

Defeat has turned us into winners

Efforts have transformed rowing club

A FRANK exchange of views and a year's dedication to training and hard work has transformed a Bristol sports club from last to first.

Humiliated just over a year ago when every junior boat from the City of Bristol Rowing Club came last at a head of the river race, the organisers and parents decided to do something about it.

Junior co-ordinator Mike Murphy, 44, from Ashton, resolved to get serious and – should his young charges so desire – train them up into crews capable of winning medals.

Like ducks to water they took up the challenge and exceeded Mr Murphy's expectations – with their latest coup coming at the Boston marathon.

The under-16 girls' coxed eight of Anna Ashford, Victoria Fernandes, Molly Preen, Aimee Hann, Katherine Evans, Katherine Shaw, Laura Ralph, Ellie Murphy and Alice Hurley (cox) broke the course record with their winning time of 4hrs 20mins.

The under-17 boys' four of Tom Worral, Alistair Burns, Mark Keresztes and Gabriel Burke matched the girls' efforts with another win and another course record of 3hrs and 58mins, as they stroked an exhausting 31 miles from Lincoln to Boston to add to an impressive haul of medals this year.

"When the kids got off the water they were all a bit tearful," admitted Mr Murphy. "But then they all said they wanted to do it again."



Turning fortunes around: Bristol Rowing Club junior co-ordinator Mike Murphy, who trains the youngsters four times a week; right, the group with their medal haul

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The club, based at Baltic Wharf in the Harbourside and more than 50 years old, trains every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday from 4.45pm to 6pm, and a whopping four hours on a Sunday for good measure.

"It is one of the reasons why they have done so well this year," said Mr Murphy. "They have trained so hard.

"We went to an event last year and all our teams came last. For the majority of them it was their first race."

That was a painful experience. And the Whitcliffe Head will be remembered by Mr Murphy as the catalyst for his overhaul of the club's junior section.

"I said I'm prepared to do (the coaching hours) if you are prepared to do (the training), and it has gone from there."

The juniors now number more than 100, with a hard-core race training group of around 30.

"It has exceeded anything I could have imagined this year," said Mr Murphy, who is now fundraising for a new junior boat to cater for the surge in interest.

Some £9,000 is needed for a junior boat. At present, the children train in boats passed down from the adults, which are too big and sit too high in the water for them.

Yet despite this, the club has a girls' four competing at GB trials and showed its all-round strength at the Boston

event. Watch this space for future Olympians from Bristol.

Interested in junior rowing? Email juniorsquad@bristolrowing.co.uk or call the boathouse on 964 4621.

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