allowed at the event and its qualifiers.

The New York State Scholastic Championships and the Philadelphia City Championships, both qualifying regattas for Youth Nationals but not hosted by USRowing, reinforce this growth trend, but also illustrate challenges, especially for scholastic events.

"If a school dips in enrollment, and many have recently, then the team size will shrink," Leslie Pfeil, president of both the Philadelphia Scholastic Rowing Association and the National Scholastic Rowing Association, explains. "There are differences between scholastic rowing and junior club rowing, and one of them is that scholastic teams are directly affected by a school's enrollment as well as budget. If there are cuts and the school cannot give the same financial support to the team, parents are left to pick up the tab, which many do already, and that affects the number of kids on a team. So the team remains but the number of kids on it has declined."

In the last decade, both New York State Scholastic Championships (NYSSC) as well as the Philadelphia City Championships (Philly City) have shown significant growth, but the amount of athletes has actually lagged in comparison to the growth in clubs and entries. NYSSC grew 62% from 45 clubs in 2004 to 73 clubs in 2017, but only a 45% growth in athletes, from 2215 to 3222 competitors. Philly City experienced a 33% growth in the number of teams from 56 in 2006 to 75 in 2015 and a 20% growth in entries of 446 in 2006 to 535 entries in 2015, but the number of competitors grew only 4.9% with 2445 in 2006 and 2565 in 2017.

- *Regional regattas have seen tremendous growth in attending clubs*
- *Funding for scholastic rowing is a major factor in crew size and budget cuts have hurt opportunities for juniors to row*

Future

The future continues to be bright for scholastic and junior rowing. The smaller increase in competitors in comparison to the growth in the number of clubs should not be viewed as a cause for concern. James Rawson, USRowing's National Events and West Coast program manager, sees it as an indicator of the sport's success.

"In the Seattle area a lot of clubs have actually had to turn people away," Rawson says. "They just don't have the room and can't keep increasing. Smaller clubs, therefore, keep popping up, to accommodate the other rowers.

Rawson adds, "The traditional route that the East Coast took is less visible here. For the most part ours has been a path of community-based rowing. Scholastic rowing never got as big on the West Coast as it has on the East Coast. This benefits the continuity of the rowing programs because funding has never been based on school budgets. That, however, doesn't mean schools aren't ready to jump in."

"The schools just need to find funding. There are plenty who have talked about it, but who simply haven't gotten around to doing it. If you ask me, the growth will continue," Rawson believes. "The

question is sometimes, ‘is there any more room for another boathouse?’ There are a lot of population centers that still lack programs and millions of young people across the country who with the right amount of guidance could find our sport. It doesn’t even take that much. Ashland, a small town in Washington state, found the right people and with determination they got it going. It can be done anywhere.”

- *Community-based rowing teams tend to see less budget fluctuations*
- *Provide rowing in population centers of all sizes and people will come*

Opportunity

It’s often said that “if you build it, they will come.” It seems to be true for rowing, too. Lay the groundwork, and young athletes will come. New events offered at Youth Nationals continue to fill up, and new scholastic and junior programs keep popping up, year after year. The future looks bright for youth rowing programs and its positive trajectory is expected to continue.

For information about junior and scholastic rowing programs, contact USRowing Member Services at 609-751-0700 or members@usrowing.org.