

The team was raising money for the Forces Children's Trust, a charity that helps children who have lost parents whilst serving for the armed forces. This year they have taken some of the children on trips to Spain and Disney World in Orlando. They also hold an annual Christmas Party in London.

With absolutely no training and no clue as to what was ahead of them they got themselves prepared. Ginger wigs and tutus adorned the 'Benson Babes', as their team captain had called them much to the teams disapproval, were ready. As they stood in the rain listening to the obligatory safety brief, they were wondering what they had let themselves in for and talk was already turning to "right we will just do the three qualifiers and be home in time for the footy." Unfortunately they had to wait three races before they got their first taste. Precariously they all got into the boat one by one, moans of panic every time the craft rocked. None more so than the Captains 12 year old daughter who volunteered to beat the drum for the first race, not realizing that she sat above everyone else with just a drum to hold onto



for safety. Finally the team was on its way to the starting line. The helmsman, who was supplied by the Dragons Alive Company that ran the event, gave the lads a chance to practice their stroke before the main event. It was at this point when the paddlers, being splashed by the person in front, realised no matter how cold and wet they already were, the water from the Thames was a lot colder and a lot wetter!

So there they were on the starting block. 'George and the Dragons' dressed up in their St George's armour and capes to their left and the more

sensibly dressed 'Hope and Glory' to their right. All the laughing, banter and japes stopped and the Forces mentality kicked in, we were going to win this. Setting an impressive 54.56 winning time and beating their opponents by four seconds, the Benson Babes realised for the first time that they were actually quite good at this. With another two qualifying races before the semi finals, any talk (or hope for the poor families who came along to support) of going home early was gone. They were not only going to qualify they were going to win. Soon little groups started to appear within the team, everyone discussing tactics.

The next race found them pitted against the 'Flying Dragons' a team from Henley Rowing club. A team who were taking it all far too seriously. With proper team talks and groups hugs before the race, not to mention removing all footwear before getting into the boat. The starting klaxon sounded and they were off. Straight away the Henley set were a full boats length ahead, but by the half way mark the 'Babes' were catching up. Coming a respectable second with 51.69 seconds, only 0.27 seconds behind the professional rowers. They also achieved the third fastest time of the day so far (the other two being put in by the 'Flying Dragons'). This just got the team more excited and more convinced that they were taking silverware home with them.

The last of the qualifying races for the team was the dreaded race 13. Their start was much improved from the last race, mainly thanks to some useful advice by our helmsman. It was only enough to get another second place losing by a quarter of a second. Was this enough to get them into the semi finals? For the cold and wet supporters they hoped not. Somehow this unprepared team from Benson qualified fourth from the heats. This found them in the first of the semi's against 'Peking Sinking' and the dreaded 'Flying Dragons'. After the near win in the second race it was a matter of pride now. The klaxon went, heads were up, the drum beat loud, and paddles were entering the water in unison it was a thing of beauty. Unfortunately Windsor is not Hollywood and the team that should have won lost by less than half a second. For this year at least the dream was over. But over £700 was raised for the Forces Children's Trust and an extremely good day was had by all. Plus there is already talk of a come back next year. ●

More information can be found about the Forces Children's Trust on their website: www.forceschildrenstrust.org. There will also be an FCT stall at the Benson Village Christmas Fete on the 5th December.

T h e r e B e Dragons

On a very cold and wet Sunday morning towards the end of September, eleven brave souls from 230 Squadron arrived at Windsor Leisure Centre on the banks of the Thames to take part in the 2012 Windsor Dragon Boat Regatta.

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