

LEND HIM YOUR OARS

BY ALISON KORN

Rowing coach Dominic Kahn is determined to dispel a few myths.

You don't have to be rich to row. You don't have to be from a private school. And you don't have to start the sport early to excel.

In fact, Kahn says, rowing — traditionally dominated by upper-crust Caucasians — is now catching on among kids from a variety of ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds, drawn to the youth league at the Bayside Rowing Club.

"This is a blossoming year for us," said Kahn, who was born in Trinidad and grew up in St. Catharines. "I'm really quite proud. In every community there are great athletes waiting, and we're going to find them all."

Dominic Kahn is throwing water on rowing myths

Kahn is committed to that vision. Every spring and fall, he dashes from school to school across Central and East Toronto, inviting students to pick up an oar. This season, the club's ninth, over 100 public school kids joined the club located at the end of the shipping channel in the Port of Toronto.

C. J. Cromwell-Simmonds, 20, first rowed at the club four years ago, when his math teacher Mary Card told him about the program. Now in his first-year of sociology at the University of Toronto, Cromwell-Simmonds is still a regular at the club, volunteering as an assistant coach for his alma mater, Monarch Park Collegiate Institute.

"You get discipline and confidence with the rowing program," said Cromwell-Simmonds, who was valedictorian and has won an array of scholarships. "The skills you pick up in rowing can be applied to your life. The club seems like it gives more than it takes."

Bayside offers kids the opportunity to train and compete regardless of their ability to pay. The Kiwanis Club of Toronto sponsored the construction of the boathouse. Revenues from a corporate rowing league help fund the youth league. And club members can get summer jobs instructing in the corporate program.

Because rowing is a sport one starts in the teen years, it offers tantalizing opportunities to those who train diligently.

"Rowing is more about dedication and less about natural talent than anything," Kahn said. "We know that any kid who starts rowing can do well domestically and be a national champion."

Or gain admittance to a top school. Torontonian Sasha Suda, 22, is in her fourth year at Princeton University and is captain of the school's crew. She started rowing at Bayside.

Now the club is developing another woman with lofty dreams and the dedication



— Erin Riley photos

to match. Peggy Hyslop, 23, won the Canadian championships on the indoor rowing machine last winter. "I was amazed because I never thought of myself as being up there," she said.

Her time of seven minutes four and a half seconds for the 2,000-metre race was a personal best by four seconds.

In only her second year of rowing, Hyslop placed eighth at this summer's national team trials and fifth at the Royal Canadian Henley regatta in the single scull.

Hyslop, who stands 5-foot-11, rows both morning and afternoon, six days a week, squeezing in a few hours of waitressing between workouts to pay the bills.

"I definitely want to make the national team eventually," she said. "I like that it's a huge physical challenge. It's difficult, but you're really proud of what you made yourself do."

You can contact the club at www.baysiderowing.com



■ DOMINIC KAHN, of the Bayside Rowing Club, shown here standing between PEGGY HYSLOP (right) and C.J. CROMWELL-SIMMONDS, says rowing is no longer the sport just for upper-crust Canadians.