



## Hawk & Team of the Year 2020-2021

---

### **Hawk of the Year: Rob Harris (CUBC)**

Rob Harris has been an exceptional leader and brilliant athlete throughout his entire four years at Cambridge. I can think of very few others who match up his sporting prowess and friendly personality. I am electing him specifically for his leadership of the victorious Goldie crew of 2021 (his second time as a winning Goldie captain and his third as a winning Goldie) which absolutely dominated Isis to win by six lengths despite only being allowed on the water four weeks beforehand.

Over the past year Rob has been extra-ordinarily dedicated to the team. Even before term started, he led the team on putting in the miles in our pre-term training. In Michaelmas he quickly gelled the team together with his large personality and constant good humour. (On a side note, you can say without doubt that no one drove the minibus longer than him!) He has always very good at making friends with the post-grads CUBC attracts. Furthermore, this year he was exceptional at taking the younger members of the team under his wing. In particular, his coaching of Clay Roberts and Luca Ferraro proved that he did not play favourites, recognizing instead how the potential of newcomers is vital to the success of the team at later dates. Perhaps the most notable incident was his success in making his trial 8 have much more fun than the other matched boat. This helped to produce one of the closest trial 8 races the club had seen for four years.

Over the Christmas holidays, disaster struck and Rob caught covid, which kept him from making the gains that he deserved. Nevertheless, he still posted competitive scores on Christmas eve on a one hour max ergo. He was understandably upset about the setback, but nevertheless kept up his fitness with spartan dedication. He was committed was even past the point when Rob knew that he would not be allowed to try out for the Blue Boat, which he had missed by the closest of margins the year before. He managed to maintain his composure, while alone in college during the third lockdown even under viral fatigue. Everyone can surely understand the excuses that people would give themselves if their dream had died, but Rob did not give in to those excuses.

Instead, when restrictions were released, Rob hit the ground running. He led the seconds group (while the Blue boat and spares were isolating) with the common goal of destroying Oxford. That target united the Goldie boat when it came together two weeks later. Rob was unanimously elected captain for the second time and rowing became fun again. We had some seriously tough sessions that pushed us to the limit. Rob didn't hold back, even at one point collapsing after a sparring session with the Blue boat so that he had to see the doctor afterwards. He stayed in the boat because of the speed and the atmosphere he produced.

On race day itself, there were never any second doubts about who was in charge. Rob drove us everywhere and got everyone in a fantastic mood. He even won £200 on a poker tournament the night before!! We were having so much fun that the race seemed unfair for the other side. We had been told that we wouldn't get a length up in the first 500 as Rob had for the last two races. That was right because Rob got us up two lengths! From then on with his famous smile he led us to

Valhalla and undying glory. It is now a well-worn saying in the boat club that Rob Harris doesn't lose. All I can say is that I have won by having him in my team.

Overall, I believe that his story this year was one of the hardest to listen to and yet he bore it the best of any I have seen. I am proud to nominate Rob as Hawk of the Year and I am sure that I will be backed up by his many friends.

*Written by Reggie Mitchell (CUBC)*

## **Team of the Year: Cambridge University Rugby League Football Club**

I would like to put forward our nomination for Team of the Year. This would be the first time in our Club's history that we would share the honours board in the James H Van Alen room and there would not be a more fitting way to cap off a defining year for our Club.

After 12 years of Varsity heartache, 11 successive losses against the other place (many featuring humiliating scorelines), and years of underachieving, Cambridge University Rugby League Football Club overcame the odds this year and ended our barren run at Varsity. With a Varsity win for the first time since 2009 and the closest second team Varsity this century all in one night, Grange Road was electric on Friday June 18th, as our year-long preparations – which featured on-field, strength and conditioning, and zoom training sessions – paid off in full. We believe our Varsity Match was also one of the highest attended Varsities of the year, testament to the student-led committee's tireless work behind the scenes to allow a crowd of around 400 to spectate.

2021 also marks the first time in a number of years that the Club has received Full Blue awards for the performance of some of its players. As well as this, a strong number of first-time rugby league players have progressed to a Half-Blue level this year and are now proud Green Lions and resident Hawks. This shows the Club's commitment to attracting and improving new players, even despite the Covid-induced training upheavals this year.

We are also a Club that celebrates its successes off the field. 2020-21 wasn't just the year to defy the odds and win our first Varsity Match in 12 years; it was a year where we built on our inclusive Club culture and improved our relationship with our Old Boys, creating an alumni membership system that will provide a platform for players past and present to connect and grow support for the Club moving forward. This growing connection was evident in the post-Varsity celebrations at the Hawks' Clubhouse, with a number of tomahawk jugs being bought by our Old Boys for a well-earned and long-awaited win.

After a year battling the uncertainties that Covid-19 provided for rugby and contact sport, we are extremely proud of our Club's achievements and believe we have a strong case to be recognised as Hawks' Team of the Year. This year's team has raised the profile of rugby league in Cambridge, breaking a 12-year streak in front of a full house at Grange Road. Not only should Team of the Year be awarded to a team that has excelled in performance and achievement, but it should be a key reminder of the history written that year, and our 2020-21 season will be marked as one of the most important in our 41-year history. Thank you for considering our nomination.

*Written by Elliott Stockdale (CURLFC)*