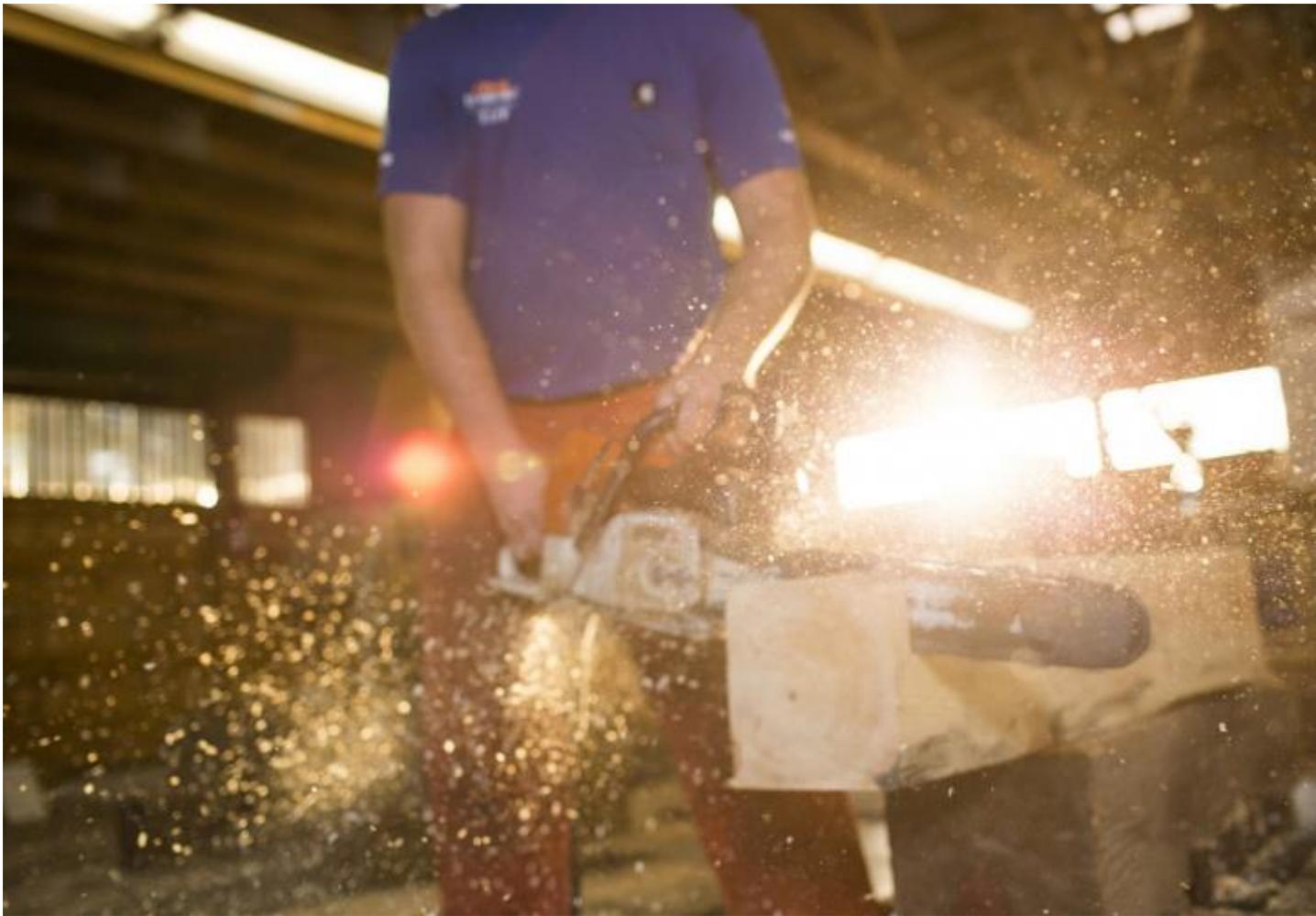


The Spirit and Sport of Lumberjacking

UNH Woodsmen Team Hosts Fall Meet on November 1

Wednesday, October 22, 2014

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Think about where the axe is going to hit. Don't overthink where the axe is going to hit. Be sure to exhale through your downswing, and follow through as the bone-cuttingly sharp blade of the axe comes barreling down, landing just a few inches between your feet.

There are lots of details to remember in the very athletic, very unique and very fascinating sport of lumberjacking.

For roughly 50 years, UNH students have been sawing, logrolling and chopping as part of the UNH Woodsmen Team — and next weekend they'll show off their skills at their annual Fall Meet at the UNH Sawmill. On November 1 the Woodsmen will wield saws, axes and chainsaws in a fast-paced competition against six other colleges and about a dozen other teams. It's a chance for these students to share their love of a sport that combines physical strength, emotional focus, and strategy—and to provide some thrills to the spectators who come to cheer them on.

Team members practice every weekday, honing their skills in events like the cross-cut, single buck and vertical chop. Assistant coach Chris Robarge says the sport is a mix of mental and physical acuity.

"If you develop good mental skills and techniques then your physical strength is a little less critical," says Robarge, who teaches in the Thompson School of Applied Science horticulture department and has worked with the team for more than 10 years. "I always remind the team members that their only competition is the wood."

In fact, the team's motto — "It's just you and the wood" — is something that athletes like Kendall Edmondson '15 try to keep in mind when they are competing.

"It's hard to be very anxious and have sharp tools in your hand all at the same time," says Edmondson. "I have to work really hard to just get out there and focus myself and do the event. When you get up on a block of wood, 'just you and the wood' is the first thing you want to think about."



The team's purpose is to promote an interest in woodsmen sports in the spirit of the traditional skills of the logging industry—felling trees, cutting lumber and delivering it to a sawmill— and events harken back to the golden age of lumberjacks, typically considered to be the mid-1800s to mid-1900s.

The pop culture image of a lumberjack as a daring, strong risk taker who tackles nature with a heavy axe (think Paul Bunyan) has found its way into current international spectator sporting events like the Stihl Timbersports Lumberjack Competition and the Lumberjack World Championships. There are five regions in the U.S. that support about 50 collegiate teams, all of which participate in Stihl-sponsored competitions. Last year, graduate student Trevor Beaudry represented the Northeast in Stihl's Collegiate Timbersports Championship, finishing second. Edmondson won the Northeast Regional female competition.

Edmondson started on the team as a sophomore, and "just fell in love" with the sport. Her specialty is the single buck, an event in which a single sawyer uses a one-man bucking saw to cut through a 20-inch diameter log. "I really like the way the saw feels when you pull it through the wood, and I like pushing myself a little bit," she says.

Other team members say the fun of being on the UNH Woodsmen's Team crosses over into their academic and professional pursuits. Take Kyle McCollin, who's in his second year at the Thompson School and his third season as a UNH woodsman.

The Lynn, Mass., native is a forestry student, and also runs his own landscaping business, K&M Quality Scapes. "For me, everything is related. How the wood cuts, how the tools work with the wood, everything," he says.

Not surprisingly, a sport that includes axe throwing, wood chopping and logrolling remains a male dominated field.

"You definitely have to prove yourself a little bit more," says Lauren Bayuk '15, who is perfecting her performance in the sharpen-and-cut event. Edmondson, who this summer toured at fairs and events from Maine to West Virginia, notes that at some events, men are paid for high finishes, but many of the women are not. But she believes that the recent influx of women into the sport will encourage more women to check out their local teams and get involved.

"Women are making an appearance in this sport, and I think we're here to stay," she says. "This is definitely a sport that's all-inclusive. There's an event for everyone."

WANT TO GO?

When: Saturday, Nov. 1, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. Please note this event is rain or shine.

Where: [UNH Sawmill](#), 248 Mast Road, Durham. Parking is available near the event.

Cost: Free

Details: The Horticulture Club will be selling lunch food and beverages from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m.

For more info: Check out the [team's Facebook page](#), or their [UNH webpage](#).

WHAT TEAM MEMBERS SAY:

What it takes to be a good woodsman: "You just gotta go for it. You can't hold back on anything, because someone else is just going to take your place." — Kyle McCollin '15

On the popularity of the UNH Team: "It's not a football or a soccer game, where it's a sport everyone knows. When you watch a meet, you're going to learn something new, and it's exciting to watch. Using big tools and chainsaws and sharp things is pretty enticing." — Lauren Bayuk '15

What if you're not a big burly lumberjack type? Doesn't matter. "You'd think it would be a sport where all out strength and power win — but it isn't. That's the surprising thing. There's so much of a technical aspect that goes into the sport and how you generate power with an axe." — Trevor Beaudry, graduate student

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