Dear Fresher,

Congratulations on getting your place at Balliol! As the captains of the Balliol College Boat Club, we would like to give you a brief introduction to rowing at Oxford.

Rowing is the largest inter-collegiate sport at Oxford, with over 1400 students taking part each year throughout the university. Like all sports at Oxford, rowing is done at collegiate and varsity levels. Most people who row at Oxford start in their first year here, rowing for their college, and at the top level, some of the blue boat rowers who represent Oxford in the Boat Race are selected to represent international teams at the World Cups and Olympics.

Inter-collegiate rowing at Oxford takes the form of bumping races. Here, the boats all start one in front of the other, about 20 meters apart, and each boat aims to bump (literally bump into) the boat in front, without being bumped by the boat behind. Once bumped, boats switch places for the next day of racing. At the top end, the 1st boats train very hard and require high levels of teamwork and commitment, and further down the divisions, rowers with less experience and a more relaxed approach race against other college boats with a similar approach, so there is competitive racing whatever your standard. Bumps races take place twice a year over four days, once in Hilary term (called Torpids) and again in Trinity term (called Summer Eights). There is also a novice-only Regatta at the end of Michaelmas term, called Christ Church Regatta.

Balliol has a strong rowing tradition, going back at least as far as the first Boat Race, when Oxford used a Balliol boat. This tradition is just as strong today, with two men’s and two women’s eights competing in summer eights last year. Last year, the men’s novice crew won Christ Church Regatta. Both the men’s and the women’s first boats have strong river position in Torpids and Summer 8s, with the women’s first boat being head of the river in Summer Eights 2011, now sitting in 7th and the men’s first boat sitting in 4th at Torpids.

Anyone is invited to get involved with rowing at Balliol. If you’ve never done it before, we take you out on the water and teach you the basics, and you’d be surprised how fast you can become very good at it. Most years a couple of novices make the college first boat. Equally, if you’ve got some rowing experience, no matter how much or how little, we can put you in at your level and you can challenge for a place in the upper boats immediately. Rowing at Balliol is free and you can try it out without any commitment.

Rowing at Balliol does not just improve your fitness. We offer our members frequent social events, ranging from posh dinners in the hall, to the slightly less refined crew dates with other colleges, with lots in between.

If you want to find out more about rowing at Balliol or for Oxford, come to our drinks event in freshers’ week at 7pm on Tuesday the 7th. This event will be followed up by a BBQ down at the boathouse later in the week. If you have any questions prior to this, please feel free to email us directly.

Good luck,

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