

# TRIBUNE-REVIEW

## Jeannette grad rows his way to top of 'crew'

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When Adam Wilson graduated from Jeannette High School in 2007, there were no colleges knocking down his door offering him an athletic scholarship.

Not involved in sports at Jeannette, Wilson's plan when he first enrolled at Cleveland's Case Western Reserve University, he admits, "was looking for a way to stay in shape and stave off the infamous 'Freshman Fifteen.' " As in fifteen pounds of weight gain.

Now, however, Wilson begins his daily fall and/or spring routine with a 4:30 a.m. wake-up call, ready to tackle the cold waters of the Cuyahoga River every morning as a member of the Case crew team.

Wilson, 21, never had any exposure to crew until college, he said.

"I didn't even know it was called crew until I met some of the team members at an activities fair designed to introduce incoming freshmen to the different clubs. I decided to give it a try and found crew a lot more intense than I had thought, but I fell in love with the sport and have been doing it ever since."

Last October, he and his crew mates competed in the Head of the Charles Regatta, on the Charles River in Boston. Part of North American Fall Rowing Festival, the Head of the Charles Regatta is "the World Series of rowing and is the premier rowing event in the country," said Preya Nixon, co-head coach of the Case crew team.

"Adam was in the stroke seat, the first seat in the varsity four-man shell (boat), with his oar on the left or port side of the shell," Nixon said. "Being in the stroke seat -- or sweep rower -- is a big responsibility. There, he controls the rhythm or the stroke rate of the boat and other rowers have to follow his rhythm or pace.

"He has to make the decision to make changes to gain an edge on his competition. Adam has a good sense of rhythm and understands the chemistry needed for all crew members. He is accountable and shows good leadership, especially when it's hard to be awake at 5 a.m. when we start practice."

Racing in Boston against the best teams from throughout the world, the Case crew, a club team at a Division 3 college, finished 51st out of the 58 registered boats.

But for Wilson, "it was really more about the honor of competing in one of the most selective events in the sport, and we were glad we didn't come in last," he said, smiling. "Sitting in the stroke seat in the Head of the Charles Regatta has been one of the high points of my rowing career.

"Our race included teams from the Royal Air Force, Galway Rowing Club in

Ireland, Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, plus other teams from all over the world. It was exciting and intense rowing against the best teams in the world."

At Case Western Reserve, a highly-regarded engineering school, Wilson has a double major in mechanical and aerospace engineering, with aspirations of finding a job that combines the business side of management with the technical side of engineering.

NASA is a definite possibility, he said, but a career in the corporate world represents another option.

At 5-feet-8-inches, 155 pounds when he graduated from Jeannette, Wilson has grown another inch but, more importantly, has added those freshman fifteen plus five, but has spread out the slight gain over three years.

"Size is a very important aspect of rowing," he said. "Height is the biggest advantage a rower can have and, as far as rowers are concerned, I'm a relatively short athlete, so this has been my biggest obstacle. But, by focusing on a clean, efficient technique in the boat, along with expanding my anaerobic threshold and overall endurance, I've overcome that height disadvantage.

"And the best rower isn't always the strongest person, but rather the person who focuses on building strong calf and thigh muscles, and maintaining a strong core."

Through the years, Jeannette has seen more than its share of capacity crowds at sporting events, but Wilson rarely sees cheering throngs on the banks of the Cuyahoga.

"The majority of people watching the races are either other rowers, family of rowers, or people who live in the general vicinity of the regatta," he said. "This differs with each regatta, and some regattas have a larger crowd turnout than others."

A dearth of cheering fans is only one drawback Wilson sees in Case crew, which rows out of the Cleveland Rowing Foundation. As a club sport, crew is not university funded and an eight-man shell may cost \$30,000 and crew members have to pay for their equipment and other expenses.

So, what's the attraction for crew, as Nixon called it, "a strenuous sport, incredibly demanding?"

"There is nothing like getting out on the water and just rowing away from all your frustrations," Wilson said. "A perfect row doesn't feel like work at all. It doesn't even feel like you're touching the water. It's more like gliding down the river, and all you can think about is the next stroke. There are no worries in the boat and it's the best way to relieve the stress of classes and work.

"There is no real off-season for crew. When it's too cold to get out on the water, we move indoors. Winter crew involves intense and often grueling workouts six days a week, including indoor sprint competition in which rowers compete in two-kilometer sprints. In-season workouts include four days per week on the water, with two or three days training off the water."

In crew during the spring rowing season, races include six shells racing toward a finish line. But fall rowing, Nixon explained, is like cross country running, with as many as 50 shells competing in a distance rowing event.

During Wilson's freshman season, he was in the stroke seat of Case's novice four-man boat, and placed first in the relay race at the Pittsburgh Indoor Sprints. As a sophomore he competed in both the varsity eight-man and varsity four-man boats, winning a bronze medal at the Columbus Fall Classic.

This year, as a junior, in the stroke seat of the men's varsity eight, he won a Gold Medal in the Head of the Cuyahoga Regatta.

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