



A Presidential Address



Saying that this year has been a roller coaster would be lying, as at least on a roller coaster you can see the ups and downs coming... This season we spent similar amounts of time off track and on track, but we also held more competitions than in any of the previous years in my time here. This year was also a year where most of our matches had to be cancelled, but also the first year in five where both men and women won the Varsity match against O*ford. We discovered a new skill we did not realise we had: adaptability.

We did have many disappointing cancellations along the way. In November, Freshers' Varsity fell just one weekend too late, days after the announcement of a new lockdown. The hopes of holding a VFEAR faded more gradually as athletics facilities remained closed to non-elite athletes. Finally, the occurrence of Varsity itself was questioned when, under 72 hours before the event, O*ford University cancelled the meet. But with every cancellation, we came back stronger and more determined to beat our opponents. After managing to relocate the Varsity to Lee Valley after a herculean effort from the committee and Achilles, what really struck me was not just how ready we were to compete, but how much we had prepared for this day. Thanks to the many competitions we had held throughout the year whenever possible, nearly everyone there not only had a PB but also a season's best to go by. The promo video was ready (<https://www.cuac.org.uk/upcoming-events>), the blues bios and pen names written well in advance. Even those that were not able to come due to self isolation, supported their teammates on the live stream (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC8jMRL9rHSRk6kdUAMIWzzg>), with our women's captain Martha Stevens pulling all the strings from behind her monitor. In short, we were there.



Left to Right: Incoming Women's Captain Martha Bevan, outgoing Honorary Secretary Joe Mitchell and outgoing Women's Captain Martha Stevens at the registration of one of our many small open competitions this year.

And after spending half of the year apart, not only missing out on the track but on all other aspects of the Cambridge life that make being a student here so special, Varsity was the culmination of the

team spirit we had cultivated throughout the weekly zoom circuits, the small squad meals and the socially distanced training at the track. It is definitely one of the highlights of my time here and one of my most cherished memories of the year.

The club did not just survive this year, it also grew. Our athletes learned to train independently and find motivation in a small number of training partners or a group chat. With the introduction of a new Hare and Hounds liaison officer, who was no one other than our favourite Olympian Louise Shanahan, the two clubs grew much closer, which was crucial to our domination of the distance events at Varsity. The lack of women training regularly in the 400m squad was rapidly remedied through added taster sessions, time trials and communication with other sports. Thanks to the very generous donations of some alumni, we were able not only to financially survive the year despite the loss in revenue, but also to start making long-term financial plans to ensure continued financial stability. Plans for an indoor facility are also very much on the agenda for the next couple of years and we hope a future presidential update will be able to inform you of progress on this front. For all of the support you have provided we are extremely grateful and hope you may continue to provide this support to help the club to thrive.



Post Varsity Hurdles Squad celebration

What we take out of this year, beyond the long-awaited victory, is the great teamwork that has involved being a part of this year's committee. The resourcefulness and motivation so many have shown kept us all going whenever one of us showed a moment of discouragement. We are proud of what we have achieved and hope we have also made each one of you proud to have once worn light blue.

Looking to the next year we have much to be excited about. Hopefully we have seen the back of Covid lockdowns and against the odds we have come out of this period better than ever, with higher levels of performance, healthier finances and most importantly a stronger team spirit. We are looking forward to welcoming the new freshers in October so that yet more people may experience the joys of CUAC and with the hope of returning to our normal schedule of training, socials and

competitions, the club will continue to prosper. Rest assured we will make the most of every opportunity to show Oxford who's best!

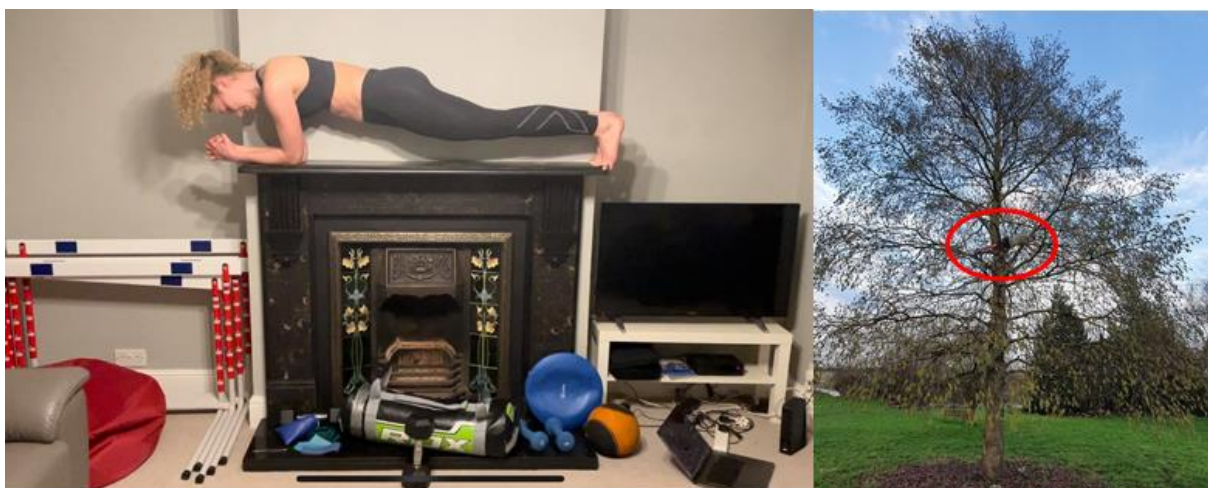
Lea Wenger - CUAC President 2020-21
Samuel Clarke - CUAC President 2021-22

CUAC in Lockdown article

Keeping athletes training when away from Cambridge is always one of the greatest challenges as captain, and that's just in a normal year. Add into the mix being scattered around the world, stuck in small bedrooms, with tracks closed for the foreseeable future, prospects look a little bleak. But perhaps it was our perseverance to feel like we were training together, even when far apart, which eventually led us to victory at the Varsity Match this year.

Athletes adapted. Dog walkers were dodged during grass reps, walls claimed for box jumps, miscellaneous heavy objects acquired as weights. Strength and conditioning evolved. Zoom became the new team training room with weekly club circuits sessions. Sweating in the virtual presence of others provided much needed motivation through the dark winter months; there's nothing quite like a burpee for team bonding after all.

We also enjoyed contributing to some (sometimes loosely) athletics themed challenges on the group facebook page to keep us connected. Two most impressive plank contributions from presidents past and present pictured below... important to add that no athletes were injured in the making of these photos!



For training in the more traditional sense, coaches worked harder than ever alongside squad leaders to provide the tools, structure and encouragement to keep everyone 'on track', even without the

familiar ring of tartan for company. We thank them for going above and beyond to support us all in the most difficult of circumstances. Alumni who have supported the club are also owed a huge thank you. Your kind contributions over the years put us in a position where we could continue to pay our coaching team throughout all 3 lockdowns despite low membership income; this made the world of difference.

From a captain's perspective, as I reflect on the year we've had, it's been a huge success. This is evidenced by some of the fantastic individual achievements we've seen this season, and our team victory against O*ford of course. But above all, it really is remarkable that following so much time training apart, we've ended up feeling perhaps closer as a team than ever before. Something I, and many others, hold a great deal of pride in being part of.

Martha Stevens - Women's Captain 2020-21

Our very own athlete at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Louise Shanahan arrived in Cambridge in 2019, to embark on a Physics PhD. She had great success as a junior athlete which included becoming the European Youth Olympics 800m Champion in 2013. However, she had been unable to match this level in the senior ranks. It was in coming to Cambridge that things started to change: She ended a 7-year plateau of running around 2:08 for the 800m, dropping her time to 2:01 and becoming Irish champion... and of course being selected for the Olympics!

An interesting question to consider is what changed since Louise arrived at Cambridge? She is now battling it out with the fastest in the world. Some argue it's all to do with her amazing elite training partners in Cambridge (NB. this article is written by one of them). Others may say that it's all down to the shoes... but given that even the NARPS have a pair now I think we can safely discount that one. The truth is, it most likely comes down to a multitude of factors, at the heart of which lies her dynamic coaching team of Shanahan senior (a former Irish 800m champion himself) and the magical Cambridge distance coach, Phil O'Dell.



Louise's two coaches, Ray Shanahan (left) and Phill O'Dell (right)

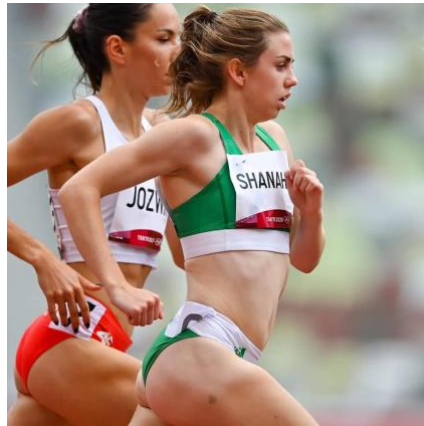
Phil has some opinions himself on what he considers to be driving forces of Louise's success. From a training standpoint, he's emphasised "increasing her speed endurance [through] longer reps and more running." This strategy even led to Louise churning it out on muddy trails in her first winter at Cambridge. A highlight of which was coming 5th in the BUCS cross country B-race and winning the BUCS indoor 800m just 2 weeks later. He also puts it down to the great support she receives from physio Rich and the strength and conditioning work she benefits from as part of the UCAPP scheme. Finally, Phil whispered that they do "have a lot of frank discussions on the training track, let's just say that." This perhaps highlights the great relationship Phil has with his athletes, which is probably at the core of the success he has had with the Cambridge Hare and Hounds since arriving at the University.



Left: BUCS XC Championships 2020 Right: Louise's victory at BUCS indoors 2020 in the 800m

One of these "frank discussions" may have happened after Shanahan scarily hit the track and stayed down during the Varsity 1500m this year, just two weeks before she was set for Tokyo. She was undertaking this race minutes after having run a "filthy 53 plus change" 4x4 relay split (and earlier having smashed the Varsity 800m record). However, attempting this feat is a true testament to Louise's character, bravery and commitment to the Cambridge cause. Her dedication to both CUAC and the CUH&H goes far beyond just her performances on the track. Louise spearheaded the organisation of the distance evenings hosted at Wilberforce Road this summer, which gave our athletes opportunities to race in what has been a difficult Covid-affected season.

By toeing the line in Tokyo, Louise has had a huge inspirational impact on her fellow athletes in Cambridge, perhaps something she won't be aware of. It demonstrates to us that sporting success does not have to be sacrificed in the pursuit of academics or vice versa. Perhaps it even makes the 'greatest show on earth' feel just that little bit closer. Fortunately for us, Louise still has 2 years left in her PhD, which hopefully means plenty more fast times and big performances to enjoy. Getting to the Olympics is the pinnacle of the sport, but one feels Shanahan may just be getting started.



*Left: Louise's 4x400 leg of the relay at Varsity 2021 (photo creds: Andy Hodge)
Middle and Right: Louise's 800m at the Olympics in Tokyo*

Angus Harrington - Men's Captain 2021-2022

Support CUAC

This year everyone across the country has faced a multitude of challenges with numerous lockdowns and restrictions. Despite these, CUAC has pulled through financially and survived a dramatically reduced membership income thanks to the generosity of many of our alumni. We have continued to pay our coaches throughout each of the three lockdowns, supporting both them and our athletes, and as a consequence CUAC claimed victory at this year's Varsity. We cannot stress our gratitude for the integral impact donations have had on the health and happiness of our athletes during these difficult times.

We are now looking to the future with plans to grow both CUAC and its facilities – including an indoor training facility. Please do consider supporting CUAC financially if you are able; and our most sincere thanks to those alumni who continue to give back to CUAC. In collaboration with both the University Development and Alumni Relations Office and Sports Service, there is an online portal for giving back to CUAC in the form of philanthropic donations. The portal supports gifts (recurring or one off) via direct debit – every penny donated by CUAC alumni goes to supporting this fantastic university club. Thank you.

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