

Mike Steintal

Yale Lightweight

Sophomore

Why did you start rowing?

When I was a Freshman at Greenwich High School, I was actually considering starting to play football that first fall, but my mom refused to let me even try out. So, I didn't play any sport in that fall or the winter, by which time I was getting cabin fever. One of my friends told me that winter, "You're getting tall ... you might be tall enough to be good at rowing." That was good enough for me, so I started rowing in the spring of my freshman year. I wasn't very good when I started, but by my sophomore year, I really started to get into the groove and I have not stopped rowing since then, until Covid. Greenwich Crew has a college rowing program for all of us at home right now, and there's a surprising number of people enrolled. Despite everyone's work schedules, so many of us have found time in the morning to come and row. I think it's a great indication of what a community Greenwich Crew is, even after graduating!

What inspired you to continue rowing?

In my freshman year, I was still figuring my way around the boat, however, when I raced at Northeast Regionals, I realized that I had never competed in that way before and really enjoyed it. When I was younger, I did play baseball and soccer, but I just could not figure out the game strategies and techniques involved. With rowing, the raw athleticism of the sport really enticed me. It was new to me to play a sport without offense or defense, or really any way to interfere with anyone else. In the fall of my sophomore year, I was lucky enough to be selected to row at the Head of the Charles and I think that's when I realized how much I loved rowing. Even though it was a brutally windy and rainy weekend, I was stunned by the turnout of people from all over the world and the historic landmarks lining the riverbank. Instead of seeming like a small niche sport limited to the salty Long Island Sound; it became apparent that it was a community; an international pastime, and I had to continue.

The Head of the Charles race the following year was one of my favorite races of all time. The weather was actually really good; it felt like early summer. It was sunny, calm waters, and I think that that year, almost every course record was broken because of the conditions.

Training advice

I definitely believe that spring race results are made in the winter. Winter training is undeniably hard,

but it means that when you get back on the water, you're fit enough to win races. I also found motivation to keep moving forward through training with the team.

When it came to the racing season, I really appreciated the time spent building fitness, but also building trust in your teammates that they are just as committed as you are. I would always take time off training after the spring race season, which worked well for my recovery.

Rowing at college

It's even better than I thought it was going to be! Greenwich Crew was a great experience and built me into the athlete I am, now a strong part of the Yale Lightweight crew. I think the biggest difference I immediately saw when I made it to college was that when the team turns up for training, everyone is experienced and ready to compete. Whereas, at Greenwich Crew, there tend to be more stark differences in age, experience, and size, especially comparing seniors to younger rowers. A full squad of highly competitive rowers makes for constant internal competition, and you don't feel as attached to a particular lineup. In my first year, there were 7 recruited athletes, but the team also has 'walk-ons' too, especially coxswains.

What is special about Greenwich Crew?

GC not only consistently manages to create top level boats, but also better people.

Everyone can become your closest friend, and that's what's special about it. When you decide to sign up for GC, with every season you complete (however many you choose to complete) you are always going to be slightly better than you were before. I think there really is something to spending some of your key formative years just punching yourself in the stomach over and over again ... or more accurately, your legs and lungs! Competing outside of your region is when you really get the chance to show how strong a program Greenwich really is. Throughout my tenure, we consistently improved our performance at Youth Nationals, ending with placing 3rd my senior year. It really is a shame there wasn't the opportunity to compete last year, as I'm sure the team could have done even better.

Looking forward

When I came to Yale, I was not entirely sure what I wanted to study, but I have since settled on majoring in Economics. I am still very committed to rowing, and I have three more full years on campus, which means three more chances to win and get the opportunity to race at Henley Royal Regatta. That is definitely the goal that I keep in mind.