Class Day rule changes cause controversy

By Gordon R. Haff

Dramatic rule changes this year cut the number of Class Day entries to almost a third of last year's and spurred a great deal of discussion in some quarters as to whether the new rule changes were appropriate.

According to Liz Fisher '80, one of the organizers of Class Day, the major reason for the rule changes was to prevent possible injuries. Last year, a practicing Junior Coxswain and a skier. When asked if overall damage was also a consideration, she said that it was a factor but that mostly the new rules "were to protect people and not so much damage to boats."

The sheer number of entries also presented a problem last year. The number of boats, cited in with exhibition races which took too long and a variety of other difficulties created a day of races which ran from before dawn to almost sunset.

Fisher said that a number of possibilities were discussed which would not restrict entries. These included running the race over two days — either on the one weekend or over two — but these suggestions were rejected as impractical.

Student reaction to this year's Class Day was mixed but predictable. Those who participated for the most part felt that it was an improvement. However, many who had vowed in previous years were unable to find a boat this year.

The rule changes were aimed primarily at the Junior '8's and probably at the fact that was where the biggest reduction in numbers was seen. Rule changes related to these enter included: a) Two inexperienced coxwains per boat; b) an experienced coxswain (or alternatively an experienced coxswain receiving); c) at least one practice together before Class Day.

More controversial rule changes included one entry per 50 people in a dorm. In the past, Baker and possibly Burton had more entries than this. In Burton for other houses groups where the basic unit is a 50-50 person group, this could have been a serious problem if every floor wanted to enter a boat or if some floors had the people to easily enter two.

The main problem with the rule changes is that there is a limited number of experienced crew people to go around. Fisher estimated 200 as an upper limit. There were well over a hundred entries last year. Thus, there is no way that the number of entries which existed last year could possibly be put together this year.

However, on the balance, the changes were probably for the best. Last year's situation was intolerable and simply stretching it over two days would not prevent the inexperienced coxswain from directing a boat full of inexperienced oarsmen down the wrong side of the river. Perhaps this year represented an overreaction to the problems of last year, but clearly some changes had to be made. The only rule changes I feel are clearly unnecessary are those that have been put together this year to get into the action. Although there are as yet no definite plants, Fisher said that they are working on some type of even for the spring — possibly barge races or possibly another Class Day. This is a very heartening change from the attitude of at least one crew member connected with Class Day Day last year who was basically of the opinion that the Junior 8's were a nuisance which have to be lived with. I think that this year's planners deserve a lot of credit for their attempt to balance mass participation with injuries and damage.