

## **Rowing Club Comes of Age in 2010**

**SJC shot to the forefront of School's Rowing this year with an outstanding season that culminated in winning the SA Schools Championships and then were denied the title due to a technicality.**

In August 2009, the rowing club gathered at Witbank Dam to kick off the 2009/10 season with a 5-day Rowing Camp. Here, the foundations were laid for what would prove to be a highly successful season under the able leadership of Club Captain Dimitri Protopappas, new Head Coach Grant Dodds and Master in Charge, Mr Matthew Taylor.

Between September and October, in the lead-up to Gauteng Champs, four regattas were contested with promising results for St John's in all age groups. After a slow start, the First Eight showed great promise by improving their position with every week that passed. A fast looking First Four in the shape of Bevan Dell, James Nevin, Jack Coulter and Paul Malakou with Willie Morgan in the Coxswain's seat, began challenging for first place.

At the Gauteng Schools Championships, the Under 14's dominated by winning all their events, while the Under 15's and 16's were among the leaders in the major classes, these being the boats with either four or eight crew members. The Under 15 Octuple had to settle for the silver medal when one of the crew got his shorts caught in the sliding seat after leading the race with 200m to go. The Under 16's showed that they were a force to be reckoned with by securing 3<sup>rd</sup> place in both the Eight and Four.

In the Open Eights, the improved depth of the club was demonstrated when two SJC crews qualified among the eight finalists in the 'A' final. This was won by KES with St Benedict's narrowly beating St John's into 3<sup>rd</sup> place by a second. In the overall placings, St Benedicts were first with 74 points followed by St John's in second place with 64 points. The first decisive step had been taken towards the goal of being top school in SA.

Early December had the First Eight competing against seventeen other crews in the annual School's boat race in Port Alfred. On the first day of this prestigious event, each crew would do a time trail to qualify for the next day's finals, each final being between two boats in the same tradition as the Oxford Cambridge Boat Race. St John's performed admirably, qualifying 5<sup>th</sup> fastest to compete in the 'C' final against the much vaunted St Andrews College crew on their home water.

While the 'A' final was won by an extremely powerful crew from Abingdon School in the UK, the 'C' final proved to be the most hotly contested race of the day. The SJC First Eight rowed magnificently, pushing the St Andrews crew over every inch of the 6.33 km course, eventually finishing just a boat length down.

2010 dawned with another early January camp at Witbank Dam. Fitness tests showed that unlike previous seasons, the boys had been diligent in maintaining their fitness levels during the December break.

The first big regatta of the New Year, the Victoria Lake / University of Johannesburg Sprint, was held at the end of January. At this event, St John's won the trophies for best junior section, best boy's school and best school overall. This was the first time that St John's had won a major regatta in its ten-year history.

The club's good form continued during the rest of the season leading up to SA Champs, despite a few hiccups along the way such as the time when members the first crew were struck down with food poisoning on the eve of the Buffalo Regatta final in East London.

The South African School's Rowing Championships were held over the mid-term break at the end of February. The first day saw the finals of the singles and pairs being contested. A victory in the Under 14 Single Sculls as well as 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> places in the Open Pairs saw the club lying in second place, just 6 points behind St Alban's and more significantly, 39 points ahead of St Benedict's at the end of this first day.

On the Saturday the Championship gathered momentum with events for the bigger more prestigious boats. With the points system rewarding every 'A' finalist, St John's did extremely well to have crews qualifying in the final of every major event.

The first final of the afternoon saw the St John's Under 14 Octuple confirming their dominance of the season by storming to a three-length victory over their nearest rivals. In the Under 15 Quads final, SJC were the only school with two qualifiers, finishing in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> place. The Under 16 Eight finished just out of the medals, but earned a credible 4<sup>th</sup> place as the 2<sup>nd</sup> best Gauteng crew. In the last race of day 2, the SJC First Four brought home the bronze medal finishing just behind SACS and KES, having to fight their way up from 8<sup>th</sup> place at the half-way mark. With one day to go and sitting on 138 points, St John's was leading the Championship followed by St Benedict's on 111.

With the morning qualifying heats out of the way, Sunday afternoon would see the last of the races for championship points being contested. Once again, St John's boys excelled by qualifying for the finals in nearly every event and with a cushion of 37 points, glory beckoned!

In the first final of the day, the Under 15 Octuples put on one of the finest shows of the regatta. Coming out of the start, the SJC crew found themselves lying in second place, one length down on St Benedict's. Slowly, they began to eat into the lead until at the end they were gaining a man on every stroke. Regrettably, they ran out of course and had to settle for 2<sup>nd</sup> place and the silver medal.

The Under 14 Quads continued their winning ways with an even more emphatic five length victory in their event.

An enjoyable season for the Second Eight ended with a fifth place in the final which, like the Under 16 Quad's 8<sup>th</sup> place, was out of the medals but earned more invaluable points.

At this point, SJC were still 6 points ahead of St Benedict's with only the Under 16 Four and First Eights finals left. Then the under 16 Four came through in 3<sup>rd</sup> place to win the bronze medal. The lead was now 4 points with only the first Eights to go!

In one of the greatest races seen in recent years, eight crews came hurtling down the 2000m course in the final of the First Eights. In the final analysis, there was very little to choose between the eight crews and while some may have felt disappointment at finishing in 8<sup>th</sup> place, the SJC crew could hold their heads high, having finished not too far behind the Gold Medallists in an extremely close race. Crucially, St Benedict's First Eight had finished in 7<sup>th</sup> place, which was not enough to deny St John's the overall point's trophy!

It would be great if the story of the 2010 season could end here. Unfortunately this was not to be. Before the celebrations could begin, a regatta Official called over an SJC representative and delivered the devastating news that one of our crews had been disqualified due to an administrative technicality.

The boys were devastated by this news, but not for long. By all accounts, this disappointment has now served to strengthen their resolve and next year will present another opportunity to win the title. This time no technicality will prevent SJC from being crowned the next SA Schools Champions.

## **Medal Winning Crews:**

### ***Gold***

Under 14 Octuple

1. Michael Davies
2. Matthew Taylor
3. Robin Lavers
4. Khanya Swana
5. Lukhanyo Dzedze
6. Edward Kerr-Phillips
7. Nicholas Papas
8. Sean Verheal

Cox: Connor Nedeljkovic

Under 14 Quad

1. Khanya Swana
2. Edward Kerr-Phillips
3. Nicholas Papas
4. Sean Verheul

Cox: George Stanchev

Under 14 Single Scull

1. Nicholas Papas

## **Silver**

First Pair

1. James Nevin
2. Bevan Dell

Under 15 Octuple

1. Andrew Morgan
  2. Heinrich Hattingh
  3. Alex Scott
  4. Matthew De Barros
  5. Vincent Foccart
  6. Siyabonga Mkhize
  7. Miguel Neto
  8. Michael Papas
- Cox: Thulani Maphasa

## **Bronze**

First Four

1. Paul Malakou
  2. Jack Coulter
  3. James Nevin
  4. Bevan Dell
- Cox: Willie Morgan

Under 16 Four

1. Matthew Wolfe
  2. Dimitri Theofanides
  3. Jamie Odgers
  4. Lawrence Nel
- Cox: Matthew Holiday

By: Catherine Papas