Dear Athletes,

In the past I have taken some time over the summer to write up what my expectations for the season and the year to come are with some analysis of where we ended the last year. 2020 has been totally lame and to say that we were all disappointed with the result is an understatement.

Last fall I felt that our preparation for 2020 was some of the best that I have seen as a coach at Marist. The team returned from a very disappointing end of the 2019 spring season with both revenge and redemption in mind. With serious leadership departing from the 2019 senior class along with roughly ½ the V8 the time was ripe for what coaches refer to as a “rebuilding year”. I kind of hate that term but it basically refers to a year with a lull in performance where time is being spent developing the next generation of athletes to top performance level. Coach S and I were pleasantly surprised to find that there were a good number of athletes who were ready to step up and fill the gaps left by the departing seniors. Additionally, some talented new recruits joined us and we had a BIG walk-on crew that came in with lots of vim and vigor and quickly started to shake some trees. In the V8, even though we felt that we were rowing very well we really had no idea what this crew had in the tank until we went to Navy Day and threw down a really strong 2nd place result. We followed this result with a super close 2nd at the Chuck and then tore MIT a new asshole at the Fish with a 13 second spanking. The 2V also had a good fall although we still trended toward some of the inward psychological tension that has plagued our recent 2V boats. When we were at our best with the 2V we took some great results including stomping out a few V8’s at the Navy Day and at the Chase and a tidy 2nd at the Fish.

Coming into the spring last year the V8 was looking at a potentially fantastic spring. Based on the numbers we had seen on land and on the water, we were not only on track for an IRA bid but Stratton and I felt that we could have been in the hunt for the 3rd final which would really have been something special. The 2V and the 3V were in strong positions to support this ranking and in particular we felt that the 2V group made some substantial gains at our winter camp in DeLand. The Frosh continued to infuse the crew with excitement all winter and we were amped to be heading into Clemson with serious momentum and a number of our competitors genuinely worried. Our main target for the NIRC win was Hobart who we beat by 3sec at HOCR. It is obviously impossible to tell who would have come out on top, but my personal opinion is that we found a new gear last fall that we hadn’t seen before, and we were going to have the tools to crush Hobart in the closing meters that we didn’t have in 2019.

The rest, as we know, is history; season cancelled, no camp, no racing, everyone went home. I think that it’s important to recognize what we have accomplished since then. This summer we had a committed core of athletes working strongly together to remotely continue their path towards personal improvement. We pushed each other to work on our core and underlying fitness and together completed over 40 million meters. We arrive on campus now on the eve of a new campaign that will look unlike any rowing year that any of us have seen yet. More than ever, this season will be a true journey and adventure as we will all be entering new territory. To begin with, we have no idea where we really stand as a team as far as our usual fitness standards. We have some big holes left by the departure of Blaszczyk, Rechen and Ari from the V8 but we have some younger guys pushing extremely hard and we have an incoming frosh class that proved over the summer that they are hungry to contribute to our top end right out of the gate. We have no idea what other teams are doing or where their fitness stands and we are unlikely to find out any time soon. Everyone is training under a variety of restrictions and limitations and we will likely not face an outside crew at least until 2021.

I know that there are a lot of questions about what this year is going to look like and so the main goal here is to outline where we stand and where we intend to go this year. This fall is going to incorporate considerable risk and considerable opportunity. The risk is simply that we do not have the pressure to race looming over us. Fall races force us to return to campus with ready fitness and they keep us honest to deliver our best rowing only 7 weeks after we return to campus. Without this pressure, we risk being lazy and growing complacent. The opportunities for us lie essentially along the same lines. From a fitness standpoint we are able to enter the season more gradually and build towards a single spring peak performance instead of having two seasons. The lack of pressure for selection in the fall opens the door for you to really tackle major technical issues without worrying about winning a seat. This means that for our returning novices, incoming freshman and veterans with technical flaws, we have time to adapt and reinvent ourselves.

At this point fall racing is clearly NOT going to take place although there is the potential for us to compete in some virtual races. The coaches are operating with the belief that by this spring we will have developed a vaccine or a successful treatment for coronavirus and that we will be at Clemson in March and back on the starting line for some racing. We obviously would love to make our winter trip to Florida in January but at this point I think it would be optimistic in the extreme to assume this will take place.

Our performance goals are still quite clear. We will be attending the NIRC regatta in early May and will face competition from a variety of schools among whom the most dangerous and most likely competitor is Hobart. Only a win in the V8 at this event will GUARANTEE a bid to the IRA for 2021. The only other pathway to the IRA is through a HIGHLY competitive regular season which incorporates wins against other IRA bubble competitors. Key schools in this group include MIT, Georgetown, Temple, Drexel, St. Joes and Holy Cross.

In the coming weeks Coach S and myself will be developing our basic training plan for the coming season. Which will incorporate hopeful erg test dates and performance benchmarks. Among my thoughts for this training plan are a few key concepts.

1. Regardless of the time apart, we must assume that our competitors will be at least as fast as we last saw them. As a result, we cannot coast and we cannot be satisfied with substandard scores in the coming season. Our focus must continue to be projected towards other teams and outside competitors and not turn 100% inward on one another
2. Even though you may not feel the immediate urgency of fighting for a fall seat we still must feel the urgency of the oncoming season and the sense that we need to be 100% invested in each practice and each day as an opportunity to improve. This team’s entire philosophy is based on a marginal gains approach where we seek to improve our performance in small increments each day. Each day is an opportunity to improve by 1% and if you can earn that 1% on most days then we can come into the spring with our hair on fire
3. Winter training is going to be more important than EVER. With the loss of the early fall and the fall racing season our training plan will shift towards winter. In the past we have often taken the month away in Dec-Jan as an opportunity to recover from a competitive fall and regather our energies for the coming spring. This winter we will not have the luxury of going easy while we are away and athletes who do not keep the pedal down during this period will find themselves woefully outgunned at Clemson and sitting on the side lines come race day. The good news here is that we showed this summer that this team has some really serious mental endurance and we will need to show the same level of bad-assery as we move through winter training
4. I know that we have said this before, but Coach S and I are more committed than ever to ensuring that there are absolutely ZERO passengers on this team. With our budget reduced due to COVID we simply cannot afford to fill and carry an entire 3rd and 4th varsity who are not pulling their weight. The team contract has made clear what the minimum standards for progression are and if you are a guy who is on this team for purely social reasons then we suggest you reexamine your participation with this sport at Marist.
5. My final thought here is just the general sense of the teamsmanship and support that we need to provide for one another this fall. Never has it been more important to cheer eachother on, to push eachother, to grind for eachother. Never has it been more important to give a high five (elbow?) to offer some advice to a younger guy or to cut someone some slack who is trying to learn. Never has it been more important to be 100% invested in one another and in the process and to give each practice your full effort and attention. Last year’s seniors are proof that you do not get that many shots at the collegiate season and it is impossible to know when it will be “your year”. The only sure thing is that you must train and commit to the process like it’s going to be your year EVERY year. Last year’s crew had this in spades and they showed on the water that any crew can MAKE IT your year through hard work and commitment.

With these things in mind we are delighted to announce the commencement of the 2021 campaign. This crew is going to arrive at March in 2021 a lean mean fighting machine hungry to go to war. We are really excited about the commitment we saw over the summer and the effort we are already seeing in our early phase1. Let’s bring it every day!

Campbell and Josh