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

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 twice every day leading up to this race. “It’s a very chill and pretty short race,” Edmonds said.

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 socially, as he eagerly welcomes the challenge. “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.