

Lewis Mills crew to honor memory of teammate Kailey Prenoveau with new racing shells

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This fall, the Lewis Mills crew will be getting two new four-person racing shells in honor of Kailey Prenoveau, a former team member who died at 14 after being struck by a vehicle in August, 2021.

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The Lewis Mills Rowing Team rarely gets new boats. This fall, they'll be getting two new four-person racing shells in honor of [Kailey Prenoveau](#).

"Everybody is going to know about Kailey, present and future. She has made a permanent mark on this team," reflected Lewis Mills Rowing Coach Jared Fellows.

Prenoveau, 14, died after being struck by a vehicle in Harwinton on the night of Aug. 22, 2021. She was days away from beginning her sophomore year at Lewis Mills High School.

During her freshman year at Lewis Mills, Prenoveau quickly emerged as one of the best rowers on the team. She posted varsity times while just a freshman, and already displayed the potential to row in college. She was a leader on the team as well, constantly pushing her teammates to be the best version of themselves.

One day last year, Fellows sent the team out for a run during practice. He ran a distance behind them to ensure everyone was running. At one point, Fellows tried to catch up and pass the team, to show he was committed to the run as well. He passed everyone, except for Prenoveau.

Always sassy with a sense of humor, Prenoveau quipped to Fellows, "come on, I've been running longer than you, I've been up longer than you today, and I'm still outrunning you."

[That was the way Kailey lived](#). Fellows joked that "she put out 28 years of effort in her 14 years of life." She would wake up early for workouts, and channel any excessive energy into supporting her teammates. Her death rocked the team.

Fellows, a special education teacher at Lewis Mills, got a call from a parent on the rowing team telling him about Kailey's death while pulling into school on the first day of the 2021-2022 school year.

"I just remember blacking out. I couldn't believe it."

Later that week, he was joined by 40-50 rowers, parents, and alumni for Kailey's wake. He said it was an emotional, yet unifying experience.

Prenoveau was a unifier.

"She made such a lasting impact on a lot of people that she probably never even realized," Fellows said.

After her death, many in the community wondered how they could honor her memory for years to come.

Walter Fisher, whose son Cameron rows for Lewis Mills, thought that writing a grant to buy new boats in Prenoveau's honor would be a way to keep her memory alive. Fisher has written grants for years, including one that the Lewis Mills rowing team received in 2018 for \$10,000 for a new trailer.

In December, Fisher wrote a grant for \$60,000 from the Tinty Foundation in Granby. The grant eventually went up for review, and when Fisher heard that it was immediately approved, he had goosebumps.

"I've been writing grants for 22 years," Fisher recounted. "I never in my wildest dreams thought we'd get the full amount."

The grant covers the cost of two new Wintech King SE shells for the team. They each hold four rowers, allowing the team to compete in top-of-the-line boats for years to come.

In Mid-March, Fellows received the news of the approved grant. He was shocked again, this time in a good way.

"I really didn't know how to react. I didn't think we'd get the entire \$60,000 grant. There were no words at the time of me finding out."

A few days after learning of the approved grant, Fellows called for a mandatory booster club meeting with his team and their parents. He broke the news to them over Zoom and Fellows said that "everyone had the same reaction as me because it was unheard of."

One of the boats will be named by Kailey's family, and the other will be named by a larger group, including the rowing team. Both boats will be painted purple, Kailey's favorite color.

One of the students on the team is Heidi Beaulieu. She is a year older than Kailey, but became instant friends with her through the rowing team.

She says that the Lewis Mills boats are typically named after weather patterns. A fitting name for the boat her team will play a role in naming? "Sunny. Kailey always had a vibrant attitude towards everything."

This year, Prenoveau was planning to run cross-country in the fall and row in the spring.

Beaulieu says the fall rowing season was the grieving period, but the spring season was particularly hard for different reasons. Kailey would have rowed in the varsity spot of a four person boat, and not having her there is a constant reminder of the pain.

"I pray for her family daily," says Beaulieu. "I'm going to paint my room purple in honor of Kailey. I try to give it my all because I know she did that."

Kiara Kannan was in the same grade as Kailey and rowed with her during their freshman year. She had been friends with Prenoveau since 5th grade. They clicked quickly.

"I found her very loyal," said Kannan. "She was quick, always on her feet, spontaneous, funny, fierce, and dedicated."

Kannan now attends Farmington High School, but is grateful the Lewis Mills team will have new boats in Prenoveau's honor. "I feel that she truly deserves to have boats in her honor. She was such a big part of the team in the time she was there."

While Kannan won't be rowing in the boats, she honors her friend's legacy every day by pushing herself to the limit, in school or daily life, just as Prenoveau did.

On June 11th, the community honored Prenoveau with the first [Kailey Jaie Prenoveau Scholarship Swim](#) held at Camp Mattatuck in Plymouth. Participants can compete in a 200 yard, ½ mile, or mile swim, donating money to a scholarship fund in Prenoveau's honor.

Heidi Beaulieu will be one of Kailey's former teammates volunteering at the race, which aims to keep her memory alive for years to come.

"In times of tragedy, it really shows how much impact an individual person can have on a big group of people, and how that void will never really be filled," Fellows said. "Kailey would have wanted us to make the best out of the situation. We are honoring her, there's not a day that goes by that we don't think of her."

This fall, Fellows' team will honor her in brand new racing boats, honoring a life lost far too soon.