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Lamorinda Rowers Help Propel Oakland Strokes at Nationals

By Karl Buscheck



Oakland Strokes Women's Varsity 4+ Boat wins a Gold Medal by Open Water at the 2017 U.S. Rowing Nationals on June 11 at Mercer Lake, West Windsor, NJ. Photo provided
Riley Eversole of Miramonte and Limor Dubrovsky of Acalanes.

There was a common thread among the three Oakland Strokes boats that medaled at the US Rowing Youth National Championships. All of them were powered - at least in part - by Lamorinda rowers.

"There have always been Lamorinda kids at the heart of our varsity boats," said Strokes managing director Dana Hooper, who rowed for the East Bay powerhouse as a Miramonte student in the 1990s. "We always get good kids from that area. I don't know why it is, but there always seems to be really good athletes coming from that area."

The Women's Varsity Four team was one of two Strokes boats that claimed a gold at the national championships held in West Windsor, NJ on June 11 and June 12.

The boat, which smashed the competition on its way to the top of the podium, featured four local athletes in Jill Lundstrum, Caroline Ricksen and

"It was just an incredibly aggressive, courageous race that they went after," said Hooper. "And (they) just kind of decimated the field from early on."

What made the decisive victory even more impressive was that the women's team had finished more than a boat length behind the River City Rowing Club - the boat that raced in second at nationals - just a month-and-a-half earlier.

"They just trained their hearts out and got themselves a boat length up, which in rowing terms, as soon as you can get a boat length up you feel really good about yourself," explained Hooper.

The Men's Varsity Eight, which included Brendan Purtill and Nikita Lilichenko of Miramonte and Cole Ortiz of Campolindo, was the Strokes other gold medal winning boat.

"We're pretty proud of it. For the men's side, it's definitely the premier event. So, it's one that you want to win," said men's varsity head coach Brian de Regt after his top team secured its second consecutive national title and capped an undefeated spring season.

"To go up against everyone in our region and everyone in our country and not lose in the spring I think is pretty great," de Regt said. "We're very, very proud of the guys."

The coach was equally proud of the Men's Lightweight Eight boat, which shattered its preseason expectations by earning a silver medal.

"There's a lot of pressure trying to repeat a championship," de Regt said of his varsity squad. "So,

it's a relief to do it. Where with the lightweights, who didn't even make it to the national championship last year, [earning a medal] is almost a bonus."

The Lightweights had a pair of Lamorinda rowers in Drew Barber and Calvin McDonald of Miramonte.

"Medaling was not something that we expected to happen at the beginning of the year," admitted de Regt. "To see them come down in a medal position behind a really incredible boat from Miami's Belen Jesuit Prep School, it was surprising and thrilling and a lot of fun to see."

From the back-to-back golds for the Varsity boat to the surprise silver for the Lightweights, 2016 ended up being a banner season for the men's Strokes program.

"It's the best spring that the Oakland Strokes men have ever had," de Regt said. "So, we're extremely pleased with the way the guys have been performing, the way they've bought into the program and how hard they're working. It's very satisfying as a coach to see their hard work get the end results and see them get what they deserve."

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