

Hallam claim Varsity win....after 14 years!



Sheffield Hallam University Sailing and Windsurfing Club at Winscar Reservoir (Pennine Sailing Club) © Erica Bewsey

Six match and three team races, nine races in total to give one university that precious Varsity point. For 14 years University of Sheffield have won the Sailing Varsity, and this year we were determined to wipe that smug record clean. As both University of Sheffield and Sheffield Hallam University unloaded two coach loads of supporters at Winscar Reservoir, tensions ran high, whilst our team was painted up patriotically in maroon and white.

The six match races were to run first, one boat from each university in a basic race against each other. A couple of incidents combined with a great sailing performance put in by University of Sheffield resulted in the loss of our first two races, setting us immediately at a disadvantage. Helm Lee Timothy and his crew Emma Southwell (team captain) were up next for the third race, both always the optimist they set off remaining confident, despite the initial blow to the rest of the team - and it paid off. A superbly sailed race brought us back in the game.

However devastation struck as we lost a further two match races, University of Sheffield were now four races up and needed just one more to win that prized Varsity point. The usual atmosphere of excitement and thrill that surrounds any Varsity event had begun to fade on the Hallam side, as both team and supporters knew what needed to be done. One tiny mistake would lose us the Sailing Varsity for the 15th year in a row, and that was not what we had trained so hard for.

The final match race had both sides on edge. As Hallam rounded the last mark behind the University of Sheffield boat, supporters' hearts sank, the last beat to the finish line was led by Uni of and it would take a miracle to overtake now. Spectators lowered their heads and began to drown their loss in a sombre atmosphere.

Suddenly, one of the few Hallam spectators watching shouted out, against all odds a strong gust of wind had favoured our dinghy and was swiftly flying them towards the finish line which Uni of were so close to crossing. A great wave of cheering and screaming surged out of the supporters as the two Fireflies came neck and neck. By some unbelievable miracle, alongside an absolutely outstanding sailing performance, Hallam crossed first.

The last race showed some incredible self-sacrifice from Charlie as we set out to win another 1st, 2nd, 3rd combination. However, determined to not let Uni of slip past, he slowed down to hold them off - allowing fellow teammates Alex Harris and Lee Timothy to gain a 1st and 2nd - a win regardless of what position the final boat finishes in.



Lee Timothy, Charlie Fitzgerald, Anna Louise Hough, Emma Southwell (Team Captain), Sean Clarkson, Alex Harris © Erica Bewsey

It was not over yet though, that one point would still give Uni of triumph and so all three team races were needed to be won to achieve Varsity victory. The first race was tense as some fantastic moves were pulled off by helm Charlie Fitzgerald in order to hold off two Uni of boats and allow Hallam to win. The second race seemed almost too easy as we sailed to victory in a first, second, third position, demonstrating some of Hallam's finest sailing. It was now 4-4. This final race would determine the winner of Sailing Varsity 2013 and the pressure was mounting, we'd managed to pull it back this far, could we get the final one too?

That was it - the last win needed - seeing Hallam take the win overall. We were 4-1 down, but a combination of the last match race and fantastic sailing in all three team races gave us the best comeback I have ever witnessed in sailing. All odds were against us, yet our determination allowed us to prove everyone wrong; 14 years of a losing streak is now broken, thanks to an exceptional team racing performance!

Anna Louise Hough

<http://www.shusailandwindsurf.co.uk>



Sheffield Hallam University's Varsity Team celebrate © Erica Bewsey