



Hometown Hero

Local Girl Makes Good

Things happen in threes. Western Washington University Viking's (WWU) 2009 Female Athlete of the Year is living proof. Audrey Coon's rowing resume is threes gone wild:

- * 3-time NCAA Division II Rowing National Champion
- * 3-time WWU Female Scholar Athlete of the Year
- * 3-time Great Northwest Athletic Conference Academic All-Star
- * 3-time Collegiate Rowing Coaches Association National Scholar-Athlete
- * 3-time Northwest Collegiate Rowing Conference Academic All-Star
- * 3-time 1st Team CoSIDA/ESPN The Mag. College Div 8 Academic At-Large All-Star

Audrey's threes are so out of control some of them need bumming up a notch: The Vikings women's rowing team is the first rowing team in history to win five consecutive national titles; the third WWU Athlete of the Year award has only happened one other time in the school's history; and she is only the second student in Viking history to earn 1st Team honors.

One does not have to look very far to see that people with such achievements do not stumble onto them by accident; it is simply what they do. I found Audrey no different. It is impossible to find a junior or high school honor roll without her name on it. She graduated from Kenai High's class of 2005 as World Languages and Outstanding Choir Student of the Year. It was a pretty sweet way to top off a high school career already laced with awards and honors, including All-State Choir and National Honor Society. Add in her countless community volunteer hours, and it is an obvious deduction she has never heard the term 'slacker'.

Audrey's first rowing experience was in the summer of 2004 with the Alaska Midnight Sun Rowers. I remember the morning I met her on Mackey Lake: her mom, Brenda Stoops a long-time rower herself, brought Audrey to the site. There was no mistaking the family resemblance when Audrey flashed that same quick smile her mother has. I found her truly genuine and very likable.





Although she brought limited rowing experience to the Vikings, her sports background of Nordic Skiing, Cross Country Running and Track and Field served her well. WWU was not her first choice of schools, but she landed there partly because she knew they had a very successful rowing team and wanted to give collegiate sports a try. WWU does not do much recruiting though. They only talk to potential rowers who have already committed to going to the school. According to Audrey, *"That way, no one is going to school just to row. I think it makes for more dedicated rowers who don't have expectations or think they're entitled to certain position/stature on the team."*

Anyone up for another round of threes? Julie Munger of Palmer, Heather Kelly of Girdwood and Audrey were Viking boat mates: three Alaskans rowed together for three years.

In a May, 2009 Anchorage Daily News article by Mike Campbell, John Fuchs the Viking women's rowing coach, said of his Alaskan contingent, "They're tough. They're used to cross-country skiing and doing track and field in the snow. The weather conditions don't bug 'em." To quote Audrey from that same article, *"They (Alaskans) bring a sense of bad-ass."*



Victorious Vikings

According to coach Fuchs, Audrey the starboard 7-seat senior, was captain of the team in 2009 and lead by example. *"When my coach described me as 'leading by example', I can assume he's talking about my attitude at practice, general work ethic, and my commitment to the team and to my school work,"* she said. She also acted as liaison between the coaching staff and the team as well as organizing all of the team get-togethers

and travel to statewide regattas.

When asked about her part in winning yet another NCAA title, she responded, *"I think of my contribution as one-in-nine...everyone in my boat brought something a little different."* Audrey and the coxswain were the only seniors in the boat while four of the eight girls had never rowed or even raced before September. Audrey's experience at having won the past two national titles was especially important as far as training, leadership and racing go. *"I gained a lot of confidence having trained and raced on a USRowing development team the previous summer, so high-stakes racing and training to compete at a higher level was something that came more naturally to me and I think my teammates took confidence in that."*

In that record setting May 31, 2009 NCAA Championship varsity 8+ race, the Mercyhurst team held a slight lead over WWU for the first 500 meters. But the Vikings, despite rowing at a much lower stroke rate, took the lead during the second 500 meters and gradually pulled away.



I was intrigued by the low stroke rate. (Hang around rowers for any length of time and you will quickly notice their obsession with this topic.) So I just had to ask Audrey about it. *“Our team's low stroke rate approach to racing has served us well over the years although it hasn't come without criticism or controversy from opposing teams and the media,”* she responded. *“Basically, I think of it as 'quality over quantity.' We generally row no higher than a 33 for the race. Nothing is more demoralizing to other teams than to be walked on by a crew that's under stroking you. Mental toughness is the key to this strategy...we fully expect to be down for most of the races we enter because of this race plan. We train all year to be behind in a race...cat and mouse pieces prepare us well for this sort of racing and train us to be mentally strong no matter what we encounter. Our coach tells us that our goal is to 'break' opposing teams. We know we can beat anyone we encounter, it's just a matter of how quickly we can do it.”* And do it they did with a perfect 10-0 record for 2009.

On June 22nd, 2009 the team went to Safeco Field in Seattle for a special tribute prior to a Mariners' game. Audrey, as team captain, was asked to throw out the first pitch. She had her 10-year-old cousin, Ben, practice beforehand, *“to no avail. I was really nervous and threw horribly. I'm just glad it made it as far as it did!”*



Audrey's Professional Baseball Debut

Audrey graduated in December 2009 with a BA in Elementary Education with a Spanish major. She is currently a substitute teacher and tutors at-risk Hispanic kids after school in Mesa, AZ. She volunteers with the Tempe Junior Rowing program and is taking some classes as well. Her future plans look much like an on-going list of her already achieved accomplishments: a National Outdoor Leadership School course, a move to Portland, OR where she hopes to coach people with special needs and disabilities for 'Adventures Without Limits', and there is speculation on a Master's degree in teaching or special education.

What strikes me beyond all the well-deserved accolades, awards and achievements is Audrey herself. There is a humble enthusiasm in her tone and demeanor. She's one of those rare, genuine people who uplifts and inspires and always has time for others.

Her rowing achievements are a bucket list of things I will only ever dream of checking off. As I look over her list of threes and think back to that first Mackey Lake row, I wonder if she had any idea where that innocent 6am venture would eventually lead her. For people like Audrey I do not think it really matters; she is bound to succeed not where life takes her but where she takes it. It is simply what she does.



“Only the guy who isn’t rowing has time to rock the boat.” ~ Jean-Paul Sartre

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Crewser Events

Intro To Rowing Tuesday, April 29th, 7:00-8:00 pm,
Resurrect Art & Coffee House

Discover the world of rowing in this informal fun- filling evening . Learn what it means to ‘weigh ‘nuf’ and ‘check it down’. Find out what an ergometer is and how and why you’d ever want to use one.

Remember to sign up for the Learn to Row class!

Open to everyone ages 14 and up.

Learn To Rowing Saturday & Sunday, May 29th &
30th, 1:00-5:30 pm, Bear Lake Row Site

A follow-up class to Intro to Rowing. Jump on an erg and learn the proper rowing stroke technique, learn different parts of the boat, get hands-on experience in a real boat with real oars and feel the way the water moves beneath the boat as you glide across Bear Lake.

Bring snacks, warm clothes and pray for sunny weather!!

Yeshiva University decided to field a rowing team. Though they practiced and practiced for hours every day, they never manage to come in any better than dead last. Fed up, the team finally decided to send Morris Fishbein, their Captain, to spy on Harvard, the perennial championship team.

So Morris schleps off to Cambridge and hides in the bushes of the Charles River, from where he carefully watches the Harvard team at their daily practice.

After two weeks, Morris returns to Yeshiva. "Well, I figured out their secret," he announces.

"What? Tell us! Tell us what their secret it!" his teammates eagerly want to know.

"We should have only one guy yelling. The other eight should row."

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