

ROWING

Victoria gets the Caius to a Walker legacy

Mark Taylor
mark.taylor@iliffmedia.co.uk

Caius Boat Club, rowing for Cambridge University and the Walker family, you would struggle to get a cigarette paper between the three.

The three are intrinsically linked, and Victoria Walker will seal the family dynasty when she rows in the Cambridge University Women's Boat Club lightweight's crew at the Henley Boat Races this Sunday.

It all started in 2007 when Peter Walker arrived to study natural sciences at Gonville & Caius. A keen and successful rower from King's School, Chester, he made an aim to represent Cambridge University Boat Club.

It was when studying a PhD in material sciences that Peter finally fulfilled his objective, rowing for reserve crew Goldie against Isis on Boat Race day in 2014.

Peter, 29, who is a metallurgist in Germany, said: "When I was rowing at school, rowing in the Boat Race was a dream. When you do it, it suddenly all comes true."

In the meantime, Emma Walker matriculated in 2010 at Gonville & Caius to study medicine.

She was coerced into taking up the sport by her brother, who by this point was overall men's captain at the college.

"I learnt to row here when Peter was captain as they needed more girls," said 26-year-old Emma, who is a junior doctor. "I had never really expected to be in the Boat Race and never thought I would – I thought I

would get a Blue in lacrosse!"

But the bug had bitten and Emma became Caius' women's rowing captain in 2012-13, trialling with the Light Blues in 2013-14, only to be the spare that year. But she came back with a vengeance to get into the lightweight's boat in 2015 as they beat Oxford by three feet at Henley.

So now it is the time for Victoria to carry on the Walker legacy.

Youngest sibling Victoria, who is

“I had never really expected to be in the Boat Race and never thought I would – I thought I would get a Blue in lacrosse!”

Emma Walker
CUWBC lightweight in 2015

in her third year studying medicine at Caius, learnt to row at King's School, Chester and was the college's women's captain last year. And in her first year trialling with CUWBC, has made the lightweight crew.

"I spent most of last year trying to be big enough to be a lightweight," said Victoria, who like her sister, was a ballet dancer at school.

"There wasn't really any outward pressure; I put a lot of pressure on myself though.

"I always knew it was something I could do, it was achievable I just had to put in the effort to do it."

All the family will be at Henley on Sunday to watch Victoria, and it will



The Walker siblings, from left, Peter, Victoria and Emma at Caius Boat Club, who they all competed for at university
Picture: Keith Heppell

be a proud moment for their parents, who have become rowing fans.

"I had been rowing for so long before mum and dad came and watched – even the stuff at school, Henley and the Coupe de la Jeunesse," said Peter.

"They have had three kids at Cambridge so they now talk about it, ask about it and understand it a lot more. I think they felt relieved when Victoria got in the boat.

"There isn't so much pressure as

we were brought up in an encouraging environment."

Peter also played a role in plans for the the new Caius Boat Club – which opened last year – a place that the three hold in high regard.

"Being part of Caius Boat Club is so very important to us all and we have all been captains there at some point across the past decade and been rowing for the first VIII in every May Bumps that we could," said Emma.

Eights make impression on Tideway

Cambridge University were the fastest University crew for the fourth consecutive year in the Women's Eights Head of the River Race last Saturday.

As they step up their preparations for the Cancer Research UK Boat Races on Saturday, March 24, the Light Blues sent three crews to contest the annual event.

The first crew clocked 18min 50.2sec to finish second overall, behind Leander A, and won their category.

Thea Zabell, who was in the No 4 seat, said: "Our performance was a good reflection of our strengths and also gives us an idea of what focuses we should take into the last couple of weeks in the lead up to the Boat Race."

Reserve crew Blondie were eighth overall, the highest second-placed crew from any club, and Pippa Dakin said: "We produced a great performance coming eighth overall and first second VIII, giving us confidence that we are racing well for two weeks' time."

A third eight featuring openweight spares and student rowers who are part of the CUWBC development squad were 42nd out of the 319 crews.

Cambridge 99 Rowing Club finished well inside the top 150.

The first crew of Abbey Child, Chrysa Litina, Sara Bastiani, Josie Harries, Agnes Bolińska, Klaske van Marrum, Guinevere Woolstenhulme, Linda Kitching and cox Sebastian Hathaway completed the 6.8km course in 22min 4.9sec to place 116th.

The second boat were 185th, finishing the race in 22.58.2

In the Head of the River Race on Sunday, Cambridge 99's crew of Karel Kabelik, Rob Sargent, Alex Shaw, Will Young, Rhidian Maltby, Friso van Gan, Nick Thorn, Nick Richardson and cox Sammi Tarling were 77th out of more than 300 boats, in 19.31.6. The men's second crew finished in 20.28.5 and the third boat were 21.12.6.

Club captain Josie Harries said: "It is fantastic to see the hard work that the squads have put into winter training paying off in these races and I am proud of our achievements as a club.

"I am really looking forward to seeing continuing success for Nines over the summer regatta season."

CUWBC have named their lightweight crew to take on Oxford at the Henley Boat Races this Sunday (March 18) at 3.30pm.

Newnham College's Ellie Thompson will stroke a crew which features Naomi Pygott (Peterhouse), Olivia Hamilton (Magdalene), Rebecca Hartwell (Queens'), Miriam Apsley (Christ's), Lucy Harris (Queens'), Debs Oakley (Darwin), Victoria Walker (Gonville & Caius) and cox Stephanie Payne (Trinity Hall).

SQUASH

Thain and Smith lay winning foundations

Melbourn moved closer to retaining their Cambs Ladies County Championship with victory over a weakened Comberton II side.

As Comberton only had four players, Melbourn started a string ahead, and the victory was confirmed with 3-0 wins for Frances Smith and Debbie Thain.

The bonus points were in the bag, and Sam Pluck won 3-0, but Helen Tipping was defeated by

the same score as Melbourn finished 17-3 victors.

Melbourn first team are in danger of relegation in Mixed Division One after an 18-5 defeat to Peterborough.

They only had four players, and the writing was on the wall after 3-0 defeats for Mark Oppen and Jan Brynjolfsson.

Vinod Duraikan picked up three points with a 3-1 win, and it looked encouraging for Matt

Sampson as he opened up a two-game lead against a former individual county champion, but fatigue set in as he lost 3-2.

Victories for Gareth Jones, Mike Easton and Nev Rimes helped Melbourn II to defeat St Ivo II in Division Four, and skipper Roger Woodfield said:

"This was another solid performance from the team, we played well and deserved to win this match."

HANDBALL

Angels flying

Cambridge's difficult season in the Women's Premier Handball League continued as they were beaten 16-15 by London Angels.

They are struggling just one place and five points off the bottom of the table, while London Angels are only four points off second place.

In a low-scoring game, they lost their 10th match of the season. Grete Morkvenaitė top-scored with five goals and Nikoletta Rau and Agi Foglein got four apiece.



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ROWING

The team behind the team that is

Wrobel seeks to bring power gains

Injury free, strong and powerful are the three goals that must be ringing in the ears of Milosz Wrobel at the start of each academic year.

As the strength and conditioning coach at Cambridge University Women's Boat Club, it is Wrobel's role to deliver a programme that gets the oarswomen in peak condition for the following spring.

Having worked with the club for the last three years, Wrobel is well versed in what is demanded to take on the Tideway in the Boat Race.

While some potential rowers may go through the Light Blues' extensive development squad during the summer, others will be immediately put through their paces at the start of the Michaelmas Term.

It sounds simple, but once Wrobel, pictured below, explains the nitty gritty of the thorough physiological screening, you understand it is anything but.

"I have three main goals: keep the athletes injury free while making them strong and powerful," said Wrobel.

"What I'm looking for is their flexibility screening as we then design individual programmes for athletes to look after themselves throughout the season so they don't get injuries because of how their body is neglected.

"Then we will test the lower body and upper body strength, and their balance as well, and whether there is an imbalance between a lower leg push or pull.

"That way we can highlight what programme they need, as well as looking at the core injuries, which is very important for rowers. The results are fed back individually."

With time at a premium given the balance of academic and sporting demands, and that of being support staff

rather than full-time coaches, it is a case of designing programmes to tackle the trends.

Developing future elite athletes is one of the primary goals of the club, so making sure the strength and conditioning programme helps athletes progress is vital.

"In terms of the workload for me, and the intensity at which I need to coach, the highest is the first two months," said Wrobel, who studied sports coaching and PE at ARU before going into strength and conditioning.

"You want the movement to get as good as you possibly can and create that loop of information to an athlete about saying or doing the right thing so later on in the boat they correct that and they improve as an athlete.

"Once the form is there, you can start putting some resistance in them so they become stronger and also, as a result, more powerful. Throughout the season we then narrow it down, and the programme becomes a bit more specific as we get nearer competition and there is a lot of power work."

The fruits of Wrobel's labour will be there for all to see in the Boat Race on Saturday, March 24.



MARK TAYLOR goes behind the scenes at Goldie Boathouse to talk to the support staff at CUWBC.

No stone is left unturned to gain the edge in the modern sporting world. Nutrition, strength and conditioning, data analysis, they have all become much more prominent tools to try to uncover those extra fractions to beat an opponent.

Perhaps the biggest difference in the last 15 to 20 years, though, has been the development of sports psychology, which in some spheres has become the prerequisite to success.

If that is true, then perhaps a good example of this could be at Cambridge University Women's Boat Club, who have been using this practice since 2015 and their development has born fruit through their results.

Kate Hays was the sports psychologist initially working with the Light Blues, but since she has been on maternity leave, Helen Davis has assisted the squad from last September.

Davis is working towards chartered status with the British Psychological Society, having been a primary school teacher for more than 20 years, and it was her own sporting endeavours as a national level swimmer that made her decide to change tack.

Having started swimming with some world-class triathletes at Cambridge Triathlon Club, she became interested that they deemed the discipline as the worst of the three and were negative about it, almost treating the race as beginning from the cycling leg.

"It just got me thinking, 'what if they could get their mental state right with their swimming, how good could they then be?'" said Davis, who has a psychology degree.

"I started looking into it and applying some theory to myself and in my early 40s decided to embark on a Masters' degree in sport and exercise psychology.

"I then applied the skills to my own swimming, and I think it's made a very big difference to my performance in that I'm now national champion for the 50m breaststroke.

"It's why I feel I'm enthusiastic about it because I've applied it to myself and truly believe it can work."

Davis gets in the rowing mindset

“Your mentality in how you view yourself and the performance you're going into can really affect things

Helen Davis
psychologist

Helen Davis has been getting into the mindset of the Cambridge rowing hopefuls
Picture: Keith Heppell

Now Davis is putting that theory to the test.

She works across a range of disciplines, such as swimming, triathlon, cycling, squash, lacrosse and of course rowing.

There are plenty of challenges for the CUWBC squad as they have the balance of sport and academia, and competing with each other to achieve individual goals, while also trying to forge bonds with future crewmates.

Davis, who runs sports psychology consultancy *think. believe. perform.*, has been out on the water at training sessions to observe

the personalities and characters when they are in the boat.

It has led to workshops between sessions working on building team culture and vision looking at attitudes, goals and values as a group, as requested by president Daphne Martschenko.

The insight of how sports psychology assists the athlete is interesting, and Davis explains that in one-to-one sessions it offers support for their well-being and the chance to talk through concerns, challenges and to assess performance.

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Fit for purpose with Lavelle

Having worked with professional sports stars in the past, you would imagine it would just be more of the same for Helen Lavelle when she linked up with Cambridge University Women's Boat Club.

With a practice based in Oakham, physiotherapist Lavelle had a contract to work with Leicestershire cricket and Northampton Saints rugby team.

Yet when she joined forces with the Light Blues for the first time at the beginning of October, it proved to be eye opening compared to the sporting groups with which she had previously worked.

"They are a different cohort, but I've never worked intensively with women before," said Lavelle. "This squad are so self-motivated.

"In professional cricket, for example, they don't have the driven work ethic. You don't have to drive these girls, they are just on it.

"They are high-achieving women, they are rowing at this level and in the middle they are knocking out a PhD or an MPhil.

"They are very special human beings, irrespective of their rowing. In rugby, you have a very different cohort. These girls are training six hours a day, the Saints train six hours a day but then they go home.

"They are not trying to fulfil the academic requirements that are going on here."

It has also given Lavelle an insight into a sport in which she also participates.

She coxes with Champion of the Thames, rows in an eight and sculls out of Peterborough with her partner.

Therefore, the background knowledge has come in handy.

"The more time I spend with the coaches, the more I learn and the more useful I am," said Lavelle.

"The more I learn about rowing the more I can link injury to biomechanics and to what I'm seeing in the boat.

"I'm learning so much from the coaching. When I go out on a launch I'm absolutely imbibing information from both Paddy [Ryan, the assistant coach] and Rob [Baker, the chief coach] and then I'm coxing my own boys."



Physio Helen Lavelle gets to work on a CUWBC patient

Picture: Keith Heppell

talk, you can identify types of thinking that they may have that could be of help, or not be of help, to their performance on the water," she said.

"A lot of what I do is talk about the types of thinking that people have, maybe the words and vocabulary they use in relation to their performance and questioning and challenging them sometimes: 'Is that of benefit to you? Is it a helpful line of thinking?'

"It gives them ideas about what sort of thinking can help them and what doesn't, and looking at their self-talk and getting them to notice

and listen to themselves about what is and isn't working for them.

"Your mentality in how you view yourself and the performance you're going into can really affect things.

"If you turn on the television and get a sports person coming off the track or similar, more often than not their reason for their success might be a psychological one.

"Yet so much effort is put into physical training but never quite so much into psychological training but people readily admit it can have a massive impact in terms of performance."



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Working with Rob Baker is one of the most enjoyable parts of the job for Lavelle, describing it as "amazing man-management".

"He just has an extremely gentle but forthright way of dealing with issues," said Lavelle.

"He's incredibly straightforward, he says exactly what he thinks, in a very nice way.

"He's just the easiest person ever to work for, and I come from professional rugby and cricket and have worked for some really good coaches."

Being part of the CUWBC environment is also helpful for Lavelle.

She has set up two initiatives

to try to prevent rib stress fractures and back injuries, and is about to embark on a research programme, with funding from Bioventus, on a product called Exogen which is aimed at preventing rib fractures.

If she is able to get the work done, it could see Lavelle present her paper in Osaka in Japan in August.

"What the squad can provide me with if I want to go and do research is the cohort," she said. "From a research perspective, this is a very good environment to be operating in.

"Those are the things going forward that are exciting for me."

Sport

The team
behind the
Light Blues

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City seek to go under the play-off radar

FOOTBALL

Mark Taylor
mark.taylor@iliffmedia.co.uk

Robbie Nightingale is targeting a stealth Cambridge City move to break into the Evo-Stik League, South East Division play-off places.

The Lilywhites have had a catalogue of postponed matches since the turn of the year, and are facing a backlog of games in the run-in to the end of the season.

Nightingale, however, has likened the prospect to the opening six weeks of the campaign, and says his side will be ready for the challenge.

"At the beginning of the season you play two games a week until the end of September," he said.

"Between August and October, we played 12 games so when you factor that in – and we played five in two weeks at the end of August – it isn't too different, to be honest.

"I'm never one to moan. You can't help the weather or certain situations and all we have to worry about is what we can deal with."

Nightingale is hoping City can pick up a head of steam – as they did at the end of last season – to make good their aim of reaching the play-offs.

"When they are on, we have to give ourselves the best chance of winning those games," he said.

"We're still in the mix and it's one of those that we have three games in hand of Chalfont St Peter and are five points behind them.

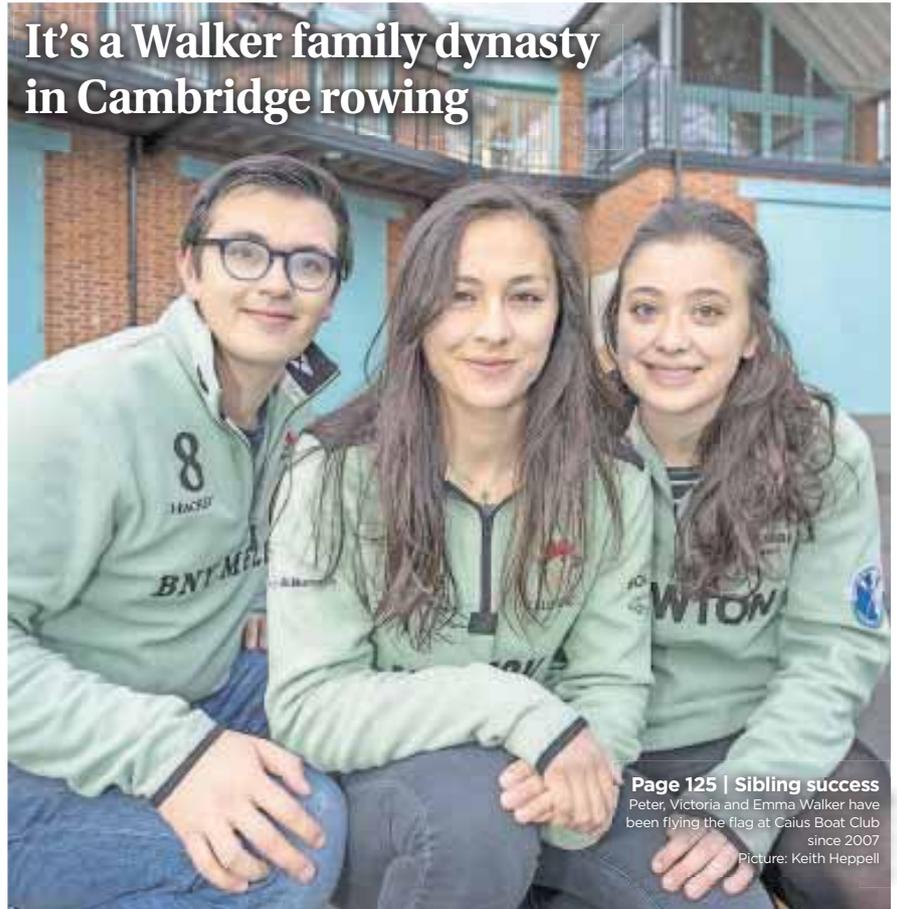
"The games we've got are against teams in the bottom five or six. Our record in those matches have been good since the start of the season.

"And the top six are all playing each other. Over the next few weeks, there are lots of games going on where if we go under the radar picking up wins then we give ourselves every chance.

"We're a young group of players, a hungry group, and are disappointed with a few of the results we've had and want to put things right.

"Hopefully the weather will be kinder to us as we move forward and we might be able to have a run of games where we can pick up some good points to be in and around [the play-offs] in the middle of April."

It's a Walker family dynasty in Cambridge rowing



Page 125 | Sibling success

Peter, Victoria and Emma Walker have been flying the flag at Caius Boat Club since 2007

Picture: Keith Heppell

DIVING

Bronze medal is a building block for Goodfellow and Daley

Dan Goodfellow earned a bronze medal at the FINA Diving World Series in Beijing.

The Meldreth-based diver joined forces with Tom Daley for the first leg of this year's series as they build up towards the

Gold Coast Commonwealth Games.

The pair had been in second place throughout the synchro platform event, but their final dive, a forward four-and-a-half somersault in tuck position, was

the most difficult in the programme and scored 62.16.

It saw the British duo finish with 417.93 points, allowing the Ukrainian team of Maksym Dolgov and Oleksandr Gorshkovozov to pip them to

second with 417.93, having scored 78.81 for the same dive.

China's Aisen Chen and Hao Hang won gold with 484.29.

The next leg of the series takes place in Fuji, Japan from March 15 to 17.

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