

# Inside Sports: IND crew cuts through elements



*By daybreak, eight rowers and coxswain Katie Simon from the Institute of Notre Dame in Baltimore, are gliding through the water, heading to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge. (Tom McCarthy Jr. | CR Staff)*

**By Elizabeth Lowe**

*elowe@CatholicReview.org*

It is pitch black outside as the Institute of Notre Dame's spring varsity crew team meets for practice at the Baltimore Rowing Club. The only discernible sounds come from birds chirping and vehicles on Interstate 95.

"The water is calmer in the morning, there's less boat traffic," said Brittany Rolf, an assistant coach and 2007 graduate of IND who rowed for the Penguins. "You sacrifice sleep but you have better practicing conditions, typically.

"You get to see a different side of Baltimore."

Meeting at 5:15 a.m. May 8, the girls warmed up with stretching and a brief run. The sun began to rise around 5:35 a.m. By daybreak at 6 a.m., they had already carried their oars and boat to the dock and lowered it into the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River.

Eight rowers and coxswain Katie Simon glided through the water from the dock, under the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Bridge to MedStar Harbor Hospital and back, then did variations of that route.

Rolf instructed the girls from a trailing launch.

"You need to focus on keeping up the power, having a long reach, getting a really long stroke," she instructed during a lull. "You can catch your breath, then spin it (the boat). We'll meet on the other side of the green marker."

*Watch a video of the team in action.*

IND was preparing for its final competition of the spring season, a May 10 regatta at St. Andrew's School in Middleton, Del., in which the varsity race was cancelled by inclement weather. Regattas are also held in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

"It's an individual effort, plus a coordinated effort," Rolf said of the endeavor. "It requires complete concentration. Any movement you make can throw off the boat. You have to be completely focused and dedicated."

Elizabeth McGrain, another assistant coach, is a 2003 graduate of IND. After rowing

for three years at the Baltimore school and four at La Salle University in Philadelphia, she knows that crew is built on trust.

"It's the ultimate team sport," McGrain said. "Coaching is very, very different than rowing. It takes a lot of time and a lot of patience. I'm grateful I'm able to give back."

Senior Jacqueline Gonzalez' interest in the sport was piqued by her sister, Erika, a 2012 graduate of IND.

"The girls on the team have become my best friends," said Gonzalez, who plans to join La Salle's crew team.

She has learned about time management, and how a healthy diet and continuous training are paramount for peak performance.

"This sport is so much about how you feel," Gonzalez said. "I love this sport more than anything. My life would not be the same without it."

Simon, a senior, has been the coxswain for four years, responsible for steering the boat. She plans to attend Towson University, which does not offer the sport.

"It's fun to be a leader of the team," said Simon, who from the coxswain's crouch critiques the rowers in an encouraging way. "I've learned from really good people. You have to be able to explain everything to rowers. You need to know everything about the boat and your rowers."

Simon hasn't minded answering a 4 a.m. alarm.

"It's peaceful," she said. "You're out here with your friends at five in the morning."

After practice concluded at 7:10 a.m., the team boarded a bus and headed across town to IND, ready for their school day to begin.

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