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Dreher works her way to national scene

By MIKE MEILER Niagara Gazette

Niagara Gazette — A funny thing happens when you ask Heavyn Dreher when her last day off was. The 16-year-old doesn't have an answer.

That's because the Grand Island native has been training year round since she was in eight grade, rowing for up to three hours and 12,000 meters a day in an effort to overcome what life's thrown her way and push herself into the national and Division I rowing scenes.

The hard work seems to be paying off. Dreher has raced in some of the top rowing events in the world in the past year, including the largest two-day regatta in the world (Boston's Head of the Charles) and the largest regatta in North America (the Royal Canadian Henley). She helped power her boat to first place in the women's junior 4-plus club division in the New York Scholastic Championships and will attempt to make the U.S. junior national team in March.

"They have identification camps all over the country," Dreher explained. "It's not just here, it's not just the East Coast. They have one in Seattle, Oklahoma, Florida, Southern California. ... I've never gone out for an identification camp before, but now after the experiences that I've had in rowing with different clubs and going to rowing clubs and examining my technique, I've built up my competition experience enough to try out for this."

Dreher's success isn't limited to team events, either. She's left her mark in the world of ergometer competition, or individual rowing machines. As a sophomore, she finished third in the under-17 women's open weight division at the Canadian Indoor National Championships. This year, she placed 40th of 300 competitors in the same division at the World Indoor Championships.

"It's thrilling, exhilarating, horrifying and extreme pain all at the same time," Dreher said of the ergs. "It simulates a race well. Even though you're not on the water, you see the number and see how fast you're going. It shows you how far in front of you first place is. You can see that and make your decision when to make your move on them."

"You can catch their little boat that's in front of you on the screen, and it's exciting because you never get to see yourself catch up to your competitors (in normal rowing)."

The road to success hasn't been without its bumps for Dreher. In August of 2011, she found herself fainting during practice. She went to a doctor and, after a few months, was diagnosed with neurocardiogenic syncope, which is a loss of consciousness caused by a drop in arterial blood pressure when the body is stressed.

The ailment caused her to miss qualifications for the 2011 Head of the Charles, which Dreher said was a big blow after putting so much effort into making the race. Since then, medication and a modified workout routine have helped her return to her normal self.

"I trained harder, I got a lot better at cardio and my endurance improved," Dreher said. "It's definitely been a process, and it's helped me, I think. I've learned to push past something I can't control, no matter what, and that's helped me in a race situation because you can't control how fast the other boats are going. You can't control if they're moving on you. All you can do is improve yourself, improve your race, change it and come back."

