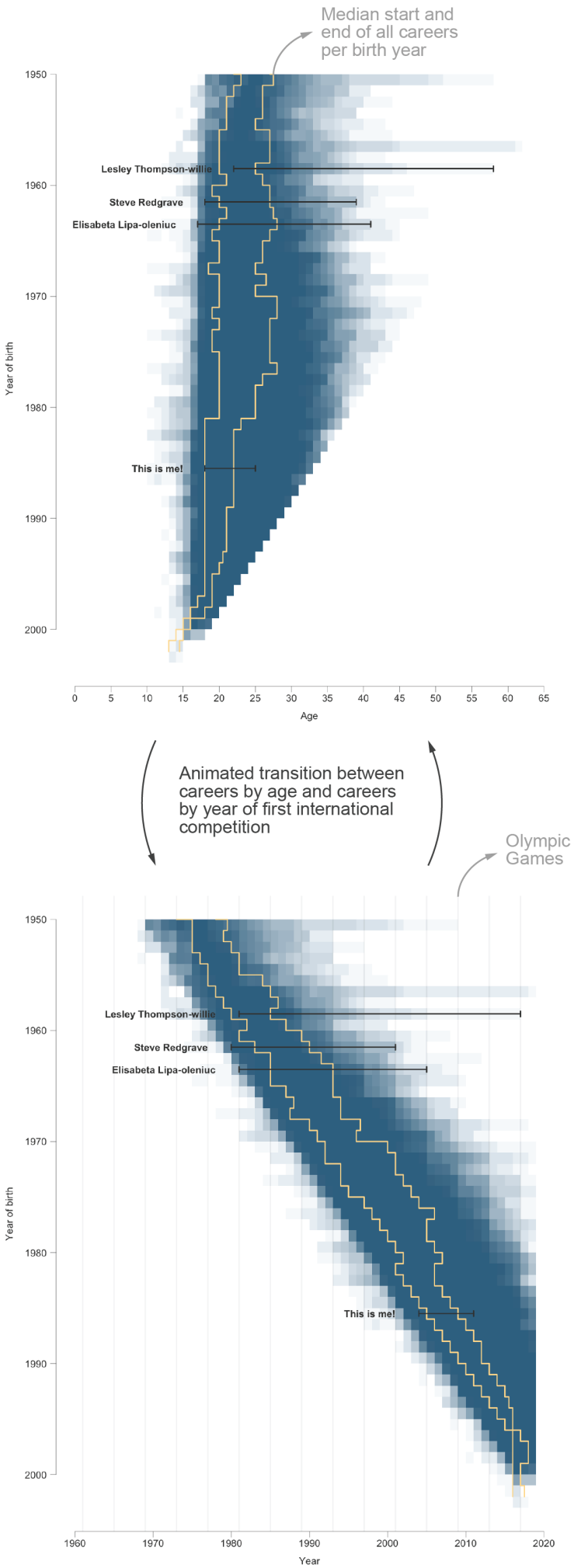
Oarsome Fortysomethings*

This is a prototype of a visualization of the career lengths of all the rowers in the FISA athlete database. It is was inspired by an idea on the Pudding backlog (age of athletes extending over time) and my personal background in rowing (I rowed for the Belgian national team for a few years).

I had the idea to plot the career span for each rower in the database (18,380 rowers after some filtering). In the figures on the right, the careers are drawn by year of birth (y axis). In the top figure, the x axis shows the of the rowers, while in the bottom figure, the x axis represents the year. I have also marked the median career starts and ends for each birth year, some renowned athletes (Redgrave and Lipa-Oleniuc are the most medalled man and woman in Olympic rowing history, Thompson-Willie has had the longest international career) and myself!

Looking at the figure on the right, there doesn't appear to be all that much of a change in the average length of a rowers career. The clearest conclusion seems to be that there is simply more data available for the more recent years. However, when I split up the rowers into different groups, I saw something interesting (next page).

My next step would be to port this visualization to d3 to make it interactive (e.g. animated switch between x axes, athlete search...).

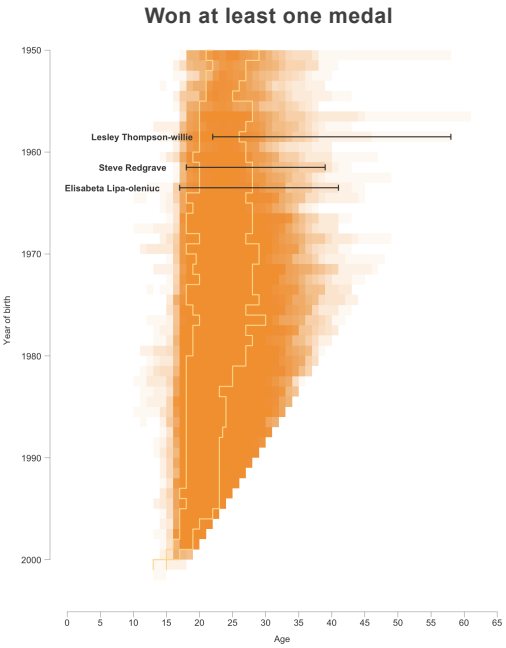


* This is a reference to the "oarsome foursome", a successful coxless four crew from Australia and the few fortysomethings who have raced at the Olympics (like Ekaterina Karsten and Olaf Tufte).

Chicken or the Egg

When splitting up the rowers in two groups based on whether they won at least one medal at an international regatta, it's clear that successful rowers on average have longer careers (I was unfortunately not one of them). Were these rowers more successful because they persevered for longer or did they keep going because they were successful? Personally, I think it's the latter.

I tried two other splits, men versus women and rowers that raced internationally as a junior (age <= 18) versus those who did so for the first time as a senior, but these did not show any large differences.



How?

I scraped the data from the FISA website using Python and explored them using R. You can find all the code on GitHub.