

## **ARGONAUT PROTEGES- 1960-1971**

Angus “Jack” Russell had a problem. As president and head coach of the Argonaut Rowing Club, he was charged with producing competitive crews, and Argo oarsmen had been trailing in their rivals’ wake throughout the 1950s. In senior heavyweight rowing, the only category that really counted in those days, the Argonaut Rowing Club had won only two Canadian Henley titles since 1945. By 1960 Russell, himself a 1952 Olympian, was aiming to bring the double-blue back to their prewar prominence. Enter the University of Toronto. Or rather not. Through the 1960s, which saw the return of Varsity Blues rowing after a twenty-year absence, the University itself played only a secondary role in developing a rowing program for its students. Instead, the UTRC was an enterprise almost entirely initiated, directed and sustained by the Argonaut Rowing Club. As the Argos went, so too did the Varsity Blues rowers.

In the post-war years, student registration had doubled from some 7100 in 1940 to 15 000 in 1950.<sup>1</sup> The University of Toronto, supported by a vigorous interfaculty league and by the many returning veterans, teemed with athletic life once more.<sup>2</sup> There were no less than 14 intercollegiate men’s and 3 women’s teams, including everything from football to fencing. But despite the influx of servicemen and the University’s commitment to an extensive athletic program, there was no rowing. Though I have found no evidence, it is plausible that U of T student-veterans were keen to row, just as they had been in 1919. However, after 1945 no faculty member stepped forward to take charge of the UTRC as

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<sup>1</sup> University of Toronto. *President’s Report for the year ending 30<sup>th</sup> June 1940*, p. 146. University of Toronto. *President’s Report for the year ending June 1950*, p. 175. This figure does not include the 4500 ex-servicemen who registered.

<sup>2</sup> *Torontonensis* 1946, (SAC: Toronto), vol. XLVIII.

Tommy Loudon had done. This was not uncommon. According to Peter King a dearth of leadership was endemic to Canadian rowing in the immediate post-war years:

After the War, the structure of clubs was strained because oarsmen who, by virtue of their age should have been coaching or officia[ting] were continuing to compete. As a result, there was a "bulge" of athletes and a "vacuum" among coaches. In the 1950s the WWII oarsmen and the next generation both graduated so that now there was an even greater vacuum.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, a disastrous fire at the Argonauts hindered the re-start of Toronto rowing in the spring of 1947. The facility had been gutted and 54 shells plus all the trophies except the Grey Cup, won the previous year, had been destroyed.<sup>4</sup> Taken together, a lack of direction combined with the crushing loss of equipment were insurmountable obstacles to rebuilding the UTRC in the decade after the war.

Throughout the 1950s, the Argonaut Rowing Club relied on its network of five Toronto high school programs to generate membership. By the time Jack Russell assumed the leadership of the club however, he had concluded that this system did not attract enough heavyweights to make the Argonauts competitive at Olympic trials. The founding of the University of Western Ontario Rowing Club in 1959 by a professor named Phil Fitz-James proved to be the catalyst for change. In 1960, Russell approached an engineering friend in the Alumni Association and through his contacts recruited students, mainly engineers, in order to challenge Western. After six weeks of practice, this inexperienced crew was introduced to competitive rowing at Lake Fanshawe, north of London. Racing in an early November hailstorm, the Blues finished second in a race against two Western boats. It was a start. Throughout the 1960s, the UTRC developed gradually, fuelled by a

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<sup>3</sup> Peter King to author, 19 April 1999, author's collection.

<sup>4</sup> Jack Russell to author, 18 March 1998, author's collection.

growing network of intercollegiate competitions. It was the old-boys down at the lake, not the athletic administrators at Hart House, who ensured that Varsity men could row.

University of Toronto oarsmen had been drawn by visions of competitive glory in the past. Recall that in 1897, President James Loudon and coach Ned Hanlan had loudly proclaimed their desire to send a crew to the Henley Royal Regatta to test the Empire's mettle. In 1920, with the UTRC barely restarted, there had been talk of participating in the trials for the Antwerp Olympiad. As we have seen, the campaign for the Paris games in 1924 had played a decisive role in the promotion of U of T rowing between the wars. Likewise, the 1960s version of the UTRC was spurred by Olympic aspirations. The international appeal of competition attracted students. Ray Seto, a physical education major, joined the rowing program in 1962 after seeing a poster looking for men eager to try out for a ticket to the Tokyo Olympics.<sup>5</sup> He was not the only one. U of T and indeed Ontario University rowing grew apace in the first half of the decade. In the 1960s, Canadian Club and University connections had a notable precedent to follow. Since 1954, Frank Read of the Vancouver Rowing Club had been recruiting University of British Columbia students, working them extremely hard, and making them the best rowers in the world. Up to 1960, these successes included one gold and two silver medals at the Olympics, one British Empire Games championship, and the much-storied defeat of a Soviet crew at the Henley Royal Regatta in 1955.

In spring 1962 the Eastern Canadian Intercollegiate Rowing Association (ECIRA), consisting of the Universities of Toronto, Western Ontario and McMaster, was formed.

Following the UBC-Vancouver RC model, the local community clubs, Argonauts, London and Leander respectively, provided the early leadership and equipment in exchange for the athletes that would improve their chances at the next Olympic trials. Through the ECIRA, the scope of competition broadened. The racing categories grew to include not only a senior eight, but a junior, freshman and by 1964 a lightweight eight as well. In this short period, Waterloo Lutheran, Ryerson and Brock and even Wayne State University from Detroit joined the founding members in competitions at lake Fanshawe, at the Argonaut Rowing Club and in Hamilton Harbour.

Training was a year-round endeavour using both Argonaut and University facilities. By the end of the first season, a rigorous winter-training schedule was outlined in a student newspaper, explaining: "This type of program is necessary if we are to reach our objective of the 1964 Olympic Games. This requires a great deal of effort and enthusiasm and if you are not prepared to work hard and make some sacrifices, please do not bother to apply."<sup>6</sup> When not on the lake or on the rowing machines, the rowers alternated between endless weight circuits and running at Hart House. Ingo Schulte-Hostedde recalled that he and his crewmates vastly improved their fitness by trying to keep up to Bruce Kidd and Bill Crothers as they pounded around the Hart House track.<sup>7</sup> As they became stronger and technically more adept, the Varsity rowers started to take their share of the spoils. In 1963, led by medical student Roger Jackson the senior eight capped an undefeated season by winning the ECIRA championship. The following summer, six

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<sup>5</sup> Ray Seto, interview by author, Mississauga, ON., 23 March 1999.

<sup>6</sup> *Toike Oike*, 17 November 1960.

<sup>7</sup> Ingo Schulte-Hostedde, interview by author, Burlington, ON., 13 March 1999. Kidd was the 1962 Commonwealth Games champion over 3 miles. Crothers was the 1964 Olympic silver medalist at 800m.

members of that crew competed for the Argonauts in the Olympic eights trial. While they finished third to a Vancouver boat, Jack Russell proudly recalled; “the program I had envisioned had borne fruit.”<sup>8</sup> After this initial growth period, there were a few changes in the late 1960s. York University became the seventh member of the ECIRA, the regatta calendar was expanded to include a competition at St. Catharines and, in 1967, rowing was added to the Ontario-Quebec Athletic Association (OQAA). Ironically, the UTRC, formed initially to serve as a source of heavyweight rowers for the Argonauts, proved to be a lightweights powerhouse instead. Largely on the strength of its lightweight crews between 1968 and 1970, Toronto won two ECIRA titles and one OQAA title.<sup>9</sup>

Very little of this had anything to do with University support, which had disappeared since the Loudon era. Back then, rowing had resonated in English Canada. It was a symbol of national confidence as well as of a continued connection to the Empire. Local scullers Joe Wright Jr., Jack Guest Sr. and Bobby Pearce had captured the public imagination by winning the Diamond Sculls at the Henley Royal Regatta.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, at a time of emerging and disputed professionalization in other sports, the efforts of the rowers symbolized the amateur ideal. Their early morning efforts on the lake were considered worthy of a disproportionate share of the University’s resources allotted to athletics. In the 1920s and 30s, when the ticket sales from Varsity football games

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<sup>8</sup> Jack Russell to author, 18 March, 1998, author’s collection. Roger Jackson was not part of the Argonaut crew. Having moved to the Vancouver Rowing Club he had not made the selected eight, but went to Tokyo as an alternate. Along with George Hungerford he became Olympic champion in the pair. Richard Symyk, another member of the U of T program, was an Olympian in 1968 and 1972.

<sup>9</sup> The ECIRA championship was decided by a points system in the final regatta of the season, until the OQAA assumed this method for itself in 1967. From then until its dissolution the ECIRA continued to award its title based on points accumulated over the entire fall rowing season.

<sup>10</sup> Pearce, an Australian, moved to Hamilton after winning the 1928 Olympic single-scull title. He won again in 1932. Wright and Guest teamed up to win the silver medal in the double at the 1928 Games.

generated as much as two-thirds of the Athletic Association's revenues<sup>11</sup>, the rowing budget was, after football and hockey, the largest among all teams.<sup>12</sup> This is particularly notable since neither the rowing competitions nor the rowing facility generated income for the University.<sup>13</sup> One can only conclude that between the wars money spent subsidizing these amateur athletes was considered money well spent.

By the 1960s, much was changing. The University saw major physical expansion along the west side of St. George St., and the creation of campuses at Erindale (Mississauga) and Scarborough. This accommodated dramatically increasing enrolment throughout the decade- from 20 000 in 1961 to over 30 000 in 1970.<sup>14</sup> The baby-boomers had reached University age, and this began to affect the UTAA's income structure. In 1937, a compulsory student fee for athletics had been instituted. In exchange, students received access to the Hart House athletic wing, admission to football and hockey games, and to the skating rink, and other privileges.<sup>15</sup> Into the 1950s it was not the most significant source of UTAA revenues. In 1954-55, for example, receipts from stadium rentals (35%) and football games (32%) were more important than the student levy (12%).<sup>16</sup> By the 1960s though, there had been a major reversal. The student fee now accounted for more than half of the UTAA's revenues, and intercollegiate games, stadium and arena rental together only accounted for 40 percent of the total.<sup>17</sup> However the UTAA's budgetary

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<sup>11</sup> UTA A79-0019/02. UTAA Minute book 1920-25. UTAA estimates 1924-25.

<sup>12</sup> It peaked at \$2500 in 1930, which I estimate is the equivalent of \$40 000 in 1999.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.* UTAA estimates 1929-30. By way of comparison, the football and hockey games and Varsity stadium and arena made the University a net profit of \$37 300 in 1929-30.

<sup>14</sup> University of Toronto. *President's Report for the year ending June 1961*, p. 235. University of Toronto. *President's Report for the year ending June 1970*, 59.

<sup>15</sup> T.A. Reed, *The Blue and White*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1944), 58-59.

<sup>16</sup> Figures from UTA A79-0019/04 UTAA Minutes, 1954-55 estimates.

<sup>17</sup> Figures from UTA A79-0019/05 UTAA Minutes, 1964-65 estimates.

priorities remained extremely stable from the 1930s to the mid-1970s. Intercollegiate sport consistently took one third of the UTAA budget. Football and hockey together took the lion's share of the funding for intercollegiate sport: 64% in 1929-30, 62% in 1960-61, and 58% in 1974-75.<sup>18</sup> What this meant, in effect, was that although student fees were becoming an increasingly significant source of revenue, this was not being reflected in spending priorities. High-performance athletics predominated over broad-based recreation, and big-name sports got a bigger share than the no-names. It would take another funding crisis and two task force reports in the mid-1990s for University administrators to finally respond to these inequities.

In the meantime, it took most of the 1960s for the rowers to gain even symbolic recognition in the form of the First Colour, the chief athletic distinction at the University of Toronto. In the wake of their ECIRA victory in the fall of 1963, the senior eight were awarded their "T" by special recommendation. Only in 1967 was the UTAA's constitution changed to allow senior heavyweight and lightweight rowers to receive their First Colour automatically, but under strict conditions: the rowers had to win against at least two crews in the championship race.<sup>19</sup> Terje "Terry" Skrien, who won three First Colours, recalled somewhat ruefully that the football players only needed to be team members to gain the same award.<sup>20</sup> In its distribution of recognition, the message was quite clear: football, hockey and basketball players were important. Everyone else was second-class.

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<sup>18</sup> Figures from UTA A79-0019/02 UTAA Minutes, 1929-30 estimates, A79-0019/05 UTAA Minutes, 1960-61 estimates, and A79-0019/06 UTAA Minutes, 1974-75 estimates.

<sup>19</sup> UTA A79-0019/16. UTAA Minutes, February 1, 1967.

Access to funding came just as grudgingly. The rowers found it tough breaking into a long-established athletics budget, especially without an influential insider like Tommy Loudon to represent their interests. In 1957, Argonaut coach Jack Russell approached University of Toronto Athletic Director Warren Stevens about supporting an intramural program, but had received no encouragement.<sup>21</sup> In 1961, the UTAA officially recognized the UTRC “on the understanding that no financial assistance can be extended.”<sup>22</sup> Early in 1963, the UTAA paid the \$25 ECIRA entry fee. By 1964, Director Stevens suggested that \$200 be allocated to the rowers to cover their clothing and affiliation fees. In 1965, the UTRC requested a \$500 budget, but the minutes indicate that the UTAA felt that \$225 plus the interest from a \$1000 bequest by a 1930s alumnus was all that could be extended. In 1967, Stevens received a letter from the Argonauts requesting help in financing the rowing team, but reminded them of a past agreement that “no financial demands would be made upon the Athletic Association.”<sup>23</sup> Financial estimates indicate that in the wake of the OQAA championship win of 1970, rowing expenditures for the period peaked in 1971-72 at \$1469.00, \$1000 less than in 1930.<sup>24</sup>

A potentially powerful source of funding, the alumni, was directed towards another worthy cause. In 1962, fifty or more former oarsmen raised \$1239 to fund an annual

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<sup>20</sup> Terje Skrien, interview by author, Oakville ON., 27 March, 1999. Since 1974, rowers have gained their First Colour by competing at the OUAA/OWIAA/OUA championship.

<sup>21</sup> Jack Russell to author, 18 March, 1998.

<sup>22</sup> UTA A79-0019/05. UTAA Minutes, 12 December 1961.

<sup>23</sup> UTA A79-0019/06. UTAA Minutes, 14 February 1967.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 22 February 1972.

award in honour of their old coach, Tommy Loudon, who was its first recipient.<sup>25</sup> A clause in the fund agreement for the T.R. Loudon Award noted that from time to time “preference be given to rowing activities if the Athletic Directorate...decides...that such activities can advantageously be carried out as part of the athletic program of the University.”<sup>26</sup> Perhaps this can account for the increase in funding levels in the late 60s, although I have found no connection. Given the awards and financial evidence, it is clear that between 1960 and 1971 the administration was reluctant to take the lead and gave as little as possible to the rowers until “feats of oars” forced an increase in financial support and symbolic recognition. None of the Varsity rowers or coaches I have queried about the period felt that the University had been a significant contributor or that they had had good contact with the Athletic Directorate.<sup>27</sup>

Given the lack of University support, how much of the burden was assumed by students? Paul Raney, team captain in the late 1960s, recalled that his jobs included getting entries in on time, hiring the buses for regattas, and recruiting new athletes by producing posters and articles for *The Varsity*.<sup>28</sup> In this respect, the rowers in the 1960s held the same basic responsibilities as any other UTRC team leader in the club’s history. However, there was a marked difference in the pressure to raise funds. Between the wars, the UTRC charged

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<sup>25</sup> UTA A82-0036/020 Office of the Vice-President Business Affairs. Administrative Officer of Trusts. Thomas R. Loudon Fund.

<sup>26</sup> UTA A79-0019/05. UTAA Minutes, 13 March 1962. The Thomas R. Loudon Award, „Presented annually to the person associated with the University of Toronto, for Outstanding Services in the Advancement of Athletics“, has become one of the most prestigious in U of T athletics. Apart from Loudon himself, it has been awarded to two rowers; coach John Houlding in 1994 and treasurer Stewart Melanson in 1998.

<sup>27</sup> The one notable exception was the longtime secretary, Phyllis Lea. Many of the student-oarsmen from the 1960s and 70s whom I have interviewed praised her for her support of the team. In recognition of her unfailing assistance to the rowers, the UTRC christened a new boat the *Miss Lea* in 1976.

<sup>28</sup> Paul Raney, personal communication, undated 1998.

no membership fee, but the rowers staged plenty of fundraising events to supplement the budget provided by the University. Half a century later, the rowers paid a token \$5 membership fee to the Argonaut Rowing Club, and were not otherwise compelled to raise money for the UTRC. In fact, none of the four student-captains from the 1960s indicated that fundraising was among their concerns. The reason, of course, was that the Argonauts covered nearly all the costs associated with the sport.

The Argos had a powerful new source of income. In the mid 1950s the Argonaut Rowing Club had sold its stake in the Argonaut Football Club for \$500 000. Half that amount went into upgrading the second floor of the club and the other half went into a trust fund. As a result, the Argonauts got all the boats they wanted, there was a waiting list for membership and the club's mortgage was "down to peanuts" according to Russell. The other source of funds was membership revenue, coming mostly from former Argonaut old-boys who paid between \$100 and \$150 per year. According to George McCauley, longtime secretary of the ARC, these social members outnumbered competitive members by up to 10 to 1.<sup>29</sup> This scheme, whereby a large number of non-rowing "active supporters" pay larger fees to aid active rowers, was common practice in Canadian rowing at the time.<sup>30</sup> According to Russell, "There was no objection from those people paying the bigger bucks. They had, in Toronto anyway, a fairly prestigious club with an old name to it and very nice social amenities. They could bring their business contacts

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<sup>29</sup> George McCauley, personal communication, 10 April, 1999. The number of active rowers fluctuated between 50 to 100, so by McCauley's estimate there could have been up to 1000 members. Jack Russell believes there would have been 300-400 members and this is probably closer to the mark. However, the point remains that there were far more social than competitive members and that the former paid far higher fees.

down.”<sup>31</sup> The club catered to this demand with the newly constructed second floor which included a lavish Ballroom, the Henley room, bedecked in rowing memorabilia, and a kitchen complete with chef. A 1962 pamphlet entitled “The Argonaut Almanac: an oarsman’s handbook”, zestily proclaimed; “There is nothing like a good workout, a hot steam bath, and a big 16oz. Sirloin Steak to make you feel good again!!! We got ‘em!!!” and listed weekly activities including steam room regulars, dance lessons, bridge club, billiards/squash, club 1872, dance night and family day.<sup>32</sup> The clincher in this social package, undoubtedly, was the liquor license. Originally founded on the premise that the demon drink had no place at a rowing club, the ARC in the 1960s was one of Toronto the Good’s few licensed establishments. Although social amenities were of great importance, the connection to sport was another significant draw. Of the old-boy members, Russell told me that “some of their fondest memories and associations that they had were at that rowing club and here they were able to relive it.... I felt they were getting their money’s worth that way.”<sup>33</sup> These former oarsmen would travel with the athletes to their competitions to cheer from the shore, knowing that their money helped pay for the top quality shells in which the younger men raced. In sum, membership at the Argonaut Rowing Club held two attractions for these middle-aged businessmen. It provided a setting for the display of social prestige, and it served as a means of maintaining connection with the glories of youth.

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<sup>30</sup> Jack Russell, interview by author, tape recording, Toronto, ON., 3 May 1999, author’s collection. He cited St. Catharines and Hamilton Leander as other contemporary examples of clubs using the old-boys model.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> Argonaut archives.

<sup>33</sup> Jack Russell, interview by author, tape recording, Toronto, ON., 3 May 1999, author’s collection.

The trouble began when these older former oarsmen began to disappear in the latter part of the 1960s. In an effort to replace them, the Argonaut management began to turn away from rowing towards another form of leisure as means of attracting new social members-squash. This game was rising in popularity, and indeed the ARC already had one court that was regularly used by many. But when club President Charlie Wilson proposed to add a second court this alarmed many rowers including Jack Russell, who had become the financial officer. Russell objected, stating that the club would be entering a market in which it could not compete while shouldering a heavy debt load. Despite this opposition, the Argonaut board went ahead with the addition, and Russell resigned. As he explains it, “they had a strong squash membership for a few years, but they had a big debt to carry with the mortgage, and the money just wasn’t coming in until they started borrowing from the trust fund to pay for expenses and then they simply depleted that.”<sup>34</sup> The board began to sympathize less with the rowers, whose activities had been the focus of resource distribution, and this increased tensions at the club. As one Argonaut pamphlet, clearly aimed at the great unwashed down at the dock, indicates:

Members may appear in the club at any hour in casual attire. This does not mean old t-shirts, tattered shorts and running shoes, but does instead mean that the members may dispose with the wearing of jackets and ties.<sup>35</sup>

One rower described it as an “upstairs, downstairs” organization with two radically different ideas of the club’s mission; social versus competitive.<sup>36</sup> Feeling less and less welcome by the 1972 Centennial year, “most of the active oarsmen from the previous

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<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Pamphlet, dated May 29, 1972. Argonaut archives.

<sup>36</sup> Ingo Schulte-Hostedde, interview by author, Burlington, ON., 13 March 1999.

decade had retired or, more accurately, had quit.”<sup>37</sup> Reflecting this exodus, the UTRC struggled to assemble a team in 1971, and utterly failed the following two years.

Rowing is expensive. Between 1920 and 1940, the student-athletes of the University of Toronto were sheltered from its costs by a benevolent administration which favoured the pursuit of this amateur endeavour over many others. In the 1960s, as we have seen, the University of Toronto was no longer committed to supporting the rowing team. Fortunately, the Argonaut Rowing Club needed competitive oarsmen and intervened, creating the UTRC as a new source of membership. Once more, U of T rowers were spared the cost of their sport. However, the flaw in the Argonaut arrangement was that by the 1970s the old-boys began to be replaced by members for whom rowing was of secondary importance to squash and social life. This was reflected in the direction of the ARC and it poisoned the atmosphere for the remaining rowers. Completely dependent on the leadership of the Argonaut oarsmen, the UTRC’s fortunes flagged when the rowers lost control of their club and departed. There was no rowing at the University of Toronto in 1972 or 1973.

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<sup>37</sup> Xavier Macia, „The Argonaut Rowing Club; A History on its 125<sup>th</sup> Anniversary“, unpublished paper, p. 5.