

# Rowing through the pandemic

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“The water was so rough that we were joking that it was the perfect metaphor for 2020,” said Hooper. “We had to move the race to a different part of the estuary so that we could get into the wind shadow. We persevered and were able to hold the races.”

Prior to the pandemic, Oakland Strokes would have over 200 kids out on the water in the afternoon through the day with slightly staggered starting times. For Hooper, it’s

been a logistical nightmare planning for practices for eight people at a time as opposed to just having everyone show up at once. “It was a heavy lift but it’s been very rewarding.”

There is no halfway commitment to the sport with all of the demands it makes on the rowers. “Prior to the pandemic, we would go six days a week,” said Shepherd. “Now we only go in four days a week but I use the ergometer (rowing machine) when I don’t go to the boathouse.”

Oakland Strokes has been very conscientious about doing what they can to avoid any exposure to the virus. “There have been no outbreaks at the facility,” said Stewart. “We’ve been very strict. No one is allowed there without a mask and all hands are sanitized.”

Time management is an essential for the rowers. “This is the first year that we have had morning practices,” said Alford. “Waking up at five after doing homework late the night before can be brutal. It does keep you driven and

motivated and to work hard and then get right on to the next thing to focus on.”


So what is it that keeps them all coming back for more? For DeFrancisci, “It’s learning how to manage the pain by convincing yourself that you are not at your maximum effort and to go places you never thought you could and to work harder than you ever thought you could.”

For Shepherd, it’s both the challenge and the serenity of rowing. “Being on the water in the morning with just you

and the boat, it’s very peaceful,” Shepherd said. “There were days where I got in the boat and had a feeling that made me forget everything. Where I could look down the gunwale at my friends and realize that we had never rowed that good before and yell and laugh at our success. Where we would get to the end of the estuary, look out at the sun setting beautifully over the San Francisco skyline and just enjoy life, only to row all the way back to the boathouse moments later.”

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