

Rowing Against the Current

CHS sophomore Paloma Edmonds' journey as a varsity rower and transgender athlete highlights the pursuit of excellence on the water and a path to diversity in sports. Currently rowing for Pioneer, he hopes to continue on his journey by leaving an impact.

BY MAHIR SOOFI



Paloma Edmonds stumbled upon his calling in the rhythmic movement of rowing oars through water. What began as a stepping stone during eighth grade at Pioneer eventually led to him being a varsity rower. He was driven by nothing but his dedication to challenge himself on this journey.

Aspirations play a role in the level of commitment that being a varsity rower requires. The season demands daily practices and weekend races that only the utterly dedicated can handle. From aiming to make it to collegiate rowing to striving for victory at every turn, the challenge is substantial.

Edmonds found in rowing an enduring passion that provided sanctuary from the snap judgments of team sports such as soccer. By embracing the repetitious, syncopated aspects of rowing, Edmonds could concentrate entirely on honing the nuances of technique.

Photography courtesy of Tomiyo Wemert

Center: The Pioneer row team getting in their positions and preparing for launch to start a race on Sept. 23, 2023. The regatta at Orchard Lake against St Mary's and Skyline demanded physical and mental toughness throughout the day. "We normally have to be there from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m., but even with these shorter days, they're still pretty long," Edmonds said. "Parents set up tents and meals for us during these days."

"I've done a lot of sports in the past, most of which I didn't like," Edmonds said. "I like rowing because it's that same movement over and over again. You don't need to worry about what you're doing, really just focus on how you're doing it."

Rowing, a sport that thrives on teamwork, boasts a one-of-a-kind dynamic that can't be found anywhere else. Picture a symphony, with each rower serving as an instrument that comes together in perfect harmony. Although not mandatory, camaraderie among the rowers is crucial to the sport. The pinnacle of rowing events, regattas, offer opportunities for shared experiences.

Edmonds' journey with rowing wasn't only about the sport. It was also about the

bonds made along the way. Comradeship was built over endless practicing and a mutual love for rowing. The path from novice to varsity showcased both development and comradeship, with many starting from their days in middle school.

Long stays at school to complete homework, exemplifying diligent time management, were a part of his routine as he balanced rowing, academics and personal life. But as the racing season gained speed, finding moments for leisure with friends became a rarity.

Edmonds' introduction to rowing was a game-changer. Though he favored indoor activities, rowing allowed him to step outside and connect with the external world. Edmonds' newfound interest in rowing

facilitated friendships and strengthened personal development. Rowing was more than just a sport to him.

Edmonds' unwavering passion for rowing persists, despite his thoughts of what is to come. Although he is attracted to the idea of rowing in college, his true appreciation for the activity stems from the pure bliss it brings him. While he acknowledges the sport's competitive nature, he cherishes it most for the joy it provides.

"I think theoretically it'd be cool to do in college, but I don't know if I'm that serious about it," Edmonds said. "I row because I think it's fun. To row in college, you have to have a very competitive edge."

The year's rowing calendar is divided into distinct and different challenges. Fall is abundant with longer, leisurely races

that allow all rowers to indulge in the pleasure of rowing. The examination arises in spring when fiercely competitive, short races determine the strength of a team and every stroke matters.

For Edmonds, every stroke is a testament to his determination. As a transgender athlete on the men's team, he navigates the challenges, aiming to bridge the speed gap and row at par with his peers.

"I want to get better," Edmonds said. "I'm on the men's team and I'm trans, so I'm slower than most of the other guys, but I want to be able to row with them, it's important to me. That's my main drive."

Determined by an unyielding drive to shatter expectations and break down barriers in the water, he simultaneously seeks balance with his team as a pioneer on a

quest for equality. He understands that if he were on the women's team, he would undoubtedly stand out as a significantly strong rower. Nonetheless, his desire to compete with the men remains undaunted, as he eagerly welcomes the challenge.

"Everyone's nice, there's no problem socially," Edmonds said. "It's hard because if I was on the women's team, I'd be an above average rower. Being on the men's team means that I'm slower than a lot of them are, which means that in the more competitive races, in the spring, I don't get as much of a chance to row."

In the echoes of adversity, Edmonds stands resilient. With each race, he seeks improvement, and with each stroke, he inches closer to his goals. While he's aware of the challenges he faces, he keeps pushing himself to be the best version of himself he can be for his team. This season, the goal is simple yet profound: to progress, to triumph and to keep winning races.

Photography courtesy of Tomiyo Wemert

Pioneer and Huron compete in a scrimmage along Bandemer Park on Sept. 16, 2023. This marked the first race of their fall season, and both teams practiced there every day leading up to this race. "It's a very chill and pretty short race," Edmonds said.