

News

Chloe Valdary

Page 2

Features

A Postlude to Hotchkiss Day

Page 8

Your Mind Matters: Embracing
Mental Health Awareness

Page 6

Opinions

Unhinged: A Recent
Note on Door Behavior

Page 2

Sports

Renata Makes History

Page 11

An Introduction to Intramural
Fall Crew: A New Chapter for
Fall Rowing

Page 7

Politics at Taft: How Dialogue Shapes the Community

LUCY RYAN
Staff Writer

Prior to the November 5th election, the race was deadlocked; there was uncertainty about who would win, and the course of action each candidate would take depending on the results. Across the country and within Taft, people have passionately vocalized and advocated for their candidate. As election day approached, political tensions ran high in the most contentious election of our lifetimes. One of the advantages of being at Taft is that we are an intentionally diverse community; for some of us, home is five minutes away, and for others, it's a 20-hour plane ride. Because of this, Taft has a broad spectrum of viewpoints and lived experiences.

In addition to the national election, Owen Grow '25 conducted a mock election in which members of the Taft community could "vote," for the candidate of their choice. A total of 226 community members voted, around 15% being students: Kamala Harris received 110 votes, Donald Trump received 90, and the Green Party received 6. These results can help illustrate the wide range of political beliefs at Taft, which are somewhat reflective of the country's political beliefs. Because of the school's politically active student body (which includes both Republican and Democrat clubs), Taft's consistent challenge in recent years has been keeping dialogue open, without crossing any lines. During an election cycle that is this heated, however, I have found myself wondering if we are doing enough to maintain a civil, but simultaneously constructive dialogue around American politics.

I asked the leaders of the Taft Republican and Democrat Clubs about their thoughts on Taft's political climate. Lane Kierstead '25, Co-head of the Taft Democrat Club, is hopeful about the direction the conversation is going: "[We] have had great joint meetings between

the Democrat and Republican Clubs." Lane talked about how the Clubs have worked together to foster "a really great learning environment where nobody is judged for their ideas," which is essential when fostering respectful political discourse. Ny'Ana Hauser '25, another Co-head of the Taft Democrat Club, shared similar sentiments to Lane Kierstead '25 when it came to the subject of maintaining a civil

community and return to normalcy quickly. One advantage she noted was her close relationships with Taft Republican Club Co-heads Bolen MacKellar '25 and Reily Pascale '25, and how being good friends with them has allowed the two clubs to initiate difficult conversations that may not have been had previously. Reiley said that these conversations have been especially valuable during this election season and that

their ability to "agree to disagree" is one of their strengths. Although the open conversation around politics has been promising, more work still needs to be done to ensure Taft students are fully informed about American politics. Reiley noted that although speakers across the political spectrum are critical to facilitating political dialogues, Taft students need an unbiased education on conservatism and liberalism. She also vocalized that the Taft curriculum needs to be more open-minded and allow space for a two-sided discussion, and how the community could benefit from a more open and honest dialogue about the realities of the election. Bolen MacKellar '25, shared a similar sentiment when it came to the idea of broadening the ideologies of our speakers: "I hope that through these conversations Taft can also realize there is a real lack of conservative viewpoints at the school and encourage equal time from both sides in order for every student to form an educated opinion."

Although America's political climate will undoubtedly be fraught with challenges in the months following the election, it is necessary to be able to put political

differences behind us and remember that politics is not synonymous with character. Lane Kierstead '25 put it best when he said that, even though it may feel like it, "politics isn't everything." Politics shouldn't determine your relationships but rather broaden your understanding of the Taft Community.



Photo Courtesy of Courtney Shanley.

discourse. She went on to talk about how for students at Taft, the main issues in this election are just as relevant to the Taft community as they would be to any other. When I asked her about the community's response to the election, she noted that there may be some uncomfortable tension for a few days. However, she is confident that Taft will remain undivided as a

Chloe Valdary’s Theory of Enchantment: How We Can Make Taft More Inclusive

CHELSEA SOETEMO
Staff Writer

Nearing the end of October, speaker Chloe Valdary enchanted the Taft community with a singalong to “Human” by OneRepublic, instantly expelling the Tuesday morning drowsiness. Mr. Becker says it was a dream to see everyone singing and clapping together, even if Ms. Valdary had unfortunately overestimated our ability to clap on beat. Nonetheless, the song “Human” proposes a valuable question: how does it feel to be human?

Chloe Valdary is the esteemed founder of Theory of Enchantment, a coaching company that guides people to have healthy relationships with themselves, which is essential to having healthy relationships with others. To answer the question posed earlier, being human is complex and messy. Referencing the yin-yang symbol, Ms. Valdary analyzes that “there is always light in darkness, and darkness in light.” Nothing is purely light or dark, and no one is strictly good or bad. As human beings, we have to accept the ambivalence of our nature.

During her speech, Chloe Valdary invited the student body to participate in the “Who Am I?” activity. Everyone turned to their Bingham buddies and spent three minutes describing themselves and expressing gratitude for both positive and negative aspects of themselves. An example of this is saying, “I am sometimes hard-working, and I am sometimes lazy. I accept and give thanks for that.” She recommends doing this exercise regularly to accept yourself as a complicated, volatile, whole human and achieve a state of enchantment.

Only after you accept the shameful parts of yourself can you accept those parts of others. Echoing our previous speaker, David Brooks, Chloe Valdary reinforces that “being deeply seen and seeing others deeply” is the key to building a community of inclusion and belonging. At Taft, this goal is synonymous with that of our many alliances.

One of Black Alliance’s heads, Teni Arole ‘26, hopes to raise awareness surrounding Black history and culture. Black Alliance



holds numerous events, including trivia, the game of life, and the dissection of black music. She emphasizes that everyone is welcome to participate and encourages students to try new things and show their love and support for their fellow Tafties. Joining alliances and participating in their events is a great way to learn more about different cultures and see the people around you even more deeply. Black Alliance is also looking to expand its board of members soon, which is an exciting opportunity for students who want to get more involved!

As we all know, Taft has always put a big emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Members of HONG, Taft’s Chinese Alliance, appreciate this but long for some Asian representation in our school. As an alliance, they welcome everyone to activities like karaoke, Lunar New Year activities, and the Chinese version of the game Mafia. However, their efforts alone are not enough. They were hoping to see Asian speakers invited and Asian Heritage Month celebrated, or at least acknowledged last

Spring at Taft, but were left disappointed. Another hurtful instance they recalled was when a group of participants at one of their gatherings kept talking over them and disrupting their activity. Their actions not only disrespected the activity’s organizers but also their culture, which they were hoping to share through the activity. Although this is all frustrating, HONG trusts that Taft will strive to show more appreciation and respect for Chinese and other Asian cultures.

We all want Taft to be an inclusive space where everyone feels they belong. Let this be a reminder to play your part in that! The next time you get the chance, be curious and ask someone about their culture, religion, or home country, or learn something new at one of the alliance events. Of course, kindness and respect go without saying. Stay open-minded and, as Chloe Valdary stresses, “treat others like the complex human beings they are.”

Photo Courtesy of Robert Falcetti.

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HAVE OPINIONS?

THE PAPYRUS EDITORS
ENCOURAGE READERS’
REACTION TO THE
CONTENT OF THE
NEWSPAPER. TELL US
HOW YOU FEEL!

The Senior Secret

PARKER OSBORNE
Contributor

It is no secret that seniors notoriously keep their college application process hidden. Since my sophomore year, I have witnessed the unwritten rule not to ask where someone is applying. As juniors, my friends and I agreed not to participate in this trend, yet as we are in the midst of application chaos, the class of 2025 continues to carry on the long-standing tradition of not discussing our college lists.

Students speculate that sharing college lists lowers their chances of being accepted, as it may tempt others to apply to the same school, but I don't think that is truly why people do it. I think the pure reason why we do not share where we are applying is because of the competitiveness in each of us Rhinos. With the harsh academic and athletic culture of Taft, there is a desire ingrained in us to prove ourselves to be the best. Are we ashamed of getting rejected from our dream school? Are we self-conscious about the schools we are applying to? Is someone going to think the schools we are applying to are too much of a "reach"?

I'm certainly not immune to the stress this process invokes; it is undoubtedly an overwhelming amount of work. From achieving ideal SAT/ACT scores, writing an inhumane amount of essays, and consistently meeting with one (or multiple) college counselors, it often feels like a never-ending circus. We forget, however, that we are all doing this process at the same time. So why not lift each other up? Why not congratulate our friends when they get accepted to their ED or support them when they get rejected? Statistically speaking, we are all bound to get rejected from at least one school; at one point or another, we will experience the gut-wrenching letter that starts with "We regret to inform you...". Instead of pretending that this is a unique hit to our ego, we should recognize we will all struggle; we all will be disappointed and rejected, if not now, then later in life. We have a rare opportunity to form deeper and more vulnerable relationships with our peers through the shared struggle and triumph that occurs within this process. Don't miss out on the ability to struggle with your friends.

This problem is not only rooted in Watertown; the larger college applications system itself seems to set us up to fail. We are pitted against each other and forced to compete for the same limited number of spots at every school. I truly believe that deep down we all want to be supportive. My real question is, why does this process bring out characteristics we don't normally see in each other? What can we do to move towards collaboration and away from competition in a system that deems us rivals at a time when stakes feel so high?

We are products of a culture that promotes high-achieving success over impactful relationships, so I urge you to break this cycle of secrecy. Talk openly about where you're applying; share in each other's stress and excitement. Remember seniors, we have roughly five and a half months together, so let's not waste energy keeping secrets from our peers. What is not a secret is my running college prediction list, so why not share where you are really applying? At least so my spreadsheet will be more accurate.



Photos Courtesy of Robert Falcetti.

Taft Papyrus

The official student newspaper of the Taft School, est. 1893 CXXVIII

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The Papyrus is run by students at the Taft School in Watertown, Connecticut.

Founded in 1893 and issued periodically throughout the school year, The Papyrus is devoted to the ideas and interests of the students, faculty, staff, alumni, and friends of the Taft School. Since 2020, our newspaper has published content online (taftpapyrus.org).

Unhinged: A Recent Note on Door Behavior

ALLISON PALMER
News Editor

Dearest doors,

I think we need to have a talk about our relationship... it's not me, it's you. Lately, I feel like I'm the only one putting in the effort; I mean, opening that Wu door engages every muscle in my back, my heart rate elevates a few beats, and I have to brace my feet in anticipation of your weight. You never try to help; in fact, you often make my day much worse. Don't even get me started on when we get other elements involved - I know way too many people who have fallen victim to your infamous Wu rain puddle and entered math class disgruntled and damp from your inaccessibility. Hundreds of people pass through you daily, and because you refuse to cooperate with others, the already slow-moving Wu train makes it almost impossible to make it to a third-floor class on time.

I'm not only mad about you, Wu doors; I have a bone to pick with main building as well. Picture this: it's a freezing, dark morning in February, and all I want is a nice steaming cup of coffee. So, as I trek across Mac Quad and prepare to greet you, instead of us having a nice interaction, all you do is shock me to my core. When my hand touches your handle I'm pretty sure my internal body temperature lowers by at least a few degrees, and I'm stuck shivering for the next few minutes. I'm not sure if this issue between you and I is caused by a lack of communication, but I am sure that something needs to change, and fast.

I've saved my worst gripe for last: Congdon doors. As a three year resident of Congdon, you, front door, and I have finally been able to work something out. But, for those who don't know you as well, there is almost always constant pulling, tugging, and multiple fob scans to attempt to open you. I know you're sensitive and can only be opened very carefully, but your stubbornness inhibits people from getting to their rooms. Unfortunately, the problems don't stop there. I know that you, Congdon doors, have been conspiring against us residents: I exert myself just to get into the building after a long day, only to get to my room to find my door has been mysteriously locked for no apparent reason. You make me involve a third party (Campus Safety) to resolve our issues - now that's just petty. Campus Safety is an integral part of our community, so maybe you should take some notes, and if you have a problem with me, don't make me call someone else to get you to move out of my way.

I don't want you to take this the wrong way. I still want to work with you, but I think you need to hear this: doors, something really has to change. The truth is, I shouldn't have to think about you as much as I do, and these issues you've been causing me have really been putting a lot of



Photo Courtesy of Robert A.M. Stern Architects.

unnecessary stress on me. Maybe it would be best for both of us just to take a break for a bit. You know, Thanksgiving is coming up, so perhaps we can just take some time to reflect, and we can revisit the status of our relationship after I get back to campus. But for now, I'm done.

Sincerely,
Allison Palmer

HOTCHKISS DAY

FINAL SCORES - VARSITY SPORTS

21 - 19
TAFT HOTCHKISS

FOOTBALL

7 - 1
TAFT HOTCHKISS

BOYS' SOCCER

3 - 2
TAFT HOTCHKISS

GIRLS' SOCCER

0 - 3
TAFT HOTCHKISS

VOLLEYBALL

2 - 3
TAFT HOTCHKISS

FIELD HOCKEY



Dear Horace...

LUCY RYAN
Staff Writer

Dear Horace...
When did Taft get so boring?
Dear Discouraged Reader,
Rather than say Taft has gotten boring, I would suggest that the people here are the ones who have gotten boring. If you think that things are getting boring, you should do something people will talk about! The gossip cycle at Taft is in constant rotation, so trust me, everyone will forget about it in two weeks; in the meantime, you will have done everyone a service by providing something to talk about.

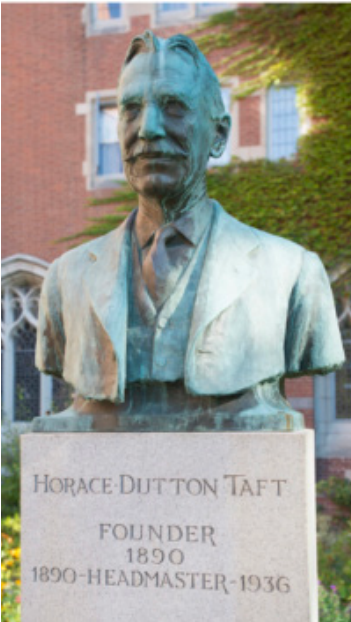


Photo courtesy of taftschoool.org

Dear Horace...
Why is Prentice always closed?
Dear Upperclassmen,
I sympathize with your struggle. If sitting in Laube brings back unfortunate memories from your freshman fall, I suggest sitting in East. Or better yet, skip lunch altogether and sit on the underclassmen-free left side of the jig.

Dear Horace,
Why is it 75 degrees in November?
Dear Climate-Conscious Taftie,
Yes, although it is admittedly strange that the temperature in Wassertown has felt a little too much like Miami, I am not complaining. When it's 18 degrees and you are trapped outside because you lost your fob back in October, you will be wishing that we pumped more CO2 into the atmosphere. I am fine with buying my grandchildren SPF 600 if it means I can wear mini skirts in February. Also, who wouldn't want their summer tan in the middle of November?

Dear Horace,
When is the appropriate time to start celebrating Christmas?
Dear Holiday Enthusiast,
Personally, I start listening to Christmas music in July. It is never too early to throw on "Last Christmas" and try to escape the fact that Taft winter is quickly approaching. I would like to see Christmas trees and lights pre-Thanksgiving, thank you very much. And if I hear any of this "Christmas starts after Black Friday" nonsense, I will be blasting my carols a little louder.

Dear Horace,
Why has assembly gotten so long?
Dear Reader Who Just Wanted Their Jig Coffee Before Long Block,
I mean this is the nicest way possible: If you are announcing a club meeting or insignificant sporting event, an email will suffice. If you really need to make an announcement, please make it short and sweet (unless you are Daniel). All of these extra flourishes are getting unnecessary.

Need New Books?

November Book Recs

ELEANOR PURICELLI
Staff Writer

***I'm Glad My Mom Died* - Jeannette McCurdy**
I'm Glad My Mom Died is a memoir by Nickelodeon star Jeannette McCurdy about growing up a childhood actress while dealing with her overbearing mother. Jeannette was only six when she was introduced into the acting world, and since then, her life has never been the same. Her mother insisted that she become a star, and so Jeannette listened to her mother's wishes. She soon fell into the world of calorie counting and eating disorders which led to anxiety and embarrassment. It wasn't until Jeannette's mom died from cancer that she could finally quit acting and begin her journey of recovery. Told through heartbreak and humor, *I'm Glad My Mom Died* is a story of resiliency that readers will not want to miss.

***Beautiful World, Where Are You* - Sally Rooney**
Sally Rooney's *Beautiful World, Where Are You* follows four characters—Alicia, Felix, Eileen, and Simon— who navigate the struggles of love, friendship, and wellbeing. Alicia, a novelist, meets Felix, and the two travel together to Rome. Meanwhile, Alicia's best friend, Eileen, attempts to revive her relationship with Simon, her childhood friend. Through their struggles of vulnerability and relationships, the four worry about their lives and what the future holds. If you're looking for a story about the value of believing in the world, *Beautiful World, Where Are You* is the perfect novel for you.

***Blue Sisters* - Coco Mellors**
Blue Sisters by Coco Mellors tells the story of the Blue sisters, who are all remarkable yet vastly different. Avery, the eldest, is a recovering addict turned lawyer living in London, Bonnie lives in Los Angeles working as a bouncer, and Lucky, the youngest sister, models in Paris, struggling to find her place in adulthood. They also had a sister, Nicky, who unexpectedly died, leaving the other three devastated. As the sisters struggle with recovery and grief, they must return to their New York home before their childhood home is sold. However, coming home is much more difficult than the Blue sisters anticipated. *Blue Sisters* is a story about grief, secrets, and the importance of finding strength within your family.

Your Mind Matters: Embracing Mental Health Awareness at Taft

ALEX WERNER
Staff Writer

Navigating the notoriously tricky teen years away from home and family, while juggling five activities on top of a full class load and sports, is a clear recipe for feeling stressed, overwhelmed, and exhausted at times. All these problems can be described as harmful to one's "mental health." However, these frequent waves of stress that the typical Taft student faces are often followed by a moment of great relief and peace once the giant "submit" button finally changes to "submitted." This experience, however, is not comparable to the persistent battle that many struggling with mental health have to fight daily; some problems don't simply fade away with the click of a button.

October was filled with important dates aimed at raising awareness of mental health struggles: Mental Health Awareness Week, World Mental Health Day, ADHD Awareness Month, and National Disability Employment Awareness Month. Closer to home, a highlight was The Taft Dining Instagram account's celebration of Chef Kaden, a valued member of our community. Chef Kaden, who is on the autism spectrum, brings skill and passion to all the delicious meals he helps our dining services prepare. His contributions, alongside all other members of the dining hall staff with disabilities, underscore the strength that diversity brings to our community and are a key step toward reducing the stigma often associated with disabilities and mental health in the workplace.

On campus, the Every Mind Matters club actively promotes mental health awareness through discussions and on-campus events, including Mellow Fest and speed dating. Moreover, they are currently planning an open discussion to gather community suggestions for improving mental health on campus. Co-head Brady Morris '25 highlights a paramount goal for EMM: to facilitate student interactions regarding mental health systems. He says, "Taft has the resources, but the students need to learn how to use them. [This can include learning] how to use their friends and faculty; everyone here is meant to help you." Co-head Karina Thomas '25 also shared her motivations for joining the club, advocating for mental health at Taft and expressing that:

"My freshman year here was really tough as I was dealing with various mental health issues. Valeria, [the founder of the

club,] did not know me, yet showed kindness in a moment when I felt helpless. She ate lunch with me and made me feel heard as we bonded over destigmatizing mental health on campus. She told me more about EMM, so when I heard about Mellow Fest, I was so eager to go and meet the other club members. It was so refreshing to be around people as passionate about mental health as I was, and I immediately knew that this was a club I wanted to be a part of."

While EMM has helped Taft make strides in its appreciation of mental health issues, there is always room for improvement. As Karina mentions:

"This year, we had speakers like David Brooks and Jonathan Haidt preach to us about anxiety and empathy, which I think is a step in the right direction; however, Taft needs to emphasize mental health more. The school

On another note, our focus on mental health at Taft should not fade with October. In the U.S., around 6 million men battle depression each year, yet many go undiagnosed, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America. Societal expectations often place pressure on men to suppress "weak" emotions, reinforcing harmful ideas of toxic masculinity. These all suppress vital discussions regarding mental health and make it harder for men to seek help, especially in comparison to women. According to the Health Assured Organisation, one in five women, compared with one in eight men, have a mental disorder, and this number is on the rise.

In November men are able to fight these stereotypes with Movember. This global initiative promotes men's health by encouraging them to grow mustaches, an attention-grabbing symbol that can spark discussion on these essential yet frequently neglected topics. At Taft, Xander Chatterjee '25, Mr. Perez, and Mr. Rivenburgh have invited the Taft community to join their Taft School Movember group, promoting open conversations and encouraging our community to embrace mental wellness.

If Brady and Karina's ideas resonate with you, getting involved with student-led clubs like EMM is the perfect opportunity to ensure we build a community where everyone feels empowered to support one another. Furthermore, when speakers like those mentioned above discuss prevalent statistics and issues regarding mental health in Bingham, instead of using

the forty minutes to catch up on sleep, take the time to listen. Even if mental health may not be a personal struggle, it is both an ever-increasing issue and especially pervasive among boarding school communities. We must equip ourselves with the necessary information and strategies to help loved ones who may be struggling before it is too late. Only by taking advantage of the efforts, celebrations, and awareness opportunities at Taft can we foster open dialogue, destigmatize mental health, and connect. As a final note, don't forget to compliment your male companions on the development of their staches for both being supportive community members and because, for some, it sure does take a lot of work!



Photos courtesy of Every Mind Matters

needs to emphasize that we have counselors and possibly have question boxes regarding what to do in various mental health situations. We should normalize talking about Eating Disorders, Anxiety, Depression, etc. because I guarantee we would be a happier community if we spoke about such issues more openly, in a non-triggering way, so we feel supported at Taft."

Karina then went on to discuss the importance of sleep - which I'm sure we can all appreciate - and proposed the interesting idea of a mental health day option for students. If discussions surrounding important topics like this one resonate with you, EMM encourages all students to apply for the club when the time comes.

PAP POLL

The Pap Poll was a staple of the Papyrus in the 90s and we’re here to bring it back! In each Pap Poll, one question is asked to a random group of students to gauge a variety of honest opinions on the subject.

Do you think you will marry someone from Taft?



Anna Rossi ‘27 - maybe (I’m in love with Elle McCauley)



Elle McCauley ‘25 - like kinda it’s on the dl (I’m in love with Anna Rossi)



Mehar Trehan ‘26 - I’m possibly concussed so nothing I say can be used against me, but yes.



Rue Brown ‘27 - Yes. Hope Phelps.



Joaquin Manon ‘25 - Yes, yeah. I think I would. We have some nice girls, and I would be really lucky to be with one of them.



Jesse Peck ‘25 - No, I don’t think so. I think there’s a bigger pond than the Taft pond.

Photos courtesy of The Taft School

November Horoscopes

IZZY READ
Editor-in-Chief

Libra (September 23 - October 22)

You have been thinking way too much. Take a deep breath, look around, and trust that everything will work out. Remember that the best things happen when we are least expecting it!

Scorpio (October 23 - November 21)

It’s Scorpio season! Take this as an excuse to do something for yourself. Treat yourself to your favorite food, and finally binge watch that show you have been dying to see.

Sagittarius (November 22 - December 21)

It is time to make that decision you have been pushing off. It is okay to think things through, but there comes a time when you need to make up your mind.

Capricorn (December 22 - January 19)

Try to find a balance between work and fun---you can get pretty caught up. In the words of Ferris Bueller, “Life moves pretty fast. If you don’t stop to look around once in a while, you could miss it.”

Aquarius (January 20 - February 18)

You have a secret admirer! Expect them to come your way soon...perhaps there will be a meet-cute on Wu train?

Pisces (February 19 - March 20)

Take some time to reflect. Life can get pretty confusing, so take some time to make sure you have your priorities straight, and that you are doing what’s best for you in your life.

Aries (March 21 - April 19)

Watch your back...someone is going to steal your food at the delivery bench! Make sure to get there at the same time as your delivery person. Also, as a heads up to any prospective food thieves, cameras have reportedly been installed near the delivery station...

Taurus (April 20 - May 20)

Take that risk! Text them! Apply for that position! Make that announcement! The universe is on your side, so take that leap of faith!

Gemini (May 21 - June 20)

Call your parent, grandparent, sibling, cousin, home friend, or that person from outside of Taft. They would love to hear from you, and miss you so much.

Cancer (June 21 - July 22)

You are being immature. Clean up your act; people will only give you the benefit of the doubt for so long.

Leo (July 23 - August 22)

Listen to some new music! Things are getting old.

Virgo (August 23 - September 22)

Be a bit more considerate of yourself, and others. It’s a stressful time of year, so remember to love yourself and the people around you.

A Postlude to Hotchkiss Day (and Its History)

VERONICA ANTOV

Staff Writer

It's the time of the year to procure your crimson tutus, emblazoned sweatpants, and chalky face paints in preparation for displaying your Taft pride, especially since this year's Hotchkiss Day is on our home turf. Also, did you know that Hotchkiss Day is a relatively young tradition in Taft's history? Here's something of a guide to the school holiday, replete with the origin story of our rivalry and the culmination of the fall sports season.

It has previously been said in Taft media that the first time Taft and Hotchkiss competed in an athletic competition against each other was in 1946, the year when both joined the New England Preparatory School Athletic Council (colloquially known by its abbreviation, NEPSAC) league. However, I was able to find a *New York Times* mention from October of 1938 already establishing the schools as rivals: suitably titled "Hotchkiss and Taft Rivals." The publication announces a football game on the Taft campus, a "feature attraction" of the preparatory school sports scene. Taft's rivalry with Hotchkiss can be traced even farther back to circa 1922, as detailed on Taft's website. Taft's football field was bestowed by Elsie Rockefeller in 1922, and in a letter about it to Mr. Taft, she wrote, "They tell me Hotchkiss has a much better field—why can't we have just as good a one?" Back then, Taft and Hotchkiss were meant to prepare the whole boy for success in university; in their infancy, a vast majority of each graduating class matriculated to Yale.

But Taft and Hotchkiss didn't become each other's principal competitors until much later. Originally, Hotchkiss considered its rivals to be Hill and Kent. Hill and Hotchkiss were foes for some time in the earlier half of the 20th century, and then Kent was Hotchkiss's rival until the 1970s. However, Kent's girls' athletics programs were still being developed, even though the school became co-ed about ten years earlier than Taft, in 1959. Meanwhile,



Photo Courtesy of Mr. Falcetti

Taft's proximity made us an option, and the fortitude of our girls' athletics teams was more comparable to that of Hotchkiss. Therefore, Hotchkiss gradually transitioned to considering Taft as its athletic rival because we were more equitably matched in our offerings. Taft-Hotchkiss Day was finally established in 1980 as an interscholastic competition of nearly all of the two schools' fall sports teams (except for the cross country team, whose New Englands coincide with the event). The first-ever Hotchkiss Day was held at Taft on Fathers' Day (in mid-November), wherein Taft dads came to be impressed by the most contentious games of the year. Fathers' Day, whose events actually spanned an entire weekend, was also

simply called The Kiss. The day was also an opportune time for showing the fall play, dance and song performances, and the teacher and advisor meetings we know all too well, but the main attractions were incontrovertibly the games. In an anticipatory *Papyrus* article from that year, a student writes that he "fully expects to mercilessly humiliate" Hotchkiss in front of the parents and guests.

As I am writing this article, Hotchkiss Day is approaching, but by the time it hits the stands, Hotchkiss Day will have passed. So, rather than advising you on how to behave, I urge you to reflect on the role you played in all this, either as an athlete or as a fan. Our rivalry with Hotchkiss is longstanding and therefore cordial, as counterintuitive as that might sound; remember that the spirit of sportsmanship we contribute determines the spirit of the whole event. In his book called *Mr. Taft's School*, late faculty member Mr. Lovelace remarks on the success of sports teams, saying that they "do a great deal to help create a school spirit that carries over into virtually every other school activity." Hotchkiss Day is a brilliant opportunity to show your love for Taft, but remember not to let your ardor get the best of you: rivalry can turn into tribalism, and we've seen this happen in previous years. I won't elaborate on that, though, because I've written enough of a historical account for one article. And regardless of the outcome of Hotchkiss Day, I can respectfully say that Taft is still superior. Go Big Red!

November Crossword

CHELSEA SOETEMO

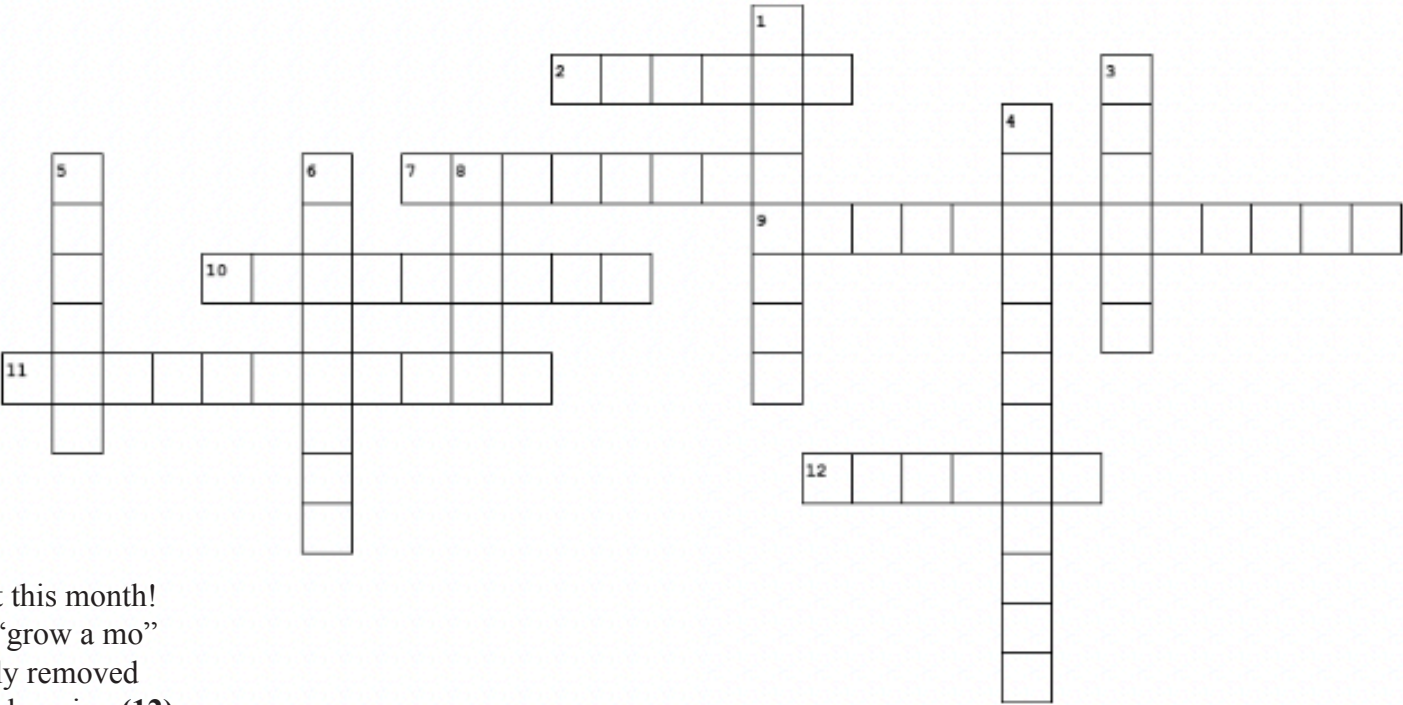
Staff Writer

Down:

(1) Rhinos are better than ____ (3) Mr. Taft's middle name (4) Can't wait for ____ (5) November 14 is national ____ day (6) The tiny mammal we often see around campus (8) Latest water bottle micro-trend

Across:

(2) Musical movie that is coming out this month! (7) Campaign known for the phrase "grow a mo" (9) Flower of the month (10) Recently removed from Potter's Pond (11) A day to go shopping (12) What does Mr. LaCasse always wear?



Dear Reader: An Overview of The Eras Tour

ELEANOR PURICELLI & HOLLY RICHARD
Staff Writers

“It’s been a long time coming...” After ending her reputation stadium tour in 2018, Taylor Swift returned to the stage in March 2023, beginning the world’s highest-grossing tour, The Eras Tour. The show has run rain or shine for over three and a half hours and spans 11 “eras” of music, dating back to when Swift was 16. Featuring 42 songs and two acoustic surprise songs, Swifties of all ages can enjoy the various traditions of The Eras Tour.

Swift’s concert is not what you expect. If you had the chance to beat “The Great War” on Ticketmaster, the concerts are a fun night of singing, sparkles, and dancing. Yet, Swift ensures that each show, regardless of location or date, is unique and unforgettable. Spanning 11 albums, she dedicates costumes of her choice to each album’s “era.” She has multiple outfits per era, 107 total, so there isn’t a single show with the same lineup. Swift strategically matches her outfits to hint at announcements for new albums, giving Swifties an idea of what might be revealed later in the show. For example, the night of her announcement of *1989* (Taylor’s Version), Swift wore three new blue-colored outfits, the color associated with *1989*, before announcing its rerecording during the acoustic set. Speaking of the acoustic set, Swift performs one guitar and one piano surprise alone with no backing vocals or band. She picks songs not included on the setlist to perform, so fans have the opportunity to hear less popular songs that may be a fan favorite. With the recent addition of mashups, Swifties now have the opportunity to hear at least three songs per acoustic set. Swift fans have also created new traditions out of the concert, ranging from trading friendship bracelets with other Swifties, crafting bedazzled Taylor Swift-inspired outfits, and chanting unofficial lyrics during the concert (like singing “you forgive, you forget, but you never let it go” during “Bad Blood”). The individuality of each show performed on The Eras Tour draws in fans

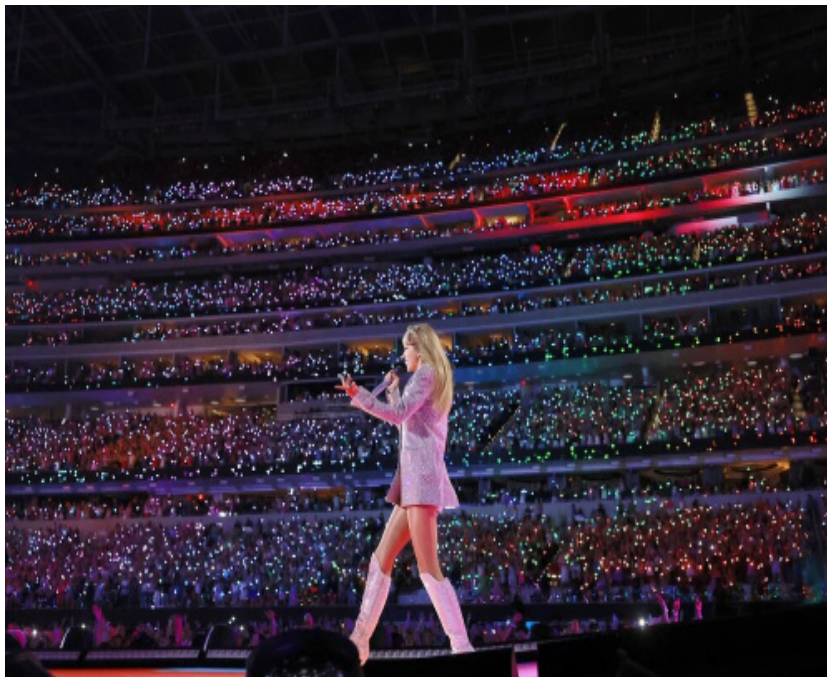


Image courtesy of The New Yorker

from around the world, crossing five continents, 22 countries, and 19 U.S. states.

Throughout the past two years of touring, Swift has made numerous adjustments to the show’s setlist. From her first show in Glendale to closing night in Vancouver, many new outfits, songs, special guests, and albums have been debuted. Last May, Swift announced the rerecording of her third studio album, *Speak Now*, during her acoustic set in Nashville. Fans in attendance and watching via live-stream were ecstatic to know that “Taylor’s Version” would soon be on streaming. Similarly, on the closing night of the U.S. leg in Los Angeles, she revealed that *1989* (Taylor’s Version) would soon be released. These albums allow Taylor to own her songs instead of her old record label. Between her Asian and European leg of The Eras Tour, Swift dropped her 11th studio album, *The Tortured Poets Department*. With the new album came the addition of seven songs to the setlist, which all Swifties were excited to see. While the announcement of the three recordings is enticing, Swift also keeps attendees on their toes by welcoming varying special guests on stage. From adding “Nothing New” and “no body, no crime” to the setlist with her openers Phoebe Bridgers and HAIM, to bringing Gracie Abrams and Sabrina Carpenter out in the acoustic set, and even having her boyfriend, Kansas City Chiefs player Travis Kelce, join as a backup dancer in London, Swifties are thrilled when a familiar face joins in with Swift. Through the evolution of The Eras Tour setlist over the nearly 150 shows, Swifties hope to see a special announcement, guest, or new outfit at every show.

Now that The Eras Tour has begun its final shows, Swifties are beginning to reminisce on their show, through photos, videos, and live streams. If you’re anything like the 10.1 million who have had the chance to attend the tour, we hope you “make the friendship bracelets, take the moment and taste it.”

The Hungriest Club on Campus: Red Plate Society

CHRISTIAN YEUNG & SEAN LIAO
Opinions Editor & Staff Writer

If you were on the brick road on Parents Weekend, you most likely would’ve seen us selling our cookbook, *Cooked: Recipes from the Dorms*. It was the hard work of over six months, featuring recipes we’ve made and perfected over the years. But who are we? You might ask. Well, we’re the Red Plate Society. Sure. We do sound like



Illustration courtesy of Julianne Jin ‘24

an elitist communist group selling cutlery. But I assure you we (Christian Yeung ‘25, Nam Dao ‘25, and Sean Liao ‘25) also sometimes cook. Really, we’re just three students who love food and during our junior year winter and spring, sacrificed precious studying time to cook, eat, and occasionally share food. Disclaimer: we have not

set off any of the fire alarms. We are not the popcorn burners nor waterless Kraft mac and cheese makers. Please direct all of those complaints to the dear lower classmen of HDT.

Our journey started on a normal Sunday morning when the fragrant smell of mapo tofu lured Nam and Sean, who were on their way to brunch, into the HDT 2 common room. There, Christian was “cooking” something he had brought from home: a few packs of instant mapo tofu and instant rice. Clearly, we’ve come a long way from instant meals. Since then, we’ve been cooking every Sunday when omelets and toast just don’t do it anymore. Every weekend we drew the attention of similar minded students on HDT4, and swarms of people wanted a bite of whatever we were cooking. Running out of funds, and seeing an opportunity, we decided to make it official and turn it into the club. Sean was strongly attracted to the profits we could make if we overcharged for our food, being the future business major, but alas, we had to go non-profit. Personal finances had to wait, and instead, we were armed with dorm funds to cook whatever we wished. Banh mi, ramen, braised pork rice: you name it, we made it. Well. More like we named it and we made it.

Then, over the summer and our already chaotic Senior fall, we decided to make a cookbook, to immortalize our kitchen follies. Sold to the many bored parents, having seen all the hoodies, Dunkin’ Donuts, and raffles, the cookbook immediately got their attention. Public health and

chess club be damned, cookbooks were the real winners on Family Weekend.

Now, as we’re heading into another bleak winter, we will be trying to cook for a few more



Image courtesy of Christian Yeung ‘25

dorms to fend off the cold and boredom. If you don’t want to spend another \$30 on Saturday for some mid McDonalds, (plus tax and tip), come find us and you’ll get some free food on behalf of whatever dorm we’re cooking in. Tips are appreciated, however, and that may or may not buy you seconds and thirds. And our eternal gratitude.

Also, we’ve recently overheard that the Dining Hall may or may not be hosting a Red Plate Society dinner in February. You read it here first, but perhaps a multi-course dinner will be making an appearance soon for the lovebirds at Taft.

A Sublime Evening: Taft's Music for a While Concert

STEVEN ZHANG
Staff Writer

Walking into the dimly candle-lit hall of Woodward Chapel, you gaze at a crowd of silver-haired concert-goers and members of Taft's musical ensembles sitting in rows and rows of spruce pews. Grabbing a program from the ushers, you quietly take a seat and wait for the music to begin. This is what I experienced on Friday, October 25th, as a first-time attendant of

Taft's Music for a While concert series. Without any expectations or preconceptions, I walked in blindly and walked out genuinely moved by what followed.

The roots of Taft's Music for a While can be traced to a series organized by Mr. Bruce Fifer called "Thursday is a Work of Art" in the fall of

1996, which was then renamed and is what "sets Taft apart as a school," according to Mr. Fifer. The program offers free-of-charge performances featuring world-class musicians from around the world to both Taft students and the general public. This time around, Taft welcomed pianist Andrew Armstrong, pianist; Abigél Králik, violinist; and Mathis Rochat, violist to Woodward Chapel with a dynamic and diverse program featuring composers such as Mozart, Gershwin, Brahms, and Bartok.

The concert began with Mozart's *Duo in G Major* for violin and viola, a brightly melodic piece that was surprising in how it was distinct from Mozart's usual style. Artists Králik and Rochat blended and balanced the voices of both instruments beautifully in the second movement *Adagio*, knowing when to complement and compromise in each passage. The following *Rondeau, Allegro* was an energetic departure characterized by capricious sixteenth notes, delicate ornamentations, and double-stop chords that resonated all throughout the hall.

William Grant Still's piano solo *3 Visions* performed by Andrew Armstrong was arguably the highlight of the concert — part of why can certainly be attributed to Armstrong's distinctly congenial demeanor as he previewed the piece talking directly to the audience, showing great erudition and musicianship. He explained that the first movement, *Dark Horsemen*, would be 90 seconds of pure chaos, but the second movement, *Summerland*, would be like "a slice of heaven." And a slice of heaven it was. After a cacophony of noisy, dissonant chords and perplexing, percussive melodies came a transfixing moment right between the final chord of the first movement and the beginning of the second movement: Armstrong recoiled

from his seat and lifted his hands up and for a split second, all the built-up tension was suspended mid-air and every single person in the audience seemingly held their breath. This volta gave way to an ethereal and airy melody that floated from the soundboard of the Steinway down the stage and throughout the pews.

The rest of the program was equally as enchanting —

Armstrong played Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* for piano solo (as well as a humorous rendition of the iconic clarinet opening solo) in a manner that can only be described as virtuosic. Rochat gave a nuanced interpretation of the second and fourth movements of Brahms' *Viola Sonata in*

F minor, using the rich, dark, and velvety tone unique to the viola, an instrument deserving of no less recognition than the violin. Following this, Králik brilliantly performed the third movement of Elgar's *Violin Sonata in E minor*, which featured demanding technique and precision. The program ended with Bartok's *Romanian Folk Dances for violin and piano*, a piece of personal significance to Abigél Králik, a Hungarian-American violinist who grew up learning and hearing the piece as a part of the standard violin repertoire.

In whole, the concert was a great success not just because of the extraordinary performances of the musicians or the standing ovations they elicited, but also how it exhibited classical music into an accessible narrative. Compared to all the other concerts I have attended, this iteration of Music for a While felt uniquely interactive due to both the intimate performance space and the passionate dialogue by the performers themselves. Many other students shared a similarly positive reaction: Louisa Prentice '26 was "pleasantly surprised," and Gavin Poon '26 recalled being exceptionally moved by the performance. As I walked out onto The Green, I was reminded of a quote poetically engraved on the grand piano in Potter's Gallery: "Music expresses that which cannot be said and on which it is impossible to be silent." Even the simple sound-waves produced by the friction of horsehair or the striking of a hammer on a string can elicit these vivid, transcendent emotions within us. What "cannot be said" through words has been conveyed in each stroke of the bow and each press of the keys in a sublime fashion. And that is evidently the product of each Music for a While concert: the sublime.



Image courtesy of Mr. Fifer

Player Spotlight: Renata Mercedes

ELLY OUELLETTE
Staff Writer

Starting towards the end of September and ending in mid-October, Taft’s very own Renata Mercedes ‘25 was preparing for and playing in the U-17 Women’s World Cup. Renata is a senior from the Dominican Republic and plays center back and center midfield for Taft girls varsity soccer. She is a captain of both the Dominican Republic team and the team here at Taft. This year, the tournament held an extra special meaning, as it was held in Renata’s home country, the Dominican Republic, where passionate fans showed up to cheer their national team on. For those of you who are not familiar with the structure of the World Cup, it begins with group stage play and then proceeds into the knockout stages. In the case of this U-17 World Cup, there were four groups with four teams in each. The top two teams from each group moved on to the quarter-finals and the winners of those games advanced to the semi-finals and so on: you get the gist.

Now, onto the play itself. The young DR team was in a group with Nigeria, Ecuador, and New Zealand. Unfortunately, the team came third in the group stage and narrowly missed qualification for the knockout rounds. However, this U-17 team’s performance and accomplishments have revealed a promising future for women’s soccer in the Dominican Republic. To start, Renata’s teammate, Yuleinis Brito, became the first goalscorer in a women’s World Cup match



Image courtesy of FIFA

for the DR in any age group. The team ended up tying New Zealand one to one, however, the euphoria from scoring felt like a win. As an added bonus, they got to celebrate with thousands of fans. Not to mention, at the team’s final match, a record-breaking 13,535 fans were present at what was the most attended match for any Dominican Republic National team. Renata describes the atmosphere in the Estadio Félix Sánchez stadium as a “once-in-a-lifetime experience” because of the support the crowd gave them. To Renata, this game was especially meaningful because, “Soccer has never been the main sport in the DR and to see that amount of support for a U-17 women’s soccer game, was incredible.” To add the icing to the cake, so to speak, Renata also received the Woman of the Match award for her performance in the game against Nigeria. Afterward, she celebrated with teammates and fans alike, and she even threw some keepsakes into the crowd.

At times we forget just how special our peers at Taft are. If you look up Renata’s name in any search engine, hundreds of photos and news articles appear. I mean, we are practically interacting with a celebrity every single day. Imagine if Alex Morgan or Abby Wambach walked into campus and simply sat in on classes, someone would most definitely ask them for an autograph or freak out. Renata has met and played against Morgan, so by default, she is at the same caliber of play and fame. If you see Renata in the hallways please ask her for a signed headshot or her shin guards, she gives those out too, but only if you are lucky.

Rafael Nadal’s Unexpected Retirement

ZOE CHIWESHE
Staff Writer

On October 10th, 2024, longtime tennis icon Rafael Nadal announced his retirement from the Association of Tennis Professionals (ATP) Tour, the most prestigious and competitive level of professional men’s tennis there is. Over the past two years, Nadal has endured numerous injuries which have limited his playing ability and affected his overall performance. Between an abdominal tear in 2022, and a more recent hip surgery in 2023, playing consistently and pain-free has been a challenge. In a video he posted on X (formerly known as Twitter), Nadal announced his retirement, saying “The reality is it has been some difficult years, these last two especially. I don’t think I have been able to play without limitations,” stressing how the physical state of his body has made maintaining his high-level of play very difficult. In this same video, Nadal closed by saying “... in this life, everything has a beginning and an end, and I think it’s the appropriate time to put an end to a career that has been long and much more successful than I could have ever imagined.”

Nadal’s professional career dates back as far as 2001, when he turned pro at the young age of 15. In the last 23 years, he has collected 22 Grand Slam titles, 14 of which were obtained at the French Open. He also claimed the No. 1 spot in ATP rankings for 209 weeks (equates to a little more than 4 years), with his longest streak being 52 weeks on top. In addition to his numerous accolades and days spent as the best tennis player in the world, Nadal also belongs to the “Big Three Rivalry” alongside two other popular players with equally as impressive track records: Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic. For years, these three have been in contention for the title of “Best Tennis Player of All Time,” and have even been compared to earlier male tennis legends like Andre Agassi and

Pete Sampras, who are also considered as the “GOATs”.

While inevitable, the announcement of Rafael Nadal’s retirement did in fact blindside many. Social media was flooded with mixed responses, most of which were understanding of the circumstances that pushed Nadal to his conclusion. However, there was backlash received by Nick Kyrgios, a known controversial player, who had said that Nadal was “crawling to the finish line”, implying that he was “obviously” struggling into retirement versus ending his career on a high note. Perceived as backhanded and insulting, Nadal enthusiasts were quick to “cancel” Kyrgios and his assertion, calling him a “disgrace to tennis” for his audacity to critique one of tennis’s most decorated figures of all time. Other players on the Tour gave their statements, including Jannik Sinner and fellow Spaniard Carlos Alcaraz, who currently rank number 1 and 2, respectively, on the ATP tour. Alcaraz expressed “He has been my idol since I started playing tennis. I look up to him. Proudly, thanks to him, I really wanted to become professional.” Sinner made his own tribute to Nadal: “We all saw how good he has been as a player and the lessons he taught us, the young players, how to behave on the court, how to handle situations on the court,” voicing the large impact that he has left on today’s generation of tennis. For years, Nadal’s presence on the Tour, both as an athlete and as a person, has been used as a model for many tennis players aspiring to reach the pro level. Nadal leaving the Tour could potentially prompt other long standing players to reassess where they are in their tennis careers, opening up the ATP to more young and fresh professionals. While his exit from pro tennis will most definitely be felt by many in the industry and across the world, Nadal’s legacy will remain and continue to inspire the future of tennis.

An Introduction to Intramural Fall Crew: A New Chapter for Taft Rowing

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Staff Writers

Picture this: It’s a stressful Tuesday afternoon, and you just submitted the paper you spent the last week laboring on. A wave of stress engulfs your mind as you think about everything you have yet to do, despite only being through a third of the week. But then you strap your feet into the boat shoes. You push off the dock, and the internal, crashing waves reduce to ripples. The warm sun reflects off your face, and a refreshing breeze delicately dances on your skin as you glide across the waters of beautiful Bantam Lake. Your stress melts as each stroke takes you and your fellow rowers further down the lake. While crew is available for all Tafties to participate in, sadly, only a few will take advantage of and experience the magic of an afternoon practice.



Images courtesy of Mr. Shotwell

Nevertheless, the team gathered nine rowers (seven returners and two novices) and two coxswains. Boys Crew Coach Mr. Aspholm stated the goal of this season was to “Give our athletes time to make progress and row for more time, as well as giving students more time to develop their skills and technical proficiency.” While there has not been racing against other schools, there has been significant competition within the team, including copious amounts of trash talk happening in and out of practice. Keeping to an intramural schedule, the team was able to row on Bantam three times a week and erg just one time a week. Still, each teammate’s hard work was evident in impressive time and speed improvements in the erg room. The team considered one of the major successes of this season to be the development of every rower, with a shout-out to the novices. Through the experience gained in the fall, they will be key contributors to Taft’s racing success in the spring.

The girls’ team has seen an outstanding turnout of novice rowers, numbering five out of nine fall participants. Each rower in this intimate group has proven willing to take a risk in trying something new and committed to making the consistent corrections and improvements that rowing demands. It may seem near impossible to learn how to row in a short fall season, especially as an intramural team only meeting four times a week; however, the girls’ team was gliding across the lake in no time. Dr. Shotwell highlighted “How hard it is for people who don’t row or coach to appreciate how exciting something like rowing by all eight, or rowing by all four is. But it’s so hard to row in a four, especially getting a four to row along together. Even if there is still a lot to correct, it’s really inspiring.” And the positive outcomes of the new season don’t end there; the girls participating in the fall intramural have worked hard and seen their effort pay off. Rowing techniques are improving, and times are dropping. However, the season has not been without challenges. But even when we sometimes did not have enough rowers to fill each seat of the boat, the boys’ team was ready to lend one of their skilled oarsmen - A big thank you to Leo, Ward, Sky, and Jeff!

As fall crew nears its end, and we take the time to reflect upon the season, Coaches Shotwell and Aspholm hope that “In a year or two, we could have a boat competing in the Head of the Charles,” one of the largest international regattas, which many fellow New England crew programs participate in. Looking forward to the spring, the next step for Taft Crew is their annual pre-season trip to Deland, Florida, which could certainly have its whole own article! Overall, both teams considered this season a successful precursor to the spring and are looking forward to a season packed with fast racing.

In hopes of providing both experienced rowers with off-season practice and novices with the chance to get a head start in learning the sport, the idea for an Intramural Crew season was born. Girls Crew Coach Dr. Shotwell recognizes that “If you look at programs which finish first through sixth place at New Englands, just about every crew has a fall program.” Despite the competitive benefits of implementing a fall season, Coaches Shotwell and Aspholms’ efforts to establish the intramural Fall Crew program have not come without obstacles. Dr. Shotwell recounts: “I’ve asked for years. I’ve made so many proposals, at least half a dozen times. [But] Mr. A and I felt like Mr. Becker was very enthusiastic about the possibilities of a rowing program and how it would contribute to the community. So we took our case to him and Mr. Dunn in the spring, and this is the result.” This fall, the athletic department is offering fall crew for the first time in Taft’s history.

Taft Boys Crew began their inaugural season with little fanfare. Learning of the season only a few days before school, there was little time for the rowers to prepare. None-

