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Additional Rowing Camp Moves Closer to Home

By Michael Sakoda



Rowing camp participants on the San Pablo Reservoir in Orinda. Photo Andy Scheck

This summer marks the inaugural year of the Oakland Strokes rowing camp at the San Pablo Reservoir in Orinda. The Oakland Strokes rowing club was founded in 1974, and began teaching rowing to local middle and high school students. More recently, they began offering instructional summer camps at the Tidewater Boating Center on the Oakland estuary.

"We've been running the camps for about 10 years," said Beth Anderson, one of the Strokes' middle school rowing coaches. "But at the estuary, there's a lot of tide and water movement. San Pablo is really calm ... a better location for beginners."

The recent move to San Pablo is thanks in large part to the support of Lamorinda teens involved in the Oakland Stokes competitive rowing teams. "All the kids from (Lamorinda) row for us, but they come all the way out to Oakland," said Anderson. "We're trying to bring rowing a little bit closer to a lot of our students."

In these times of childhood obesity, diabetes and other weight-related epidemics, parents can't refute the importance of a good exercise, but more than that, rowing offers an opportunity that few other sports do.

"Middle school is a time when kids are changing sports and sort of discovering they might not be good enough to compete in the sport they're playing," said Anderson speaking as a mother of two. "The nice thing about rowing is it starts in middle school or the beginning of high school. It's good for kids who are athletes but haven't found a sport they're really great at because it gives them a place to excel."

Members of the Oakland Strokes competitive teams are sought after by recruiters from top universities. "Almost every college in the country that recruits for rowing comes to see us," said Anderson. "We're one of the leading programs in the country competitively, so we send kids to all the great schools."

Several Lamorinda teens are moving on from the Strokes to compete at the college level.

From the US Junior National Champion Women's team, Alia Shafi (Acalanes High School) will be competing for the US National Team at the Junior World Championships this summer before attending Brown in the fall. Elizabeth Pate (Miramonte High School) will be attending Harvard, and her twin sister, Ellen, will be attending the University of Virginia. Indigo Catton (Campolindo High School) is set to attend UPenn and Camille Triebisch is heading for UCLA.

From the silver medal winning men's team, Erik Johnson (MHS) is off to Cornell, Karmi Chan (MHS) to UCLA, and Ben Peterson (CHS) is heading for Trinity College.

"It gives you an edge if you've got good grades and you're a strong athlete," said Anderson. "It's a good opportunity. We can teach them something new and take them to the next level."

The coaching staff of the Oakland Strokes will be at the disposal of campers at the San Pablo sessions where children of all skill levels are invited to join in for an incredible experience with a storied program.

"We have two sessions at San Pablo: Beginners go 8:30 to 10:30, and we teach them everything they need to know and get them rowing by the end of the week; and an intermediate group, where they've done one week of summer camp, comes from 10:30 to 1:30, and they progress from where they left off the week before," said Anderson. "What we're trying to do is introduce kids to the basic sport of rowing and the excitement of what crew has to offer."

The camp concludes its second session this week, and will run one more session for beginners July 22-26. For information, visit www.oaklandstrokes.org.

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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