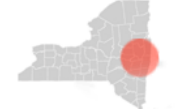




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Friday, May 23, 2008

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SRA prevails on championship Sunday

By STAN HUDY, The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Even in rowing there is a Super Sunday.

This weekend it involved more than 3,000 rowers gathered on the shore of Fish Creek in Saratoga Springs as the New York State Scholastic Rowing Championships were contested for the 11th consecutive year as Saratoga County teams claimed 12 titles and 23 medals.

The state showed unprecedented depth in talent and the Saratoga Rowing Association girls program continued to prove its prominence, winning state championships in the girls eight, second eight and freshman eight races.

The girls varsity eight captured its eighth consecutive state title, rowing away from Western New York powerhouse West Side Rowing by nine seconds and holding off local rival Burnt Hills Rowing Association. The SRA second eight regained its title after four consecutive years of ownership from 2002 to 2005 and the girls freshman eight claimed its ninth consecutive state championship.

"Shaker got us off the start and then we did our move and we had them," Saratoga freshman coxswain Rae Backens said. "We were excited about the race, but were so nervous at the start."

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The crew also had to follow in the footsteps of two generations of high school rowers that claimed state titles.

"We had to do it," Chelsea Brown said. "Not for the past boats, but for ourselves."

With the victory, the freshman eight earned entry into the Scholastic Rowing Association of America national regatta May 23 and 24.

"I've been counting the days to nationals since last year," Brown said. "We're going to the same place (Oakridge, Tenn.) that the last freshman boat won a national title."

The girls second eight edged out Central New York rival Fayetteville-Manlius by two seconds, allowing three seniors, Courtney Krueger, Jamie Logan and Andrea Bambera to leave their home course on a winning note.

"There was a lot of emotion for the seniors and the underclassman," coxswain Andrea Bambera said. "I called a 10 (a 10-stroke effort) for the seniors in the body of the piece and in the sprints I said 'It's our last run, make it a good one.'"

With its first-place finish the second eight was matched with the varsity girls eight for their chances to go to Oakridge. The varsity eight had to finish in the top five for both boats to qualify.

"It was our last race on our home course," senior Jamie Logan said. "We were in it to win it all the way and go to nationals."

The SRA also had another repeat champion, Elihu Reynolds, winning his second boys New York State singles title on Fish Creek and his fourth overall after earning two state titles in the New Jersey State Championships. He bested Shenendehowa's Ian Fisher by four seconds in a new racing shell he received Friday.

"It's a demo from Hudson and they helped me with the seat and the rigging," Queensbury senior Reynolds said. "I took a couple trips with it up and down on Friday and I said this is a new boat and I'm going to make it work."

He utilized his length to row his way to an early lead and maintained his distance from his competitors for the remainder of the 1,500-meter sprint race.

The state event combined scholastic events, rowers who attend the same high school, with club events, teams that are comprised of rowers from an area, regardless of their high school.

Saratoga's girls senior double and boys lightweight doubles crossed the finish line in second overall, but earned the state scholastic title with Albany Rowing Center earning the club title.

Meredith Venerus and Sarah Martin of Ballston Spa High School earned the school its first-ever state championship title in crew and earned entry to the SRAA regatta. Scottie teammates Ryan Allen and Eric Newton took second-place in the boys junior double will join them on the journey to Oakridge, Tenn.

The Friends of Shenendehowa Crew, Inc. had a stellar weekend, still without a permanent coach in place. The Shen contingent rowed to titles in the girls lightweight double, girls novice four and boys senior double.

The day wasn't without dramatic finishes, saving the best for last as the Burnt Hills Rowing Association boys varsity eight upset perennial powerhouse, Chamaine in a tight three-boat finish to claim its fourth title in the event, but first in seven years.

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