

What does athlete Holly Hill think and feel about her involvement in the 2015 Boat Race?

Take a peek inside the Cambridge University boat when the women's Varsity contest makes its debut on the tideway on Saturday. There, in seat No6, you will find second-year Downing College student



Holly Hill, who was inspired to take up rowing after watching Helen Glover and Heather Stanning win the first British gold medal of the London Games.

Why? What was she thinking?

With a head full of dreams Hill went online and stumbled across the same Sporting Giants talent identification programme that had recruited Glover a few years earlier. "It's a bit bizarre. I ticked the boxes because I was lanky and keen to try out rowing as by then I knew I'd got into Cambridge and I wanted to row for my college when I got there."

What does she think is strange? Why?

"It's really momentous and such an honour to be a part of [the women's team]. Both Oxford and Cambridge crews, whatever the outcome of the race, understand that this event is bigger than all of us and represents much more than this battle between 18 girls.

What does she think about this race? Why?

"Whether or not I was in the boat, to be able to see this happening to the sport that I care about and for gender equality overall on a public stage is really incredible," says Hill who credits Helena Morrissey, CEO of the women's sponsor, Newton Investment Management, for leading on the issue.

What might cause her to feel this way?

As a young girl Hill watched the Boat Race every year on television, but it was not until she was 17 that she realised there was something missing from the annual spectacle. "I remember thinking: 'Is there a women's Boat Race? I just don't know ...' Before then I would have just watched the Boat Race, there's just one, and they're men. When you're young you just accept that, you aren't asking the question: 'Oh, where are the women?' You just accept it at face value when it's not presented in the media in an equal way. Which is one of the reasons it's so good that women are now on the tideway."

What might this idea lead her to feel? Why?

How would this make her feel? Why?

"You have to be really organised because rowing does take up a huge amount of time, but rowing for me is an escape," she says. "We train in Ely, which is about 15 miles north of Cambridge. I just love getting up early, escaping the city, going somewhere tranquil and peaceful, getting out of your head.

As a university student, what might she think?

'Come on ...' I was gobsmacked at how much time I was going to have to give over to it. But if you love it enough you just do it."

What does she think?

There is no room for distraction, says Hill, and she may be right after the Oxford women's crew had to be rescued by the Royal National Lifeboat Institution while training on the Thames last Thursday. Hill **stifles a polite giggle** at the mention of the subject. "We weren't there when it happened, **sadly,**" she says, **grinning**. "But it just shows what the river's like and we have to be very careful in terms of tides and the wind. **A lesson learned** for everybody, I think, that we ought to respect the river."

How must she feel? Are there conflicting emotions?

"I've got a lot of nerves and excitement **all rolled into one**, it's hard to disentangle," Hill says. "On the one hand it's really exciting and **such an honour** that so many people will come and watch, but the thought of **embarrassing yourself** in front of how many people on TV, taking a horrendous stroke in the boat makes it as **exciting as it is nerve-racking**."

Again, what emotions is she experiencing? Why?

"Rowing is incredibly **unpredictable** – especially on such an **unpredictable** river with such **unpredictable** conditions, so I can't predict if we're going to win or lose but **I'm 100% confident** that we're going to bring our A-game and **give it absolutely everything** – and if we do that we have a good shot at winning."

Why does she feel this way?

What must she be thinking?