

DELAWARE AT PLAY | ADULT LEAGUES/SPORTS



The News Journal/WILLIAM BRETZGER

John Williams, an assistant coach with the University of Delaware men's crew club team, rows on the Christina River. He recently won the club singles event at the prestigious Head of the Charles Regatta in Boston.

# The oars of justice

Wilmington man passes state bar before winning prestigious rowing competition

By **BRIAN SMITH**  
Special to The News Journal

John Williams became a lawyer and a rowing champion over one weekend in October.

While in Boston Oct. 17-18 to compete in the 39th Head of the Charles Regatta, one of the most prestigious events in rowing, the 27-year-old Wilmington resident learned he had passed the Delaware bar exam.

He then went out and won the club singles race, one of the regatta's major events, beating 56 other rowers with his time of 19 minutes, 39.696 seconds.

It is somewhat fitting that the two events happened almost simultaneously, since Williams often found himself preparing for the race and the exam at the same time. It's the type of juggling act Williams performs regularly.

In addition to his day job as an attorney with his family's law firm, the Williams Law Firm of Wilmington, Williams volunteers as head novice coach for the University of Delaware's men's crew club team.

"You can't just say you want to win the Head of the Charles. It takes a lot of work," said Andy Seifried, a UD senior who is vice president of the club. "Some people listen to music while they're working out. [Williams] was listening to law CDs."

Williams began rowing when he was 14 for what is now known as the Wilmington Youth Rowing Association. His coach that first year was Chuck Crawford, who had just started a men's crew program at UD.

Williams went on to row at Williams College in Williamstown, Mass., and was

## ABOUT THE REGATTA

The Head Of The Charles Regatta, the world's largest two-day rowing event, was first held on October 16, 1965. Harvard University sculling instructor Ernest Arlett proposed to the Cambridge Boat Club that a "head of the river" race similar in tradition to races held in his native England, be held on the Charles River. In "Head" races, long-boats race against each other and the clock on a three-mile course, starting sequentially approximately fifteen seconds apart.

## ON THE WEB

**Head of the Charles Regatta:**  
<http://www.hocr.org>

**University of Delaware men's crew:**  
<http://www.delawarecrew.com>

part of a men's eights team that set a course record of 14:57 at the Head of the Charles. The record still stands.

Williams then attended law school at Emory University in Atlanta, where he took his first coaching position. He returned to Delaware after completing law school, which happened to be around the same time Crawford was finishing a three-year break from Delaware's program.

"I came back here and I missed coaching, and I liked coaching college crews," Williams said. "He [Crawford] was there, so it fit in."

Students entering the UD program are novices for their first year. Williams teaches them the basics of rowing.

"He's a tremendous asset to the organization in everything he does," Crawford said. "He's a very good coach, very well organized



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John Williams has finished first at the Head of the Charles Regatta in Boston twice.

and a fine example for these young men. We're very pleased to have him with the program."

One dilemma that rowing coaches often face is keeping newcomers interested in the sport, which involves much more time spent practicing than competing. Williams isn't afraid to try some unusual training techniques to break the monotony.

"It's always been entertaining to see the guys that row under John," Seifried said. "He's always finding ways to make their training more interesting. He might have them do something like taeko or get on another rower's back and have the guy run up a couple flights of stairs."

Another obstacle is the program's club status. While women's crew is a varsity sport at

UD, men's crew is not. As the program's main recruiter, that means Williams must try to lure rowers to Newark without incentives such as scholarships.

"From that avenue, it has been very challenging," Crawford said. "But our program has been very successful over the past couple years. As a result, the kids are very aware of that, and a lot of kids want to be a part of it."

As a club program, the entire coaching staff volunteers its time. To Williams, coaching is about more than money.

"Most of the guys I coach never rowed before, so it's teaching them a skill they'll have the rest of their life," Williams said. "Just seeing the team come together and seeing the guys become athletes is pretty exciting."