



DOUBLE OLYMPIC GOLD MEDALLIST LEADS LATYMER OLD BOYS TO REMARKABLE ROWING VICTORY

Andy Holmes hadn't sat in a Latymer Upper School rowing boat for more than 30 years but on Saturday (September 19) the double Olympic Gold Medallist returned to the Hammersmith school that introduced him to the sport and showed that the passing of time had done nothing to diminish his habit of winning.

Joining up with old crew-mates drawn predominantly from his Class of 78 year group, Andy's crew - average age around 48 - took on the school's First VIII... and won!

Rowing over a sprint course from Harrods Depository to the Latymer Boathouse on Upper Mall, the Old Boys took a narrow lead off the start and were never headed, despite a determined push by the school as the crews went under Hammersmith Bridge.



"We went off at almost 40 strokes a minute," said one exhausted Old Boy afterwards, "which wasn't easy even when we were 18 and seemed close to impossible now that some of us are almost 50. But we held it together and, to be honest, the first half of the race felt really, really good." And the second half? "Horrible, just horrible."

Holmes, who won his gold medals at the Los Angeles and Seoul Olympics alongside Steve Redgrave, was delighted, both by his victory and by being out in an eight again. "I did most of my serious rowing in smaller boats - in fours and, of course, in the pair with Steve - so it was great to be back in an eight and going full tilt, even if it was a bit scary."

The boys of Latymer's current first VIII, however, have nothing to feel down-hearted about. Not only is it the beginning of their season, but they'd had a long morning outing and had rowed against a crew of recent leavers before they took on the Class of 78 crew. And if they knew their rowing history, they might have realised what tough opposition they were up against.

Rowing behind Andy Holmes was Richard Phelps, Cambridge Blue and fellow Olympic



oarsman, while stroking the boat was Henley winner, Andy Ciecierski. Both are from a slightly younger Latymer vintage, having left the school as recently as 1983. But the rest of the crew all rowed in the first and second eights of 1978 and included Chris Andrews, who won the TransAtlantic Rowing Race in 2006, two former junior National Champions in the form of David Jones and Nick Peters,

World Masters' finalist, Steve Aquilina, and Matthew Bond who now coaches at nearby Furnivall Sculling Club.

Having enjoyed their moment of victory, the Old Boys crew are keen both to continue rowing together occasionally and to give something back to Latymer rowing if they can. "We all learned to row at Latymer and, 30 years later, we're all still doing it and really enjoying it too. We couldn't be more grateful, " said Matthew Bond. "That's why we're already talking to Latymer's Head Coach, Bobby Thatcher, to see if we can come along and act as a pacing crew during one of their winter training outings. I'm sure the boys will be itching for revenge and I'm quite sure, that for any piece lasting longer than two-and-a-half minutes, they'll get it."

The result has been described, mainly by those in the winning crew, as "a stunning victory for middle-aged sportsmen everywhere."

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