



Back on terra firma: Jagdagdorj at the Harvard Sailing Center

you have to be in unison and trust that the other person is with you; you have to be slamming your weight over at exactly the same time, to give the boat the momentum it needs.”

She remembers a race at Tufts that sophomore year, one of the last regattas of the fall, when it began to hail. (“Unless there’s lightning, we race,” she says. “We’ve sailed in snow, in really torrential downpours, in 50-mile-per-hour winds—in zero wind. Sometimes you’re wearing a drysuit and an entire winter outfit underneath it, and you’re still frozen at the end of the day.”) Jagdagdorj and Sertl were doing well, going fast

despite the weather. But then, sailing around the last mark to head downwind to the finish, the boat flipped over. And the rudder, which wasn’t tied down, fell out. They got the boat upright, but then they couldn’t steer. Huddled in the hull together, they started to really feel it then: the hail and the cold and the wet. And the lost race.

That’s when Jagdagdorj knew she was serious about sailing. She’d seen it at its worst and still came back for more. To her family, this was all somewhat baffling. Born in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, she came to the United States with her parents at five years old, when her mother began graduate school in journalism at the University of Missouri (she’s now an instructor there; Jagdagdorj’s father works for IBM). In the early months after Jagdagdorj joined the team, there were worried phone calls from her grandmother back home in Mongolia; her grandparents kept asking if she’d given up sailing yet. She kept having to tell them she hadn’t. Then she had to tell them she’d been named co-captain.

And yet her origins in landlocked Mon-

golia, to which she returned during summers growing up and where her distant relatives remain nomadic herders, helped launch her into the sport. “Mongolians have such a strong tie to nature,” she says. It is a country full of ancient beauty, where you can drive out into the desert or the steppe and look back 800 years. “A big part of the nomadic culture is sustainability,” Jagdagdorj says. “There isn’t really even a word for it, because there is no other way.” (This same experience led her to major in environmental engineering.)

She talks about the particular hill in the southeast that she and her family return to whenever they’re there, and the ritual they perform: the men climb to the top, while the women circle the base three times. “It’s about respecting and being grateful for the land you’re in....And I think what’s really beautiful about sailing is that you can’t help but respect nature. You’re going out in a very tiny carbon-fiber boat into large bodies of water. People die sailing. Things can get out of control really quickly.” She thinks about that, even now, whenever she pushes off the dock into high wind or heavy waves. “There’s still that one flip of my stomach, like, ‘All right, here we go.’ You can’t ever get complacent with water. And that’s a very Mongolian attitude.”

~LYDIALYLE GIBSON

A Hardwood Foundation

Young basketball teams’ seesaw seasons

DURING THE 2016-2017 season, a construction crew labored outside Lavietes Pavilion, the home of the Harvard basketball teams. Making incremental progress on a project to refurbish the 91-year-old building, the workers were mostly waiting for the season to end and the teams to vacate the premises, so they could gut the second-oldest arena in college basketball (see harvardmag.com/lavietes-redo-16).

The construction parallels the rebuilding projects under way this winter on the hardwood within. Both the women’s and men’s squads depended heavily on underclassmen: the men started four freshmen, and the women started two freshmen and a sophomore. These talented young players were striving for Ivy League championships, but they were also laying the foundation for several years of team growth. Among the

goals for that growth: a twelfth Ivy League championship under the leadership of women’s head coach Kathy Delaney-Smith, who just completed her thirty-fifth season leading the Crimson (see “Acting As If” for 35 Seasons,” November-December 2016, page 31); and a deep NCAA tournament run for the men, whose seven freshmen were rated by ESPN as the country’s

Katie Benzan ’20 was a first-team All-Ivy honoree and led the team in scoring (13.4 points per game) and assists (4.2 assists per game).



tenth-best recruiting class in 2016.

After both teams lost in the Ivy League tournament semifinals in March, what can the women (who finished the year 21-9 overall, 8-6 Ivy) and the men (18-10 overall, 10-4 Ivy) learn from their up-and-down seasons

to build toward future gains?

AFTER A middling 2015-2016 campaign during which the Crimson went 14-14 overall, Delaney-Smith welcomed a freshman class headlined by forward Jeannie Boehm—just the third McDon-



ald's All-American in conference history—and Katie Benzan, a highly touted point guard. Paired with a returning nucleus led by sophomore guard Madeline Raster and senior forward Destiny Nunley, the team had one of its most talented and balanced rosters in recent memory.

During the first two-thirds of the season, the newcomers successfully demonstrated their potential. The year started with a 103-87 loss at Minnesota, but then the Crimson reeled off 16 consecutive wins, tying the longest streak in school history. The run included victories at Kansas (from the high-powered Big 12 Conference); against Temple, which earned a seven seed in the

shot two for 14 from the field in the second period, the Tigers pulled away—ultimately, for a 68-47 victory. Among the factors separating the Quakers and Tigers from her own young players, the coach said, is the fact that “they believe in themselves.”

The players had a chance to bolster their confidence when the Crimson received an at-large berth to the Women's National Invitational Tournament (WNIT), the most prestigious tournament after the NCAAs. Harvard capitalized on that opportunity, defeating the University of New Hampshire 69-56 in the opening round, before falling to



Co-captain Destiny Nunley '17 (above left) was an All-Ivy honorable mention designee. She and head coach Kathy Delaney-Smith (above) led the Crimson to a 21-9 overall record and a third-place finish in the Ivy League.

The team began to find its footing in a stretch from early December through late January, winning 10 of 11 games, including a 57-56 win over Houston, one of the Crimson's best non-conference opponents, and a sweep of Dartmouth and a victory at Cornell to start Ivy play. Still, Harvard's lone loss during that period—82-71 at Vermont, an NCAA tournament team—portended the difficulty of winning close games against more experienced squads on the road.

That problem recurred repeatedly. During the remainder of the Ivy season, the Crimson won all but one home game but lost three road contests—including the last two games of the regular season, at Princeton and Penn. Harvard's four Ivy losses came by a combined 11 points and, as Amaker said, stemmed in part from bad luck: three

Harvard Hardwood: Review the men's and women's seasons in detail with game dispatches, analysis, and profiles at harvardmag.com/basketball.

NCAA tournament; and four consecutive wins to start conference play.

Looking back, Delaney-Smith suggested that, ironically, the win streak may have “hurt us more than it helped us.” It raised the pressure and expectations on a young squad. And it camouflaged some weaknesses: inconsistency, turnovers, and rushed decisions. The Crimson won five games by five or fewer points and needed last-second heroics on several occasions—including a game-winner by Raster with 4.9 seconds left in a 70-68 home victory over Columbia.

Those flaws came into sharper relief during the last month of the season when the Crimson lost six of 10 games, including four against Penn and Princeton, the teams that finished ahead of Harvard in the Ivy standings. In those losses, a troubling trend emerged: if the Crimson's shots were not falling, and the other team made a run, Delaney-Smith's squad would fade. That happened in the Ivy tournament semifinals against Princeton. Harvard trailed by just one point (12-11) after the first quarter, but when the Crimson

St. John's University 62-57 in the round of 32. “The takeaway for those kids coming back,” said Delaney-Smith, “is you can play with anybody in the Ivy League and then some of the stronger teams in the country.”

THE WOMEN began the season on a tear, but the men lost their first four games against Division I competition, including an 80-70 defeat by Stanford in the season opener in Shanghai. The setbacks left some wondering if Stenberg coach Tommy Amaker could get his large, talented roster—which included proven All-Ivy talents point guard Siyani Chambers '16 ('17) and forward Zena Edosomwan '17, along with the highly regarded freshmen—to coalesce.

Bryce Aiken '20—Ivy League Rookie of the Year and a first-team All-Ivy honoree—led the Crimson with 28 points in the league tournament semifinals against Yale.



teams defeated the Crimson after hitting challenging last-second shots. Still, turnovers (18 in a 73-69 loss at Princeton in the penultimate game of the season), spells of ineffective play (the Crimson fell behind Princeton by nine or more points in both games), and a defense that was good but not great yielded a second-place finish for Harvard.

The conference tournament gave the Crimson another opportunity to compete for a coveted NCAA berth. But many of the same problems that undid the team in the regular season reappeared in a 73-71 loss to Yale in the semifinals. The players struggled to defend the paint; in the second half, the offense was anemic except for Bryce Aiken '20, who scored 28 points; and although Harvard had just five turnovers, it gave the ball away on the final possession.

Although both teams fell short of this year's goals, the women return Benzan, a first-team All-Ivy honoree; Boehm, who had seven blocks against St. John's in the WNIT;



Coach Tommy Amaker (above) and co-captain Siyani Chambers '16 ('17), a first-team All-Ivy honoree (right), led a young Crimson squad to a second-place finish in the Ivy League before falling to Yale in the conference tournament semifinals.



and four starters. The men lose Edosomwan and Chambers, who garnered first-team all-conference honors, but bring back four freshmen starters, including their top two scorers, Aiken and Seth Towns '20. When the refurbished Lavietes Pavilion reopens,

fans can look forward not only to more modern amenities but also to two teams, with talented and tested nuclei, looking to make their own improvement to the spiffed-up arena: a pair of championship banners.

~DAVID L. TANNENWALD

Sports in Brief

Men's Hockey

Blazing through what a *Boston Globe* headline deemed a "season of redemption," the men's hockey team in late March, for the first time in 23 years, secured its return to the Frozen Four, the NCAA semifinals, with a 3-2 win over Air Force in the tournament's

second round. That triumph, before a sold-out crowd in Providence, Rhode Island, capped a remarkable six weeks that saw the Crimson bring home its first Beanpot trophy since 1993, close out the regular season with an unbroken string of wins and a share of the conference title, and then capture the Eastern

In the momentum-building Beanpot victory: Crimson forward Alexander Kerfoot skates against Boston University.

College Athletic Conference championship. Four players—forwards Ryan Donato '19 and Alexander Kerfoot '17, defenseman Adam Fox '20, and goalie Merrick Madsen '18—earned all-conference honors. The team was warming up for its first Frozen Four contest, on April 6, against Minnesota Duluth, at the United Center in Chicago as the magazine went to press.



MADDIE MEYER/GETTY IMAGES

Fencing

After a regular season during which both men's and women's fencing won Beanpot trophies—the tenth for each (Harvard has won the competition every year since it began)—the program sent 11 athletes to the NCAA tournament in Indianapolis, Indiana, in late March. Sophomore Eli Dershwitz, a 2016 Olympian, won an individual championship in men's sabre, and Harvard finished fifth overall, one spot behind rival Princeton. Senior Adrian Jarocki, the defending national champion in women's sabre, took fifth place this year.

Swimming and Diving

Led by freshman standout swimmer Dean Farris, men's swimming and diving routed its opponents to win the Ivy League championship in mid March, after an unbeaten regular season. Ulen-Brooks head coach Kevin Tyrrell was named Ivy coach of the year. Four swimmers and five relay teams went to the NCAA tournament, where Farris finished fourth behind a trio of former Olympians in the 200 freestyle. Men's swimming finished twenty-seventh overall.

Women's swimming and diving sent two athletes to the NCAA tournament: first-year swimmer Mikaela Dahlke, who competed in three events and finished thirty-sixth overall, and junior diver Jing Leung, who came in thirty-second after defending her title as NCAA Zone A platform-dive champ. With strong performances by Dahlke, Leung, and sophomore swimmers Brittany Usinger and Meagan Popp, the women's team took second place in the Ivy League championship, finishing just behind Yale and crushing third- and fourth-place finishers Penn and Princeton.

~LYDIALYLE GIBSON