

Mike Dowell for Twickenham Rowing Club Captain

My background

I've been rowing since I was 13. I was fortunate enough to enjoy my fair share of success as a schoolboy rower, and even picked up a bronze medal as a Great Britain Junior in 2000. Since then I've rowed at St Anne's College Oxford, Wallingford Rowing Club, Plymouth University Boat Club, and for the last 3 years, the mighty TWRC. As well as rowing in Twickenham's top senior men's crew for the past three seasons, I also took the opportunity to try surfboat rowing, bringing home the European Men's Open runner up trophy in 2008, and still row the surfboat in the summer. It made sense to join TWRC when I returned to London from academia – I was raised in Strawberry Hill for 20 years, so it is in every way my home club.

Why am I running for Captain?

I love Twickenham Rowing Club, its special mixture of welcoming, laid back atmosphere; tradition; location; and the wide opportunities it provides its members, so that whatever your aims from rowing, you know the club will support you. I'm running for Captain, because I want to do my bit for the next few years of the club's life to preserve what makes Twickenham so special and because I have ideas on how the club can perhaps improve what we offer our members.

I was Captain and then President of St Anne's College Boat Club, so I have some relevant experience, but I'm also aware that Twickenham is a much more diverse club. I know it will be a demanding role, but I also know how great it feels when you can contribute to the success and future of an institution. When John said he was stepping down, I immediately thought about what I could offer and whether I had ideas and skills that would make a good contribution to the club. It's a big commitment, so I didn't make my decision lightly, but it would be an honour to captain TWRC.

I believe the Captain's role is to listen to all the club's different members, whether a minority or a majority, and facilitate each member getting what they want out of rowing at this club. I would be a listening and responsive Captain rather than a dogmatic one. There is room at Twickenham for social members, scullers and rowers, from juniors to Masters, whether recreational, competitive or a bit of both and we welcome beginners and support experienced members to keep improving. There will always have to be some compromise, but the Captain will ensure that the decisions that are taken will be after everyone has been heard and will be fair and supportable if questioned.

What do I think the captain's role should be?

As I said earlier, I believe in listening, so I took the time to discuss the Captain's role with John and understand what it really means rather than what the rules and bye-laws say about it. From that discussion and my own experiences, I can best summarise the Captain's role as follows:

1) Listen to members to create the club that they want

The Captain needs to balance the needs, ideas and demands of the many different types of member that make up Twickenham RC. It is the Captain's job to ensure that every member can get what they want from their membership, and also communicate transparently to members when there are inevitable instances of compromise.

2) Lead the club toward a future that is exciting for all our members

The Captain needs to work with the Committee to plan and deliver for the future of the club, so that with each year that passes, the club becomes even better able to service all of our members in the way that they want. Members should be supported in getting fulfilment from their rowing, no matter what level they are at - whether that is a pursuit of trophies at Henley, or better technique for the weekly scull to Richmond and back.

3) Support coaches and other volunteers to ensure a coordinated effort

Regardless of what the club rules say, it is not the Captain's job to select crews; the Captain should liaise with the coaches in the development of their training programme(s), and trust them to select the crews. It is the Captain's job to intervene if members are unhappy with the level of coaching that they are receiving or if a particular group is consistently underperforming.

The club relies on volunteers for its management, coaching and many other less obvious day-to-day tasks. The Captain should champion members who donate their time and make it easy for others to give something back. The club should continue to pay its cleaners and with time will almost certainly pay for more such services.

What are my plans and ideas?

My ideas and plans flow from the three basic tenets above.

- **I will create a rowing committee** consisting of the elected representatives of each of the squads, a coxing representative, the coaches and a representative of the boats sub-committee. This will encourage cooperation between the squads and provide a forum for asking questions, airing any issues that need to be resolved, and planning for the future. The sub-committee will focus purely on the rowing/sculling core of what the club is about and would form the basis of my Captain's report to the club committee each month.
- **I will listen to each of the different squads to understand their priorities rather than setting my plans in stone now.** Ideas that I have include a summer club sculling series, which we can trial at the end of August to begin properly next Easter; a series of heads and regattas where the club can enter en masse and cheer each other along; and a coaching and coxing pathway so that coaching and coxing recruitment and development are given the same attention as the rowers. After this season's sculling results it would be exciting to run a sculling squad in the coming season.
- **Recruitment and learn-to-row courses:** the club now offers learn-to-row courses for all ages, which are working extremely well. At a time when the club's Development Plan requires a substantial year-on-year growth in membership numbers over the coming years to meet its projected costs, it would be mad and irresponsible to scrap the successful programmes run so expertly by David Stanley (Juniors), Corin (Seniors) and Kosta (Rec Vets). I would also like to build on the sculling courses held last year and this summer to encourage sculling competency among all members.
- **Boats, facilities and equipment:** the boats sub-committee and I will ensure that appropriate boats are available for whatever training or racing any member wishes to undertake. I will ensure that plans for future equipment mirror the planned changes in membership composition.
- **To be absolutely clear, the Senior Squads would still be welcome to pursue their Henley ambitions at Twickenham** and would not be forced to abandon sweep rowing. All members will continue to be able to choose their own path. I do not want any member or squad to be made to feel that Twickenham no longer wants them.
- **I will work with the Fundraising sub-Committee** to ensure that we raise enough money to build the new kitchen this season to provide the club with new income streams and new benefits for members.

In short, being a rowing club captain is about listening, providing unified leadership, and concerning oneself primarily with the business of rowing. I believe that by listening, and perhaps a little encouragement, I can continue to lead the club in the right direction, building on all the good work of those before me, and those currently around me.

Please feel free to quiz me on anything, and I am more than happy to offer more in-depth and detailed explanations of the above in person at the AGM. In the meantime, send your questions, comments and suggestions to mikejdowell@hotmail.com