

26th Annual Knecht Cup Regatta Returns to the Cooper River This Weekend, April 12–13

New trophies honor Olympic legends, lifelong friendships, and a shared legacy that continues to shape the sport of rowing

CHERRY HILL, NJ, UNITED STATES, April 8, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- As more than 64 collegiate programs prepare to descend upon the Cooper River this weekend for the 26th Annual [Knecht Cup Regatta](#), organizers are placing special emphasis on the individuals whose lives and legacies have shaped American rowing.

From Olympic gold medalists and legendary coaches to trailblazing women and beloved community leaders, this year's slate of championship trophies tells a powerful story—one of excellence, perseverance, and deep personal connection.

"This regatta is about more than just racing," said Laura Knecht Blanche, Regatta Director and daughter of the late William J. "Bill" Knecht, for whom the event is named. "We're proud to carry forward the vision of people like my father, and so many others who helped build the sport—not just locally, but nationally and internationally. The level of competition, the sense of tradition, the sportsmanship—it all reflects the rowing community they helped to create."

Among the many honorees is John B. Kelly Sr., a three-time Olympic medalist and one of Philadelphia's most revered athletes, and his son, John B. Kelly Jr., an Olympian and fierce advocate for rowing who shared a lifelong friendship with Bill Knecht. This year, the regatta



One of the most anticipated regattas of the collegiate rowing season, the 26th annual Knecht Cup Regatta returns to the Cooper River course designed by the event's namesake, Bill Knecht, on Saturday, April 12 and Sunday, April 13.

introduces two new trophies that recognize that bond: one for the Men's Single (The John B. Kelly Sr. Trophy) and one for the Men's Double (The John B. Kelly and William J. Knecht Trophy).

"For me, it's about remembering a great man—my godfather, and my dad's great friend and doubles partner," said J.B. Kelly, son of John B. Kelly Jr. "They were brothers in all but name. The Cooper River course was a dream of Bill's, and to see it hosting an event of this caliber—it's the culmination of that dream."

Bill Knecht, a gold medalist in the 1964 Olympic eight and a dominant force at the Vesper Boat Club, was also a builder—of businesses, rowing associations, and dreams. He helped design the Cooper River course to meet international racing standards and played an instrumental role in founding the Cooper River Rowing Association, among others.



The Knecht Cup Regatta has grown to include over 300 entries from over 60 of the nation's top college programs, making it one of the largest collegiate regattas in the country, second only to the ACRA National Championship.

“

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John B. Kelly III

“My dad's company was just across the river in Camden,” said Blanche. “He believed rowing brought out the best in people, and that's what we see here every year.”

Other trophies this year honor remarkable figures in rowing, four of whom are linked to Knecht through the 1964 Olympic Gold Medal winning eight, including: Tom and Joe Amlong, both also military veterans; Stan Cwiklinski, a Navy salvage expert; and Emory Clark, who later chronicled the 1964 Olympic Gold Medal journey in his memoir.

Another trophy honors Ana Tamas Knecht, a Romanian woman and 14-time world rowing champion as well as Knecht's wife. She became a pioneering coach on the Schuylkill River as the first woman coach at the legendary Vesper Boat Club.

Trophies also pay tribute to local heroes whose lives continue to inspire: Ann Harris Smith, a dedicated Villanova supporter whose foundation raises awareness for ovarian cancer, and Danielle Kousoulis, a Villanova alumna and 9/11 victim whose determination and spirit continue

to motivate student-athletes.

New this year, the regatta will feature enhanced live-streaming on a Jumbotron screen near the grandstands, and an upgraded beer garden and spectator space at the finish line.

“We want people to watch rowing, not just be at the river,” said Kelly. “With this technology, we’re bringing the sport back to the public in a way that’s dynamic and personal.”



John B. Kelly, Jr. (left) and Bill Knecht (right) were lifelong friends and teammates on the 1964 Olympic Gold Medal winning US men's eight.

With over 345 entries expected across two days of racing and representation from top collegiate programs across the country, the 2025 Knecht Cup Regatta stands as both a competitive showcase and a living tribute.

“This is not your grandfather’s regatta—but it honors your grandfather’s teammates,” said Kelly with a smile. “And for many of us, it brings the past and present together in the most meaningful way possible.”

About the Knecht Cup Regatta: The Knecht Cup Regatta is one of the premier collegiate rowing events in the United States, held annually on the Cooper River in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. Named in honor of Olympic gold medalist and rowing visionary William J. "Bill" Knecht, the regatta brings together top programs from across the country for a weekend of high-level competition, tradition, and community celebration. The event is sanctioned by USRowing and proudly reflects the legacy of the athletes, coaches, and families who have shaped the sport—both on and off the water. Now in its 26th year, the Knecht Cup continues to grow in scale, innovation, and impact.

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