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Three trophies proves good start to spring

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The 7-month-old varsity team all but swept competition at the University Rowing Association (URA) Championship this past weekend.

The women's rowing team placed first in every race but one and earned 97 points out of a possible 99, taking home the overall points champion cup.

The weather was another pleasant surprise for the team.

"We enjoyed racing in the calm conditions for once," senior and captain Jackie Monaghan said of the race, with conditions tending to be cold and rainy in the past.

"Our first team set the tone of the event," head coach Will Greene said of the first team's comfortable 18-second lead that marked the easy pace UR struck for the day.

The Yellowjackets fielded two other boats in the same Varsity 8 race. Each team was beaten by a narrow one-second margin to land second and fourth place.

In addition to winning the Chicago Alumni Cup for overall points champion and the Varsity Cup for first in Varsity 8, the team collected a cup for the Novice 8 race.

The closest finish on the day was in the Varsity 4, which was determined by a sprint between UR, University of Chicago and Washington University in St. Louis.

The 'Jackets won with a narrow three second split. Although the URA trophies do nothing for the Yellowjackets in the University Athletic Association or the NCAA rankings, they go a long way in building the young team's confidence and allowing them to face tougher competition through the year.

"The next two weeks will give a better indication [of the postseason] because our opponents are two of the top four/five teams in the country," Greene said. "Our goal is to be selected and compete in the national title. If we can show well against the teams in the top five we stand a good chance of being selected."

The Yellowjackets squad brings at least one trait to the upcoming competitions — a relatively young team with a blend of experience and a lot to learn.

They have something to prove at each event and the optimism to best past rivals.

"A lot of the people are hungry in their first year of NCAA competition," Greene said.

The 'Jackets will have their chance to prove their appetite in upcoming events against two of the top four DIII schools.

In the next two weeks they will face Ithaca College and Bates College.

However, the upcoming schedule of races requires more than a positive outlook — it requires mental and physical flexibility. The UR team trained half the year to build up endurance for 5k races but now must adapt to a spring schedule with shorter and more powerful 2k races.

With only a few weeks back on the water after a winter hiatus, the Yellowjackets are working to take their racing to the next level.

"Recently in practice we've been focusing on movement together as a boat," Monaghan said. "Synchronization within a boat is key to how fast it moves, so we've been working to solidify that aspect of rowing before the rest of our races this season."

Leber is a member of the class of 2011.