

WSU MEN'S CREW to launch WOMEN'S LIGHTWEIGHT ROWING

With the backing of University Recreation, Men's Crew is set to launch a new branch of our existing team; Women's Lightweight (LWT) Rowing, fall of 2009.

The Means and the Motivation

Men's Crew prides itself on being a club team. Part of what this has allowed the team to do is to make the sport available to anyone who is willing to make the necessary effort and commitment, not just the elite few worthy of an athletic scholarship. Throughout our history we have fielded some of the best men's lightweight crews on the west coast. Yet, despite the incredible growth of women's collegiate rowing since Title IX, LWT women's crew (weight limit of 130 lbs) has gained none of this support, even though its events are featured on the worldwide stage including the Olympics.

Since the 1970's Cougar Crew thrived for nearly two decades as a coed club program. On the women's side, lightweight and open-weight rowers were equally important to their identity and competitiveness. When women's rowing received Title IX support within the athletic department the men's team remained a club sport. But the WSU women's rowing program, like so many others, has not offered female lightweight rowers an outlet to compete in lightweight events. The only Pac-10 team that does offer women's LWT rowing is Stanford University, who placed 3rd at nationals in the women's lightweight 8+ event in 2008. When lightweight women, some with impressive high school and even collegiate experience, seek the opportunity to row at WSU, they are almost always viewed only as potential coxswains, not rowers. Though coxswains are important to any crew's success, this option will typically fall well short of fulfilling the goals of these athletes.

Three years ago Men's Crew took their passion for the sport and made the effort to launch the first ever community rowing program for high school and adults in the Palouse region; Palouse Rowing. In this same spirit we now feel that there is another group of potential athletes who are being denied the opportunity to partake in this great sport. We have the means to change this by launching Women's LWT Rowing. Even as a Men's Crew, we have always had lightweight women on our team as coxswains. We go out of our way to teach our coxswains to row because it makes them better coxswains. They sometimes fill into line-ups when a seat is empty, and we've even raced them. Including LWT women's rowing will be an expansion of what we've already been doing for years, and rekindle who we were before Title IX.

The addition of women's LWT rowing at WSU will create heightened awareness and interest from high school rowers, particularly from programs on the west coast, as well as their parents and their coaches for the athletic opportunities that this brings. This past spring, eleven colleges in the WIRA Conference entered boats in the lightweight events, so there is a healthy amount of competition and plenty of room for WSU to make its mark.