

Golden Girl at Full Power

Champion rower Caryn Davies isn't just another Rilke-spouting athlete.



Caryn Davies leans on the gunwale of a shell at Weld Boathouse.

AT THE END OF EVERY E-MAIL from Caryn Davies '04 is a quotation from poet Rainer Maria Rilke: "You see, I want a lot./Perhaps I want everything:/the darkness that comes with every infinite fall/and the shivering blaze of every step up." Davies, the six-foot, four-inch dynamo at the center of this spring's mighty Radcliffe crew, may actually *get* everything. Last year, as a 20-year-old sophomore, she became a world champion, rowing in the U.S. women's eight-oared crew that won gold in Seville. This year, she helped power a varsity eight that won the Eastern Sprints championship for the first time since 1989, overthrowing a five-year

strokes they were already a boat length behind. But Radcliffe settled nicely into its cadence and, around the 750-meter mark, coxswain Julie Gluck '05 announced, "Here comes the freight train." Davies recalls, "We started walking back through them, and pulled even just before 1000 meters [the halfway point]. I thought, 'They're done; we're going faster than they are.'" Radcliffe stunned the Tigers, finishing 2.7 seconds ahead and thus declared themselves one of the nation's best crews. Eventually they went 10-1 on the season; in dual races, only Brown would outrace them, in late April. But three weeks after that loss, Radcliffe exacted their revenge at

Brown dynasty. The season reached a climax at the NCAA championship regatta on June 1 in Indianapolis, when the Radcliffe crew captured their first national title in 30 years (see "Walking on Water: A Rowing Trifecta," page 85).

Davies (her first name is pronounced *car-in*) rows in the number-six seat of an eight that coach Liz O'Leary has compared to a freight train for its steady, powerful base cadence. "It takes us a while to get up to speed," Davies notes. "We never have a fast start. But once we get going, we just motor along."

They sizzled in the season's first race, which pitted thirteenth-ranked Radcliffe against Princeton, then third in the nation. The Black and White had not beaten Princeton since 1989, and after 30

the Eastern Sprints, again rowing through Princeton, leaving the Tigers 4.4 seconds behind at the end; top-seeded Brown was a distant third, 7.4 seconds back.

The "engine room" (seats three through six in the center of the boat, where the biggest, most powerful athletes typically row) of course had a lot to do with the crew's success. Two of the four middle oars—Anna Brock '03 and Lis Lambert '04—stand six feet, three inches tall. And then, an inch taller, towers Davies; last year's crew captain, Michelle Guerette '02, dubbed her simply "The Big One."

HEIGHT HAS ITS DOWNSIDE: "I don't even *understand* basketball," Davies says, "and people expect me to play it." In a boat, however, The Big One can do it all. She'll row port or starboard, and is also a skilled sculler. She learned to scull as a ninth-grader in Tasmania, where her father, Peter, who teaches plant biology, was on sabbatical from Cornell. Back on Cayuga's waters, she kept rowing and, at Ithaca High School, played volleyball and skied. But "Rowing started to take over my life and I stopped doing anything else," she says. "That's how it is with a lot of people."

A key inspiration was her older brother, Kenneth, who graduated from Cornell last year, having captained the heavyweight varsity crew. Another was Whitney Post, a former Brown oarswoman and world champion in lightweight events, who was living in Ithaca. Post began coaching Davies and sculling with her in singles and doubles. Despite the mismatch in size, the duo came in fourth in the Championship Double event at the 1999 Head of the Charles Regatta. When Post began training for the 2000 Olympics, the two women stepped it up to double sessions: rowing in the morning, gym in the afternoon. "Caryn was always incredibly focused, with that obsessive 'rower' mentality," says Post. "She has a grace to her, too,



Davies rowing with the Radcliffe varsity

a natural athleticism. Caryn is a pretty rower to watch.”

Davies made the U.S. junior national team; in 1999, she won silver at Plovdiv, Bulgaria (“The opening ceremony was in an old Roman ruin”) and gold in 2000 at Zagreb. She liked the taste of victory. In choosing Harvard, she explains, “The speed of the team was very important.”

Yet at first she hated the College. She broke her foot shortly before arriving and was “hobbling, in pain, miserable,” she recalls. Still, she was skilled enough to stroke the Radcliffe varsity at times as a freshman. But the season was disappointing: “A lot of promise that year, but it never panned out,” she says. With time,

to O’Leary. “She finds that a helpful tool for flexibility, range of motion, relaxation, and focus.” Davies also likes ballroom dancing and wishes she had time to dance for the Harvard team.

Instead she’s been sidetracked with other diversions, like winning world championships. Davies was the youngest rower in the U.S. eight that triumphed at Seville last summer. She went a bit stir-crazy in Spain. “We were in a hotel by ourselves, just the U.S.A. team,” Davies recalls. “We were even discouraged from going to the opening ceremonies. I wanted to socialize—a big part of the experience is meeting people, having fun.” Worse, she was bothered by a sore rib—“It was just

however, college and crew both began to jell. She decided to concentrate in psychology. She went to Bavaria the summer of 2001 (she speaks German) to write for the student travel guide *Let’s Go*. Furthermore, “Caryn is quite accomplished in yoga,” according

to killing me”—and wondered if it might get so bad that she couldn’t row. But in a moment of clarity, Davies realized, “This is exactly what I want to be doing—all I want to do is row this race.” That insight—and a lot of Vioxx—calmed her. Shortly thereafter, the United States crossed the finish line nearly a second ahead of Australia and Germany, and Davies was at the pinnacle of her sport.

Only 15 minutes after the race, a U.S. coach was telling the new gold medalists, “Now you have to start thinking about an Olympic gold medal—the big one that you really want.” Right—Davies wants *everything*—and yes, she is gazing toward Olympia: she’ll take next year off to train full-time at the national rowing center in Princeton for the 2004 Athens Games. Further out, Davies says she’d like to be “a veterinarian or a rowing coach. I’d love to work for Radcliffe. They have a lot of fun in the coach’s office—they eat chocolates and gossip.”

~CRAIG LAMBERT

Walking on Water: A Rowing Trifecta

HALF A CONTINENT APART, on the weekend of May 31, three Harvard crews pulled off a feat unprecedented in the history of college rowing: simultaneous national championships in men’s heavyweight, women’s heavyweight, and men’s lightweight rowing. The men dominated the Intercollegiate Rowing Association (IRA) regatta on the Cooper River in Camden, New Jersey, while the women triumphed at the NCAA Championships on Eagle Creek Reservoir in Indianapolis. Though the mighty oars of Newell and Weld Boathouses have long inspired wonder and sometimes awe, the 2003 trifecta is a new kind of high-water mark. Harvard’s supremacy was the more remark-

able in its decisive triumphs over many rowers with athletic scholarships.

No one finished within a length of the heavyweight men all year long. They demolished six other crews in four regattas before the Eastern Sprints, where Harvard won its first title since 1990. There, the heavies beat Wisconsin, the 2002 champions, by a length and a half. Another victory in the JV race and a second-place finish by the freshmen allowed the Crimson to retain the Rowe Cup for overall heavyweight supremacy.

Harvard entered the IRA for only the fourth time in the regatta’s 108-year history. Scheduling conflicts with exams and a previous obligation to the 151-year-old

Tennis Rampant

The Harvard men’s and women’s tennis teams were both undefeated in the Ivy League this spring. The women (19-4, 7-0 Ivy) had the best winning percentage (.808) and most wins (21) in the history of the program. At season’s end they were ranked number 14 in the nation, their highest ever, up from number 56 last year. They upended the two-time defending Ivy champions, Pennsylvania, 6-1 to clinch the Ivy title and hand Penn its first Ivy loss since the spring of 2000. The women then defeated Oklahoma State, 4-1, and upset Arizona, 4-3, in the NCAA tourney. Their season ended with a 4-0 loss to the defending national champions, Stanford.

The men (19-9, 7-0 Ivy) captured their twelfth Ivy title in the last 15 years. The showdown at the end of the Ivy season pitted the thirty-ninth-ranked Crimson against forty-second-ranked Brown. Harvard triumphed, 5-2, and then upset seventeenth-ranked Virginia Commonwealth, 4-3, in the first round of the NCAA tournament before falling to sixteenth-ranked Alabama, 4-0, the next day.