

# GIVING DEVLIN HER DUE

by Casey Hart, Assistant Director for Athletic Communications

In her first three seasons as a member of the Harvard sailing team, Sloan Devlin won a national championship, earned All-America honors twice and finished second in the running for the Quantum Women's Sailor of the Year award.

But on a campus where football is the most prominent sport on land, rowing is the most followed aquatic sport and every athletic achievement is matched by an equally impressive academic feat, people don't always understand what she does every weekend.

"We're trying to work on the stereotype of, 'Oh, you have a regatta this weekend? What seat are you in your boat?' like you're rowing crew," Devlin said.

It's not that she craves the attention received by athletes in higher profile sports. She just likes to enlighten people as to what her sport is all about.

"I wouldn't want to be a football player at a place like Michigan because I like being able to go into class and just be a student," Devlin explained, referring to her parents' alma mater. "But then people start talking to you and you reveal your interests and they learn more about you, that you have this other cool thing about you."

There have been many cool things to talk about lately for Devlin and the Harvard sailing



team. She helped lead the women's squad to its first national title since 1972 and helped the program capture its fifth straight Fowle Trophy as the top overall program in collegiate sailing.

In the process, she earned all-America recognition, along with teammates Genny Tulloch '05, Clay Johnson '07, Christina Dahlman '07 and Emily Simon '07.

For Devlin, winning last year was the culmination of three years of hard work by a tight-knit team. Now a senior captain and with Tulloch lost to graduation, Devlin has made it her goal to not only maintain the high level of performance this season, but to help show the new freshmen what it takes to compete at the collegiate level.

"She is an excellent leader both on the water and off," said head coach Mike O'Connor. "Her work ethic on the water, in the gym and in the classroom makes her the perfect example of what a student-athlete should be. When Sloan does something, she does it right."

And Devlin does more right than just sail. She lists her hobbies as modern dance and organic chemistry.

"I'm a chemistry concentrator, so that's the academic side of things," said Devlin, who excels in the classroom to the extent that O'Connor is preparing to recommend her for a prestigious Rhodes or Marshall scholarship. "Dance is something I've done since I was little. I still enjoy doing it, although not as seriously as I did before."



O'Connor refers to her as the athlete who "spends more time in the gym weight training than any sailor in the history of our program." She played a big part in the design and implementation of a team weight-training program last year. That commitment is crucial in a sport where strength and athleticism are as important as skill. Unlike in recreational sailing, O'Connor says you cannot be a competitive sailor in college without being a good athlete.

"As a team we stress boathandling," he said. "The ability to handle a boat better than the competition makes the tactical and strategic part of the game much easier. Sloan has great strength and athletic ability, which enables her to be one of the best boathandlers in the nation."

That is not to say sailing is all about physical fitness. In the doublehanded boats that are used for most collegiate competition, the person in the crew position handles most of the sail controls. The other sailor, called the skipper, steers the boat, trims the mainsail and is responsible for most of the tactical decisions.

While several Harvard sailors in the crew position have gone from walk-on to all-America over the course of their careers, it is nearly impossible to become a top-level collegiate skipper if you start as a novice.

Luckily for the Crimson, Devlin was anything but a novice skipper when she arrived in Cambridge. The Mystic, Conn., native started sailing at age 6 and began competing shortly after that. She started in small, singlehanded

boats and, at age 14, made the U.S. team and qualified for the European championships. She aged out of that division a year later and continued to compete in the U.S. Junior Olympics and international events.

Devlin also sailed for her high school team at The Williams School. Sailing in college and at Harvard was something she had in mind as she progressed through the youth ranks.

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"Just by talking to people at my yacht club and others, I found out that college sailing is fun and you get to meet a lot of people from other places," Devlin recalled. "Harvard has the history behind it, especially recent history because, in the past five years, the coeds have won both the coed dinghy championship and a team racing championship."

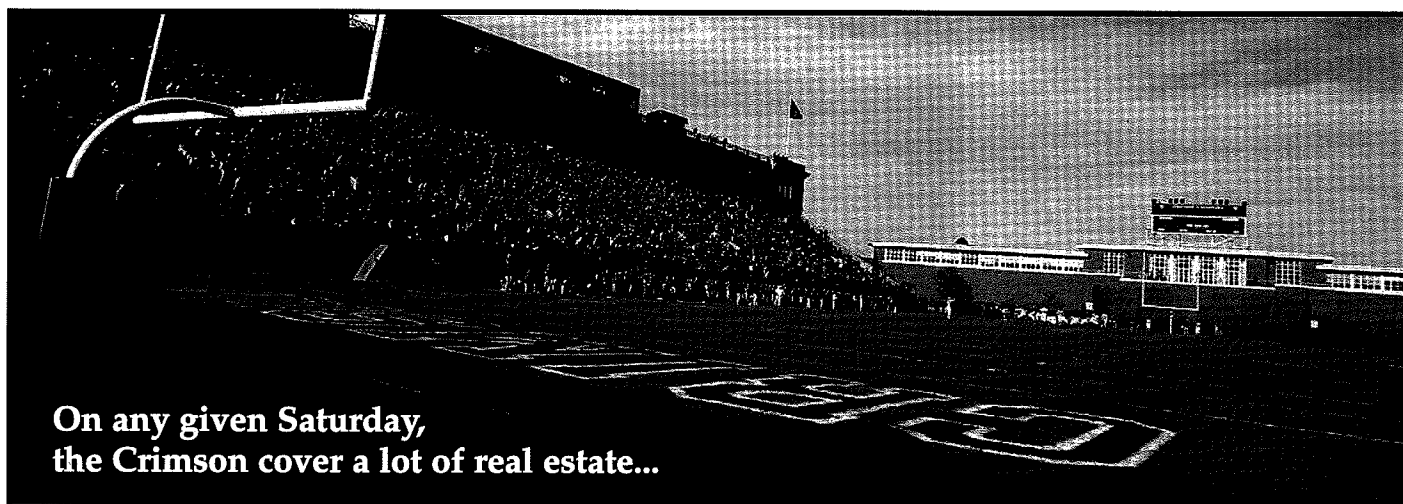
The nature of the sport has driven Devlin to continue improving.

"It's a very humbling sport," she explained. "Environment plays such a large factor. Is it breezy? Is it light? Is it wavy? You can get unlucky with the shifts a lot of times. In that sense, it's a constant learning process and you're never the best. You just have to realize that and take your lumps and pay your dues."

Another unique aspect of sailing is its coed competitions and practices, something Devlin says makes her better. The skipper/crew pairing on a boat needs to weigh between 250 and 280 pounds, so male skippers often sail with female crews.

The coed team is off to a good start after this season's first two major regattas. The fourth-ranked Crimson opened the season with a bang, defeating 23 schools to win the Harry Anderson Trophy at Yale. Harvard came up with another good performance a week later, finishing second among 24 squads at Dartmouth's Captain Hurst Bowl. With the women's team ranked fifth nationally, the Crimson should be in the running for a spot at all six national championships: men's singlehanded, women's singlehanded, sloop, women's dinghy, team race and coed dinghy.

Whether it's directly from her sailing or a result of the groundwork she's laid leading the team in the boat, weight room and classroom, Harvard's next national title will bear Sloan Devlin's fingerprints.



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