

## 1976 Olympic rowers to be honored at Hall of Fame ceremony

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SARASOTA — They were an unlikely group of formidable female athletes, plucked from across the country and placed in a boat that would debut at the 1975 World Rowing Championships and return No. 2 in the world.

Several of the women who pioneered that legendary crew would go on to represent their country for the first time at the 1976 Olympics in Montreal and defeat teams from countries that pushed salaries and resources toward their female athletes.

"They triumphed not merely over the favored Russian and Romanian women in England, but also back in their own country against all the prejudices of the era about what women were not supposed to do," wrote David Halberstam in the forward of "The Red Rose Crew," a novel by Daniel J. Boyne about the members of the first international women's crew team in this country.

Today, members of the 1976 Olympic women's eight will reunite when the National Rowing Federation hosts the National Rowing Hall of Fame Class of 2016 induction ceremony at a private event at the Polo Grill in Lakewood Ranch.

On Sunday, the finals for seven of 14 Olympic boat classes will be held. Athletes who have trained for years for a chance to represent the U.S. on an Olympic stage will compete for coveted spots in the men's and women's single sculls, double sculls and lightweight double sculls, as well as Paralympic spots in the men's and women's arm and shoulders single sculls.

"The boat has never been together since we parked it at the rack in Montreal," said Carol Brown, a Pennsylvania native who represented Team USA in both the 1975 World Championships and the 1976 Olympics. "It's amazing to think that we really were the women's eight and look at where the sport has come now."

Brown was in part talking about the success of the USRowing women's national team, particularly in the eight boat class. The U.S. women's eight won their 10th consecutive world title this past summer; they have not lost an Olympic final since 2004, when they took second to Romania.

On Friday, Brown joined 1976 teammates Lynn Stillman Reed and Anita DeFranz at a news conference kicking off the semifinals and finals of the USRowing Olympic Trials. They are here to watch the trials, which feature the United States sculling events, and to be honored at the induction ceremony along with 16 other rowers from the 1976, 1996, and 2000 Olympics who have paved the way for athletes competing at Nathan Benderson Park in Sarasota today.

"Today you can see a window into the future for this venue," said USRowing CEO Glenn Merry. "The Olympic Trials are the pinnacle for our athlete pool. The very top competitors in our sport are here this weekend to go on to represent the U.S. at the Rio Games coming up in August. There will be some great competition here. There will be some fierce fighting on the water."

The intensity of this weekend's races, the mental ferocity and the physical pain athletes will endure to win, is something these veteran rowers are familiar with. DeFranz, a member of the International Olympic Committee, calls it "the burn." Back in the day, competitors didn't talk about the burn, but every rower was intimately familiar with it.

"Our bodies are telling us to stop, that this is just not right," DeFranz said. "Our lungs first and then our thighs. You just feel like you are going to die."

She paused Friday and thought a moment and then spoke again. "That's what I learned," she said. "How hard I could work without dying. That's what I got from that (Olympic) race."

On Friday, trials competitors were separated into heats with winners automatically advancing to semifinals scheduled for today with the remaining athletes directed to a "last-chance" race to advance. The double sculls team of Sarasota Crew coaches Rosa Kemp and Monica Whitehouse narrowly missed winning their heat, and will have another chance to make the semifinals today.

After placing fourth in his heat on Friday morning, Sarasota Crew alumni Hunter Leeming placed third in a last-chance race later Friday, and will not advance.