

= The Boat Race 2003 =

The 149th Boat Race took place on 6 April 2003 . Held annually , the Boat Race is a side @-@ by @-@ side rowing race between crews from the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge along a 4 @.@ 2 @-@ mile (6 @.@ 8 km) tidal stretch of the River Thames in south @-@ west London . The lead changed twice during the race , which Oxford won by one foot (30 cm) , the smallest margin of victory in the history of the event . The close race has been described as " epic " , while multiple Olympic gold @-@ medallist Steve Redgrave suggested that the race was the " greatest we will see in our lifetimes " .

Umpired by the Boat Race veteran Boris Rankov , the 2003 race was the first to be scheduled on a Sunday . As a result of a collision between the Cambridge boat and a launch , a member of the Cambridge crew was replaced just two days before the race . This was the first Boat Race to feature two sets of brothers on opposing sides . In the reserve race Goldie beat Isis and Oxford won the Women 's race .

= = Background = =

The Boat Race is a side @-@ by @-@ side rowing competition between the University of Oxford (sometimes referred to as the " Dark Blues ") and the University of Cambridge (sometimes referred to as the " Light Blues ") . First held in 1829 , the race takes place on the 4 @.@ 2 @-@ mile (6 @.@ 8 km) Championship Course , between Putney and Mortlake on the River Thames in south @-@ west London . The rivalry is a major point of honour between the two universities ; it is followed throughout the United Kingdom and broadcast worldwide . Oxford went into the 2003 race as reigning champions , having won the previous year 's race by three @-@ quarters of a length , but Cambridge led overall with 77 victories to Oxford 's 70 (excluding the " dead heat to Oxford by five feet " of 1877) . The race was sponsored by Aberdeen Asset Management for the fourth consecutive year , and was the first to be scheduled on a Sunday , in order to avoid a clash with the live television broadcast of the Grand National . Although the 1984 race was held on a Sunday , it had been postponed from the Saturday following a collision between the Cambridge boat and a barge .

The first Women 's Boat Race took place in 1927 , but did not become an annual fixture until the 1960s . Up until 2014 , the contest was conducted as part of the Henley Boat Races , but as of the 2015 race , it is held on the River Thames , on the same day as the men 's main and reserve races . The reserve race , contested between Oxford 's Isis boat and Cambridge 's Goldie boat , has been held since 1965 . It usually takes place on the Tideway , prior to the main Boat Race .

The umpire for the race was former Oxford rower Boris Rankov , who had represented the Dark Blues a record six times between 1978 and 1983 . Cambridge were coached by Robin Williams (for the ninth time) while Oxford 's coach was Sean Bowden , assisted by coxing adviser Dan Topolski .

= = Crews = =

Wayne Pommen , the first @-@ choice Cambridge bow , was injured two days before the race , fracturing his wrist following a full @-@ speed collision with the harbourmaster 's launch during a practice start . Matthias Kleinz was hit on the head but did not require medical attention . Cambridge number seven James Livingston said : " For a couple of seconds I thought I was going to die . We were going flat out and all of a sudden I heard Jim 's voice . I 've never heard so much fear in anybody 's voice before . " Pommen was circumspect : " A few of us were feeling quite lucky last night ... at the same time , it was very frustrating and disappointing ... but there was no point sulking in the corner . " Three oars were destroyed and two riggers bent ; the boat was sent to Weybridge to be repaired . Pommen was replaced by Ben Smith , brother of the Oxford stroke Matthew . Not since the 1979 race had such a late change in the line @-@ up of a crew been made . Along with James and David Livingston , this was the first time in the history of the Boat Race that two pairs of brothers would be racing against one another .

The official weigh @-@ in took place on 1 April at the London Eye . The Cambridge crew had an advantage of 7 kilograms (15 lb) per member , representing the largest disparity between the crews since the 1990 event and the lightest Dark Blue crew since the 1975 race . Oxford were considered " underdogs " for the race . The Cambridge crew had an average age of 23 , while Oxford 's crew averaged 21 . The Oxford crew featured seven Britons , an Australian and a Canadian , while the Cambridge crew consisted of four Britons , two Americans , two Germans and an Australian . Cambridge 's Tim Wooge , the 30 @-@ year @-@ old stroke rowing in his third Boat Race , was the first German president of Cambridge University Boat Club , and the heaviest man in the race . His Dark Blue counterpart Matthew Smith was rowing in his fourth Boat Race . Robin Bourne @-@ Taylor , Basil Dixon and Matt Smith had rowed for Oxford in the 2002 race , while , in James Livingston , Cambridge saw just one Blue return from the previous year 's event .

= = Race descriptions = =

= = = Main race = = =

Cambridge won the coin toss and the Light Blue boat club president , Tim Wooge , was clear : " Cambridge choose Surrey " . Cambridge elected to start from the southern bank (the " Surrey side ") of the Thames , handing the northern side of the river (the " Middlesex side ") to Oxford . At race time , conditions were overcast and breezy . Oxford took an early lead with a slightly higher stroke rate than Cambridge as both coxes were warned by the umpire to avoid a clash . By the Mile Post , the Dark Blues were half @-@ a @-@ second ahead . Five minutes into the race , Oxford , with a third of a length lead , were warned again by the umpire and moved away from the racing line , and following a series of oar clashes , allowed Cambridge to take the lead , shooting Hammersmith Bridge a second ahead . Oxford continued to stay in touch with Cambridge along the long middle bend of the course , towards the Chiswick Steps , and retook the lead on the approach to Barnes Bridge as the course curved back in their favour . With a three @-@ quarter length lead at Barnes , Oxford began to weaken and Cambridge recovered to a third of a length . With every stroke , the Cambridge boat gained on Oxford , outrating them in a " sprint finish " , but the Dark Blues passed the finishing post 1 foot (30 cm) ahead , the narrowest winning margin in the history of the race .

Oxford finished with a time of 18 minutes 6 seconds . Rankov did not initially announce the result , instead he " spread his arms wide and shrugged his shoulders " . The result was confirmed to Rankov by finishing judge Ben Kent , with the winning margin being approximately 0 @.@ 05 seconds , and announced to the crews by Rankov under Chiswick Bridge : " One foot to Oxford " . James Livingston wrote of himself at the finish : " eyes widen and bulge in horror . Our desolation is total . "

It was the first time a crew had won the race with a deficit of more than one stone (6 @.@ 4 kg) per man . It was Oxford 's third victory in the previous four years and brought the overall result to 77 ? 71 in Cambridge 's favour . At the finish , following tradition , the Oxford crew threw their cox , Acer Nethercott , into the water in celebration .

= = = Women and reserves races = = =

In the reserve race , Cambridge 's Goldie beat Oxford 's Isis by nine lengths in a time of 18 minutes 4 seconds , two seconds quicker than the Blue boat , recording their fourth consecutive victory and their sixth in seven years . Earlier , Oxford won the 58th women 's race in a time of 6 minutes 35 seconds , three @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half lengths ahead of their Light Blue opponents . It was their second consecutive win and took the overall result to 38 ? 20 in Cambridge 's favour .

= = Reaction = =

The Oxford University Boat Club president and stroke Matthew Smith said " It feels fantastic and I

think it will take a while to top this feeling " . He went on to say : " We have got an awesome bunch of guys in this squad ... but I have such respect for Cambridge ... with a lighter crew we 've turned round the biggest weight deficit in history . " Nethercott remarked " I really thought we had lost . In the space of a few seconds I went from the lowest point in my life to absolute , unbridled ecstasy . " The Cambridge oarsman James Livingston said " It was the worst margin to lose by . I just wish I could stop losing these epic races " while the Cambridge coach Williams described the defeat as a " blow to the heart " . Wooge was disappointed : " I pull my hat off to Oxford , that was an amazing race . " Rankov later revealed " It ? s the hardest I ? ve ever had to work in an umpiring situation . "

The five @-@ time Olympic gold medallist Steve Redgrave , who presented the trophy to the victorious president , Matthew Smith , commented on the race : " Remember that race and cling on to the memory , because it will be the greatest we will see in any of our lifetimes . " An estimated 400 million people worldwide watched the event on television , with over 5 million viewers watching on BBC One in the United Kingdom . The race is retold in the book Blood Over Water , authored by opposing brothers James and David Livingston .

Martin Cross , writing in The Guardian , said the race provided " a thrilling finish and renewed interest from the public " , Christopher Dodd in The Independent called the race " stupendous , a titanic struggle of will " , while Rachel Quarrell of The Daily Telegraph declared Oxford 's victory as " epic " and suggested that " there will never be a better Boat Race . " Simon Barnes of The Times described the finish : " At the finishing line , the bobble of the Oxford bow was inches in front , a second later , it was inches behind . If the line had come with the completion rather than the beginning of the final Cambridge stroke , the result would have gone the other way . " Author and journalist Christopher Dodd , writing in Rowing News summarised the race as " incredible " and a " titanic struggle of wills " .