



## **2020 USRowing AAC Election - Commitment Form Questionnaire Answers**

### **AAC Athlete Representative**

**Caryn Davies**

#### **1. Why are you interested in being an AAC Athlete Representative for USRowing?**

I've been around the Princeton Training Center a long time—almost 20 years! In that time, I competed as an athlete in three Summer Games and volunteered my time as Athlete Service Coordinator (a Team USA quasi-staff position) for the most recent Winter Games. So I understand intimately the struggles of the athletes. More to the point, I'm motivated to help make things better.

#### **2. What skills, experience, and/or perspective would you bring to the AAC and the USRowing Board of Directors positions?**

When I was first elected as athlete representative to the USRowing board in 2004, I thought I knew how to fix the problems. After six years on the USRowing board and another seven years on the board of the US Olympians and Paralympians Association, I now know that it's not that easy. We're using limited resources and facing structural barriers. But I also know we can't give up on trying to make things better for the athletes. And I'm better equipped now than I was then. Five years working as a corporate lawyer taught me to anticipate issues and minimize risks. More importantly, while volunteering at both the NGB and NOC levels, I forged relationships with both stakeholders and staff, which means I know whom to call for advice or assistance.

#### **3. How do you think the AAC and USRowing can better serve the athletes?**

Jamie Redman and Nick LaCava did a great job as AAC reps these last four years, so I hesitate to say I can do better. Regardless, I'm going to try. I've noticed that our organizations spend a lot of time and effort working to appease those who make the most noise even though the noise has little to do with the changes that will make the greatest difference for the greatest number of athletes. I plan to actively seek out athletes who might not otherwise speak up and advocate for them, thereby giving the silent majority a voice in the governance process.

#### **4. Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to add?**

Feedback is a gift—one the most valuable gifts anyone can give or receive. I hereby commit to both giving and receiving honest feedback in an effort to continually improve ourselves and our organizations.

**Jenifer Forbes**

**1. Why are you interested in being an AAC Athlete Representative for USRowing?**

I have been a member of USRowing since 2005, when I received my very first paper card in the mail as a sophomore in high school and a novice on my high school's rowing team.

Participation in sport, and the trust we build for not only our teammates, but also for those meant to serve, protect, inform, and make decisions for us is what makes amateur sport fun and sustainable. I've stayed with rowing because quite simply, I believe it is a worthwhile way to spend my time, and the people within the sport - for the most part- align with the moral code that I myself strive to meet. It is not my aim to place judgement on those who have made mistakes but rather try to understand all sides of the story and make necessary decisions after all sides have been evaluated. It would be foolish to say that the rowing community is void of bad eggs. I would like to figure out how to identify the bad eggs, determine whether or not there is a way to fix the problem without fear or intimidation, and then get working on ways to make the sport better by listening, learning, and implementing actual change.

I've attended Junior Development/Selection Camps, had the opportunity to race internationally at U23 Worlds and the Pan American Games, rowed and coached at Division I institutions, and have learned a tremendous amount about training, fairness, and diplomacy through my time with the Green Racing Project, as a few of my USSki + Biathlon Teammates are representatives for their respective sport.

My desire to help people and help make communities better is the core reason for my application. This rowing community has been with me for half of my life. And I am so grateful for the people that have made it so. I hope that by taking on more leadership roles, I can continue to act as an advocate for all athletes.

**2. What skills, experience, and/or perspective would you bring to the AAC and the USRowing Board of Directors positions?**

I feel strongly about creating an equitable space for all individuals to compete. I bring the desire to work on a board of progressive thinkers, and desire to communicate with domestic and international athletes. I believe that while there is a strength in sticking to the protocol, there is also strength in accepting failure, and being willing to start from scratch all over again.

Five months into my sculling career, I suffered a severe back injury that required surgical intervention. Not knowing exactly how, I maintained resolve that I would return to training. I knew it was going to take time, four years later, countless failures, and a few successes later (not to mention a lot of help along the way) I moved to Vermont in the summer of 2017 and joined the Green Racing Project to press the restart button on my elite sculling career. In my first year, I placed 9th at NSRI, 5th at NSRII, and while I was ultimately cut from 4x Selection Camp, I went on to win the Pre Pan American Games Regatta in Rio de Janeiro.

The following summer, after a suffering a cross training injury and recovering for five months, I won the National Championships in the W1x and placed 5th at the Pan American Games - a regatta that was not without incident for me personally, but also for Team USA and all of international athletes living in our village.

During the four years I spent recovering in Washington, DC, I continued to train, coach, learn, talk, and photograph rowing. I saw it from a different perspective because I had to, and when I finally got back into the boat, I had an idea in my mind of what I wanted it to look like. What I wanted it to feel like. Three years into my sculling career, now I am excited, humbled, and motivated by the challenges and opportunities that present themselves to me in my day to day training.

My ability to adapt is a key reason I'm still rowing. I ultimately realized that I needed to figure out how to return to training on my own- it has made me a better empathizer, leader, communicator, and teammate. In short, failure has been an incredible teacher.

This is the type of leadership I can bring to the AAC. Eagerness to make this space a better, more inclusive, and equitable organization by leading by example and working with the smart, talented, hardworking, passionate, and creative members of the USRowing board and the AAC. I want people to feel that their basic needs are being met, and once that is in place, when people feel safe they can focus on their training and making the boat go fast. I want people to feel that they can trust that the powers that make their decisions are doing so with their best interest at heart.

We want to compete, and we want to compete on an equitable platform. In many cases this can mean addressing areas of inequality in sport. Competing clean is just one example. Another is addressing SafeSport policies on teams (sexual harassment, bullying, racism, etc.). Identifying the means to actively uplift those that have been pushed aside, unknowingly or otherwise. Another way is by actively creating a safe and competitive space for athletes of color, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ individuals.

### **3. How do you think the AAC and USRowing can better serve the athletes?**

Provide more education and training for coaches and athletes. Remember the old school safety video we had to watch as novice rowers, the one we had to watch before we took a swim test in a sweatshirt? "The new normal" needs to address priorities of the organization. And if the organization prioritizes true inclusion for all, all athletes need to be reached by the message of inclusion. How can we build the athlete/person? I want to win, but not at all costs. And I think exploring what we as athletes and an organization are willing to sacrifice and what we are willing to adopt in the name of performance, could be a great exercise.

How can we reframe our priorities to make all individuals that are part of the sport feel included and welcomed regardless of race, class, identity, financial status, etc. How can we create a system that can focus on teaching athletes about the sport, while providing the necessary tools for coaches to address real problems on their teams?

I'll use the SafeSport training as an example. A few coaches I've spoken with feel as though the SafeSport model does not provide enough resources for coaches on the pre elite and elite level. I'd also like to have SafeSport be a required course for all athletes. Harassment, bullying, etc. are all still very real parts of life for many. With some modifications, the training would be an excellent addition to many elite/club/university/high school programs.

### **4. Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to add?**

I hope that if my nomination is accepted, and if I am voted to be a representative for the AAC, that athletes will trust my desire to maintain neutrality and to make fact based decisions. It is this

sort of leadership that I believe is fair, and necessary. I hope to continue to make each space I occupy better than how I found it, regardless of the decision.

Thank you for reading.

## **Sara Hendershot**

### **1. Why are you interested in being an AAC Athlete Representative for USRowing?**

During my time on the National Team, I trained from both inside and outside of the Training Center. Leading up to the 2012 Olympics I trained in Princeton with about 30 women as part of the Training Center, and leading up to the 2016 Games I trained with only a pair partner and a coach. In both of these scenarios I was faced with challenges, required resources that weren't available, and craved the support of an athlete advocate who would represent my needs in uncomfortable situations.

While training, there were periods where I had to work full-time in order to feed and house myself, and there were periods where I had the support of a small USOPC stipend check. At times, I had the benefit of team health insurance, and conversely, I experienced the removal of those health insurance benefits when I was injured and needed them most.

I want to take the perspective I've gained by experiencing multiple training environments and advocate for the needs of all National Team rowers to the USOPC. I would love to see our next generation of rowers receive stronger support and achieve greater results than I did. Regardless of where you are training or your current level of financial, structural, and emotional support from USRowing, there is a great opportunity for improvement.

### **2. What skills, experience, and/or perspective would you bring to the AAC and the USRowing Board of Directors positions?**

Since retiring from the National Team I've grown a career in sports marketing and branding. I've been fortunate enough to work with brands like TriggerPoint Therapy, WHOOP, Clif Bar, Nuun, Osmo Nutrition, and 2XU. Most recently, I've led a start-up sports nutrition brand called Momentous as their Director of Marketing to launch a line of NSF Certified for Sport supplements in which we've seen four years of consecutive growth and three rounds of fundraising. These experiences have allowed me to develop a broad perspective on health and fitness marketing, the skills to attract sponsors and partnerships, and the ability to leverage social media to grow a broad audience of consumers.

I've also stayed closely involved in the rowing world by serving as a performance consultant to the Harvard Women's Rowing team for the past four seasons, and by founding a digital training program called Rowfficient that targets both the rowing and Crossfit communities. These roles have exposed me to the perspectives and experiences of many — from junior, collegiate, and masters rowers, to Paralympic, LGBTQ and BIPOC athletes. Athletes of all backgrounds and experiences should have a place at USRowing. I want to work with the USOPC and USRowing to ensure that every athlete has an opportunity to thrive within our sport, and that the intrinsic biases preventing this possibility are stripped away.

### **3. How do you think the AAC and USRowing can better serve the athletes?**

While I see many opportunities for our community of athletes to be better represented, there are a few areas in particular I would want to focus my voice — 1) fair and impartial selection for all, 2) a structured National Team Exit program, and 3) stronger marketing support to improve athlete sponsorship opportunities.

I believe that our goal at USRowing should be to create the fastest possible boats while simultaneously creating strong, empowered individuals. There were many instances throughout my time on the National Team where I simply did not know or understand what the path to making a team looked like. The process, my options, and my athlete rights were not clearly explained to me, and I know that this is not an uncommon experience. No one should feel like a bystander in their own journey. I believe we can better involve athletes in their own process which will ultimately help us to produce faster boats and stronger results.

#### **4. Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to add?**

I retired from elite rowing four years ago, and it's taken me that long to feel whole again. That is a huge problem. While I'm sure we can all agree that it is an incredible honor to represent Team USA on the world stage, I'm not certain we could all say that we are better off when we finished competing than when we began. Your run on the National Team is a relatively short period of time, but it will impact you for the rest of your life, and that impact should be a positive one.

The quality of support delivered both during and after your National Team years has the potential to dramatically shape you. We should not be leaving our alumni to fend for themselves when it comes to career guidance, safe methods of detraining, mental health support, and social networking. The network and reach of the rowing community is far too strong to accept the current lack of structure in these areas, and I'm passionate about helping make a serious change.

### **AAC Alternate Athlete Representative**

#### **Robin Prendes**

##### **1. Why are you interested in being an AAC Athlete Representative for USRowing?**

Growing up, my immigrant family had no money to spend on sports for me to participate in, and rowing is very expensive. It was due to the support of the charitable rowing community that I was able to join the sport and to develop as an athlete. I owe a great debt to the rowing community. Rowing opened incredible opportunities for me in life. Rowing helped me get accepted into Princeton University. Rowing allowed me to travel the world. Through rowing I met my closest friends. These experiences are what make rowing great. The opportunity to give back to the rowing community and to contribute to meaningful change is what motivates me to represent rowers on the USOPC AAC and to serve as athlete representative to the USRowing Board of Directors.

##### **2. What skills, experience, and/or perspective would you bring to the AAC and the USRowing Board of Directors positions?**

**Perspective:** As a Hispanic, I represent a growing segment of the U.S. population that is underrepresented in rowing. I believe this perspective will be important in both the USRowing board and the USOPC AAC. I came from a low income household. I was able to develop as an

athlete and eventually represent the U.S. in two Olympic games thanks to the support of the rowing community. How to succeed in the sport coming from a low income family is another unique perspective that I bring. Finally, I was a part of the U.S. Junior, U23, and Senior national teams so I can provide a perspective of what it means to be a national team athlete at all levels of the sport.

**Experience:** I have been a member of the FISA Athlete Commission for the past three years. I have attended all international FISA and Athlete Commission meetings, as well as two international competitions each year. Throughout that time, I have always been a part of a working group. I helped draft and run the Athlete Lane Selection in Belgrade last year. I was the Athlete representative at the past two World Indoor Rowing Championships. I supported the WADA outreach initiative, developed athlete feedback surveys, and made improvement reports for the events that I attended. Finally, I helped develop the FISA's Safeguarding initiative to prevent harassment and abuse in our sport. I will use this experience and my current involvement in FISA to communicate international trends and issues. As an AAC athlete rep I will be able to get a first-hand perspective on issues that are affecting U.S. rowers today and I can leverage my position at FISA to better represent our athletes abroad.

**Skills:** I am fluent in Spanish.. I have 3 years' experience in project management, and financial analysis at a Fortune 100 company. I am currently pursuing an MBA at Stanford Business School and have taken non-profit accounting and non-profit governance courses.

### **3. How do you think the AAC and USRowing can better serve the athletes?**

Listening and engaging with athletes. There are so many issues that are finally being discussed today that the AAC and USRowing can support athletes with. Mental health, safeguarding from harassment and abuse, diversity and inclusion, and retirement support are some of the most important.

In addition to these issues, USRowing and the AAC can better support athletes dealing with change and disruption. FISA's plan to expand coastal and indoor rowing is a change that USRowing should help athletes adapt to. During the next Olympics, coastal rowing could represent up to 3 medals for countries that have supported athlete development in those disciplines. I know the United States can be one of those. Finally, COVID-19 is another disruptive change that is seriously affecting athletes in ways we don't yet know.

### **4. Is there anything else about yourself that you would like to add?**

My passion for giving back to the sport is what I believe helps me stand out the most. After retirement I continue to communicate with rowers to get a sense of what their needs are and to support them in any way I can. Transitioning after retirement has been a big part of that dialogue. I highly recommend programs like Tuck Next Step: Transition to Business Program at Dartmouth. I have lived and trained in most major rowing cities in the U.S. and understand how important local communities are for the support and development of successful athletes.

Additionally, I understand the importance of athlete sponsorship and financial support. I will do everything that I can to help facilitate sponsorship for athletes. I have been working on this initiative with the FISA athlete committee by adding more athlete stories and creating athlete spotlights/interviews during regatta broadcasts. I hope to do the same with U.S. athletes as a member of the AAC and as the athlete representative to the USRowing board of directors.