

## COACHES' ROUNDTABLE

# Henry Fox, Booth Kyle and David Swift

The *Bulletin* invited former Brooks crew coaches and current Director of Rowing Tote Smith to a roundtable discussion via Zoom. Here, Henry Fox, Booth Kyle '89 and David Swift reflect on their tenures at Brooks and the unique commitment that the school's rowers have to the sport.

**How did the crew program evolve under your tenure? What's its strongest feature?**

**Henry Fox:** I had coached in college prior to coming to Brooks. There were a few kids from Brooks who I coached in college who had been coached by David Swift, and they were outstanding rowers when they arrived on the campus. And then when Liz O'Leary approached me and asked me if I would have any interest in coaching at Brooks, my immediate answer was yes, mostly as a result of my experience with the rowers that I had coached who had graduated from the school.

**Booth Kyle:** When I was the coach at Brooks, I was a recent graduate from college. So it's hard for me to separate the entirety of my Brooks rowing experience into coaching and when I was an athlete and when I watched my brother and sister participate too. But I'd say that when I coached, that really the legacies of David and Henry were still there. I remember feeling, especially when I was an oarsman at Brooks, that you just felt you were part of a legacy. I remember going up after practice and doing sit-ups in the upstairs room of the old boathouse and the pictures of all the championship crews and the oars with those names on the oars, hanging in the rafters. That was very palpable and just made you feel like you're a part of history. Brooks was an unusual place, an unusual

rowing situation, because it was a "niche" sport that was totally mainstream on campus. I've been around a lot of programs, and never has it been that feeling, that it was just something that everyone did.

**David Swift:** I came to Brooks on the 1st of February during a blizzard, having just gotten out of the Navy. I was 25, newly married, my wife was expecting. And we got out of our Volkswagen bug and moved into the farmhouse after FDA had walked us over there. And then a couple hours later, Kim Smith, head crew coach and math department chair, paid a visit to welcome us and, with a huge smile, said "David, here are the books we're using. Here are the classes that you're going to teach tomorrow. I'll see you down at the boathouse in late March." That was my introduction and orientation all wrapped into one; took five minutes. I had never taught before. I'd never coached before, so what did I know? I was learning on the fly for many years. Back in the early 1970s Ox Kingsbury's name was still everywhere. We didn't see him often, maybe once in the spring, but everybody knew what he had done, the one who put crew on the map in New England. After Ox, Kim Smith, I believe, was the next coach. And he was followed by Doug Peterson, who was the head coach when I was there. So I spent, I think, '71 to '74 coaching third and fourth. This very esoteric, but amazingly magnetic gentleman named William

Dunnell coached fifth and sixth. Doug left to become a head of school down in Texas, so I was next up, and that was, I believe, '75.

**Why does the history of this program matter? What is the effect of memorializing the program in the way that previous Brooksians have?**

**Booth Kyle:** This is my rowing story: I was an active athlete. I played soccer, basketball and baseball before I arrived at Brooks. John Morris was my advisor, he's a history teacher. And all year he told me, "You know what? You really got to think about rowing." I just sat down in that tank that day and was not good at it and Mr. Dunnell wasn't the easiest guy to figure out, but I was like, "What is this?" And there were cobwebs all over the place and the water was dirty and it was a really nasty experience. But I was hooked. I was like, "Give me a part of this." I think there's something about the setting. Adolescents are always looking to be part of something. I think it was just obvious that you'd look around and you're like "Wow, this is something." And if it's new to you, it's hard to piece together, but you realize it's something. This is real legacy history stuff. As a kid, why wouldn't you want to be part of this?

**Tote Smith:** I have so many stories of bringing families who are considering independent school

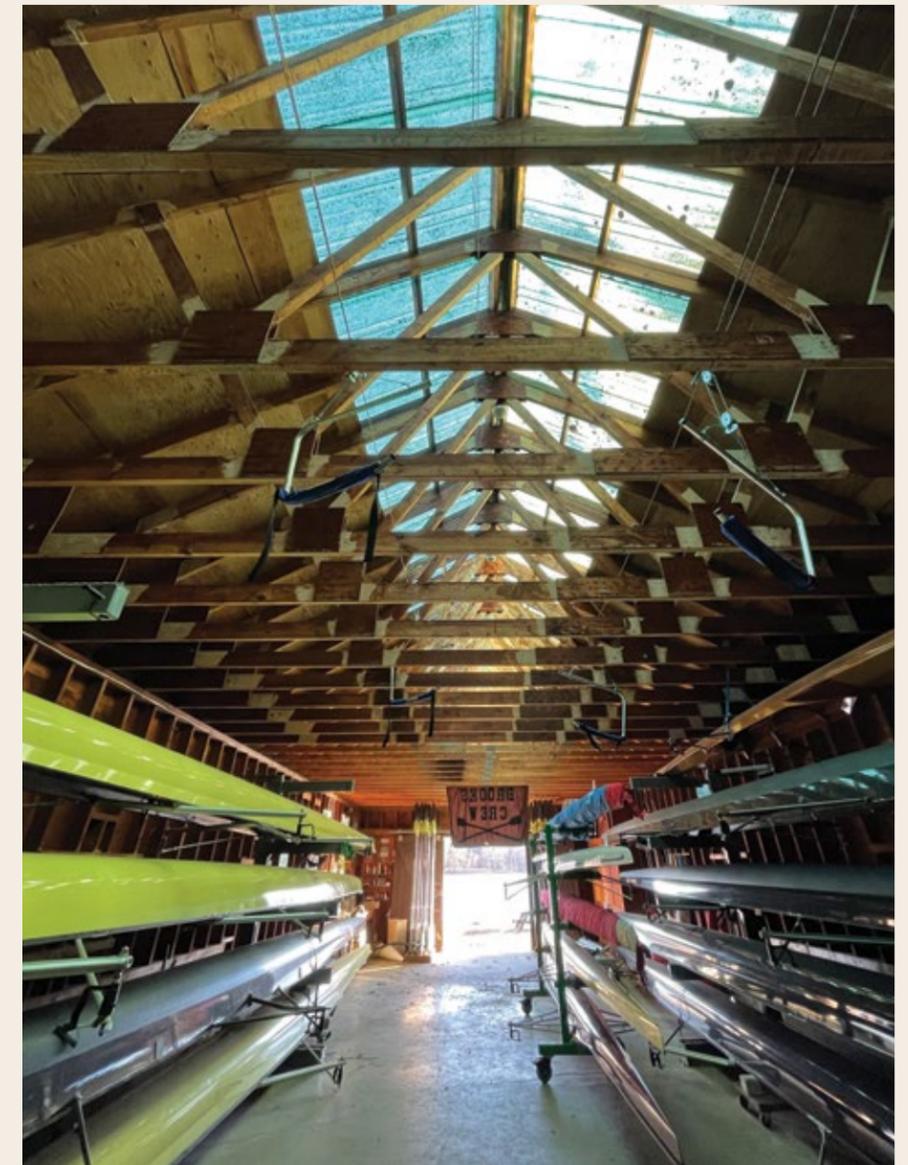
down to the boathouses in the fall. I always take them upstairs, and as soon as you crack the door into the upstairs of Lyman, you are immediately overcome by what we always talk about, which is that we stand on the shoulders of those who come before us. You walk in and you see the 38 or 40 oars that are hanging in the rafters. And you see a hundred years of photographs of athletes around the walls. Athletes who are thinking about pursuing excellence in this sport know that is something that they can do here at Brooks, because it's been done here for a hundred years. And so for the students who are part of the crew, they know that they're attached to something that is so much bigger than they are.

**Is there a specific artifact that you think of as most embodying Brooks crew?**

**Henry Fox:** I can remember the first time I went to the boathouse. Standing there in front of those two buildings and looking at the lake, it was almost a religious experience. It's a magic place, that setting, finding flat water on rough spring afternoons.

**Booth Kyle:** There's another photo of a crew I was in at the finish line, with me in the bow, holding on for dear life — but I love that finish line photo — all the people on the shore, the boathouses in the background. A special place. Also, as a wedding present for my wife and me, Henry made a beautiful table and a picture frame. And in the picture frame, we have a commissioned painting of a Brooks crew on the water at the finish line. It's just a really important artifact that we have in our home.

**David Swift:** I want to chime in on one other aspect that's been kicking around here, and it's the idea of legacy. And my name has



↑ The interior of the varsity boathouse at Brooks.

been connected with that, and I'd like to correct the record. Rowing was already, at that time, the thing to do. It was the number one sport on campus. And I was so young, I just wanted to make sure I didn't screw things up. And thanks to Mr. Dunnell — he made sure I didn't.

**Booth Kyle:** That's great. That is the legacy of Brooks crew right there. Mr. Dunnell was the soul of the program for so long. And Libby DeLana and [former faculty] Marshall Moore were really key cogs in the machine in my era. I remember this more about the student athletes that rowed in my crews when I was a coach. Those kids

were great kids, and they all rowed hard. There's something about the spirit of the program there that brings it out of the kids, I think. I'll give my mentor, who's on this call, some credit for instilling that in me. Henry was so good at imparting that upon us as athletes. And that kind of commitment in that effort, that's something that Brooks crew embodies, for sure. And I do think it's unique compared to other places that I've coached.