

## From Rugby to Rowing: In Quest of Perfection



THOMAS A. BESS COURTESY TECHNIQUE

Elizabeth Bradley, '83, who's now a graduate student in Course VI, talks about going to the Olympic Games the way some people talk about graduate fellowships; she is not counting on it, but it would be nice.

Bradley always wanted to play football. Instead, she came to M.I.T. and chose rugby, becoming team captain by her sophomore year and a member of the Boston Women's Rugby Club shortly thereafter.

Bradley had to quit last year when her doctor told her that she had suffered too many concussions. Bumper stickers that read "Give blood: Play rugby" are not kidding.

The Rugby Club's loss was the crew team's gain. Bradley decided to return to rowing, a sport she had tried briefly in her freshman year. The coach of the novice squad sent her to then-varsity coach Douglas Clark, since she had already learned the basics, until the rest of the novice team could catch up. Clark never gave her back.

A friend of Bradley's accused the coach of brainwashing her. Perhaps he did. "As the [racing] season approaches," Bradley says, "you get totally drawn into it, physically and emotionally. People start calling you a fanatic. The day of a race, you don't want to deal with non-crew. They don't understand. My parents came to see me the day of a race, and I practically threw them out.

"You've run 30 miles a week, lifted weights, spent months getting perfect. The two days before a race you spend

peaking. . . . When you go out to the starting line you're terrified. The coach says you look like you want to throw up. The first stroke you're so nervous you forget to breathe."

The training, nerves notwithstanding, paid off. In 1982 the women's teams were fast and powerful enough to win bronze medals at the Bay State Games and the National Collegiate Women's Rowing Championships, and a silver at the National Sports Festival. They were also fast enough to run down a couple of ducks on the Charles River—justice, it is claimed, for what the ducks do to the docks.

Ducks are not the only obstacles the team has to overcome. Crew shells made in the early 1970s were designed for use by women weighing between 130 and 140 pounds.

The equipment has not kept up with the women using it. The coach had to rig splash-guards at the nationals to prevent the heavyweight shell, riding low in the water with four women weighing about 165 pounds each, from filling with water. One member of the varsity, in the Department of Ocean Engineering, spent the summer designing a better shell.

Winning has had an added meaning for Bradley. Jack Kelley, an official at the National Sports Festival, while hanging a medal around her neck, offered a special congratulation to the granddaughter of John Carlin—a former member of the U.S. Olympic Rowing Committee.—*Amy S. Gorin, '84, from The Tech (Reprinted by permission; © 1983. The Tech).*