

11/13 - THAMES GONG SHOW

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This coming weekend is the 'Four's Head' in London, a regatta as large as it is long. Raced on the Boat Race course (but backwards, from Mortlake to Putney instead of vice versa), it is one of the preeminent events of autumn racing in Britain. It is also a gong show.



For those of you uninitiated in the ways of the Thames River, it is a wicked beast, with tides strong enough to break your boat against bridges and winds that can kick up three-foot swells. Because of these conditions, all boats have to launch before the start of racing, for it would be dangerous to do otherwise.

With this in mind, you'd think that the regatta committee would limit the entries to a small number of crews. Of course, you'd be wrong. Over 550 boats will line up to race this weekend, ranging from the British World Champion 4- to the 3rd women's lightweight novice coxed quad from North Chesterfordshirebridge High School. With all boats required to be above a certain point on the river by start time, you can imagine what happens: waiting, waiting, and more waiting.

It isn't so bad for us at Cambridge – my 4- starts around 20th, right after the men's quads leading off. Therefore, I get a pretty clear run to the start and back. However, for the lower-level crews, the wait time can be excruciatingly long. The crews starting at the tail end of the race will literally have to sit in tidal water for over two hours at the start line. That's right: two hours. There is nowhere to dock, and crews have to constantly keep moving to avoid confrontations with bridges, the shore, and other boats. It's amazing that people still come out to this thing. There is little-to-no chance that I would have the patience for such a wait. Patience, so say the least, isn't my strong point. The boat I am in this weekend is an interesting one. I am stroking on starboard side (I have recently switched sides, more on this at a later date), and behind me sit three British boys. We are the top-ranked straight four from Cambridge, but the top boat for the team is actually in the coxed four, consisting of our two World Champion Germans, our Olympic Champion Brit, and our President, Tom James. My boat is expected to do well, but the coaches don't seem to have amazingly high aspirations for us. We intend to show them otherwise.

Our goal is simple: beat the Oxford boat that starts directly in front of us. We are being measured against our own teammates for selection purposes of course, but as a whole we have no doubt that we are out to crush the Dark Blues. It is our first race against them this season, and our only direct measure before Boat Race day. On Saturday, we intend to show them who has the upper hand.