

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ROWING

18th Century England. Competition among small ferry barges on the Thames River in England gave rise to the sport we know today as rowing. The first formal rowing event was in 1715 between apprentice English watermen in which an Irish comedian, Thomas Doggett, offered a silver badge and orange coat as a prize. Since then, this race for the Doggett Coat and Badge has been run annually, except during the war years. Amateur rowing began in 1815 at Oxford University. Cambridge University organized its first crew shortly thereafter. The two schools held the first intercollegiate race in 1829, using professional watermen to coxswain their boats. The professionals were barred after the first race, and a highly formal code of amateurism has characterized English rowing ever since. Rowing is a gentleman's sport, with rules and behavior codes designed to encourage good sportsmanship. The Henley Royal Regatta, established in 1839, is a social as well as athletic event, with most spectators decked out in formal finery. The Princess Elizabeth Cup, Henley's prize for the best schoolboy eight, was won by a local high school, Washington-Lee, in 1964 and 1969. J.E.B. Stuart High School, in Fairfax County, won in 1968.

19th Century United States. The first rowing race in the United States was in 1811 between professional ferrymen using 4-oared barges. In the 1830s, both Yale and Harvard formed crews. They competed against each other in the first U.S. intercollegiate regatta in 1852, seventeen years before the first intercollegiate football game. The Harvard-Yale regatta is held annually and restricted to those two schools. In 1867, rowing was introduced in Virginia when Washington & Lee University formed a crew. Today, crew racing is a well- established and growing sport at both the college and high school level in this country. While particularly strong programs exist on both coasts, in recent years numerous programs also have been established by schools in the South and Midwest.

Recent U.S. Accomplishments. The past few years have witnessed remarkable successes by the U.S. men's heavyweight eight. This past summer, the U.S. eight won the FISA World Rowing Championships, the third year in a row that it has accomplished that feat. In so doing, the U.S. became only the second country in the history of the world championships to win three consecutive men's eight titles.

Rowing in the sixth seat of the heavyweight eight was Jeff Klepacki, who traveled to Gonzaga from New Jersey last year to speak to the Gonzaga rowers.

Rowing in the Olympics. Rowing became an Olympic sport in 1922. In 1968, Washington-Lee graduate Tony Johnson and Larry Hough of the Potomac Boat Club won a silver medal in the Mexico City Olympic Games in pairs without coxswain, losing to East Germany by one-fourth of a second. Local rowers also raced in the 1992 and 1996 Olympics held in Barcelona and Atlanta.

Governance. All United States rowing is governed by the [U.S. Rowing Association](#) (USRA).

WATCHING BOATS -- WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Appraising a crew is perhaps the most difficult role that the expert has to play in sports. However, according to the rowing experts, four major factors determine the *run* of a shell. These are: *timing*, *form*, *power*, and *conditioning*.

Naturally, *an excellent run*, the distance a shell is propelled by one stroke cycle, is the effect sought by all crew coaches. So the first thing to check is whether a crew makes its shell move -- i.e., whether it has a good or poor run. Coaches will say that there are a lot of good crews, but many of them row differently because their form varies. However, coaches all agree that the good crews have excellent *timing*. If the crew's timing is off, the boat won't run. Watch the crew's form. Look and see if all eight hit the *catch* together. That is, do their blades all enter the water together? Also, watch the bodies of the crew -- see if they all move in unison, or if there is a break. The former, naturally, spells positive results, while a lack of uniformity means an additional *check*, therefore retarding the run. All good crews have *power* and drive, for it takes a certain amount of horsepower to move a given weight through the water. Of course, the athletes must be in top physical condition in order to keep their timing, form, and power for the entire race. Crew coaches often look for tall athletes because they can apply additional leverage and get a longer reach. However, size is not everything, especially if the individual doesn't have the other prerequisites -- i.e., timing, form, power, and conditioning.

ROWING TERMS

Understanding crew talk is not difficult. It just takes learning a few new phrases and words so when the team captain or your son talks about keeping keel you will not look at him as if he has just stolen part of the boat. Below is a list of rowing terms that can help you enter and keep up with the world of crew. Following are some important terms that you may need to be familiar with.

All commands are in *italics*; all other terms are underlined.

Back-It Means to have the rowers place their blades at the release position and squared, and then push the oar handle towards the stern of the boat. This motion causes the shell to move backwards.

Backwater To propel the shell backwards.

Blade The spoon-shaped end of the oar or sweep.

Blades-Down This command is used to tell the rowers to place their blades back on the water after performing an easy-all (see below).

Bow The forward section or nose of the boat. The front of the shell. Also the rower in the seat in the very front of the shell.

Catch That part of the stroke where the oar is placed in the water and the pull-through is begun.

Catch a crab A serious rowing error, in which the oar becomes trapped in the water in such a manner that it is difficult to get it out at the end of the pull-through. A crab happens when the blade is at the wrong angle and catches the water the wrong way. Usually it slows the boat down only momentarily, but if it is an exceptionally powerful crab, it can even throw the rower out of the shell.

Check The amount of interruption of the forward movement -- usually occurs at

the catch and sometimes at the release.

Count-Down This command tells the crew to call out their seat number, starting at the bow, when ready to row.

Coxswain (pronounced "cox 'n ") The crew quarterback. He sits in the stern of the shell to steer and give commands to the rowers. The cox is in charge from the time the crew picks up the shell in the boathouse until it returns to the boathouse.

Crab Action caused by turning of the oar blade so that it is trapped under water and cannot be removed at the release.

Down-on-port or starboard Means that the boat is leaning to one side or the other. Rowers on the side that is down must raise their hands, and the other side must lower their hands.

Eights Colloquial term used to indicate eight-oared shells (as differentiated from fours or doubles.)

Ease-up and Firm-up These commands tell the rowers to reduce the pressure on the oar or apply more pressure as needed.

Easy-all This command tells the rowers that when they finish the stroke, they will stop rowing, sit at the release, extend their arms, and place their oar handles on the gunnel of the boat. The rowers' blades will be off the water, and they will try to keep the shell on keel until the command *blades-down* is given.

Even-it-out This command tell the rowers to pull with even pressure on both sides. This is the complement to *ease-up*.

(#) *Fall-out/Fall-in* These commands tell the rower(s) either to stop rowing or to start rowing with everyone else. (#) indicates the number of the rower(s) who should start or stop-- e.g., "Bow pair Fall out, stern pair fall-in, in two..."

Feather The act of turning the oar over so that the blade is practically parallel to

the surface of the water at the end of the stroke.

Fin Also called the skeg. Thin piece of flat metal or plastic that helps stabilize the shell in the water.

Finish That portion of the pull-through just as the oar is taken from the water.

Foot-stretchers What the rowers put their feet in while they row.

German rig Position of the first four oarsmen is changed. No. 1 is port, No. 2 is starboard, No. 3 is Port, Nos. 4 and 5 are both starboard.

Give her ten This command by the coxswain orders 10 strokes of special effort. It frequently is given when a crew is attempting to pass another boat.

Gunwale or (gunnel) The top edge of the sides of the boat.

Handle The part of the oar that the rowers hold and pull with during the stroke.

Hands-in Tells the rowers to grab the ribs on the inside of the boat so that the boat can be rolled from heads. The coach or cox uses this command when the crew is putting the shell in the water.

Hands-on Tells the rowers to grab the boat next to their seats, so that the boat can be moved.

Hands-out Tells the rowers to grab the dock in preparation for shoving off.

Heads Tells everyone within ear shot that a shell is being carried nearby and to please move out of the way.

Head Race A long race in which rowers race a twisting course of approximately 3 miles. A race for time. The start is staggered. Usually held in the fall months.

Heads, ready, up Tells the rowers to press the boat above their heads.

(#) Hit-it Tells the rowers to row until told to stop -- i.e., "Two, hit-it..."

Hold-Water Tells the rowers to stop rowing and square their blades immediately! Used to avoid collisions.

Hull The actual body of the shell.

Inside hand The oarsman's hand nearest the oarlock. This is the feathering hand.

Keel To have keel is to have a balanced, level boat. This also is the term for the center line of the shell (lengthwise).

Keelson A structural timber resembling the keel but on the inside of the shell.

Keeper or Gate The metal rod across the top of the oarlock that keeps the oar from coming out of the oarlock.

Lay-back What rowers have when they sit with their legs flat and lean towards the bow of the boat with their body.

Leather/ Sleeve A thick piece of leather (or plastic) around the oar to keep the oarlock from wearing out the wood.

Let her run The command to stop rowing and let the oars rest flat on the water.

Lines The ropes held by the coxswain to control the rudder.

Loom The part of the oar between the blade and the handle.

Novices Rowers who are rowing for the first season.

Oar lock Piece of hard wire on the end of the rigger that the oar goes into. It is U-shaped and has a locking bar (called a gate) to keep the oar from coming out.

Outside hand The hand of a rower that is placed on the end of the oar handle.

Over-reach A fault committed by an oarsman when he comes to his full reach forward and then releasing his grasp on the handle with his outside hand or by bringing his outside shoulder further forward.

Paddle Tells a crew to row with just enough pressure to move the boat. The paddle command is also used to bring a crew down from full pressure at the end of a workout piece or race.

Pair A shell rowed by two athletes, each using a single sweep oar.

Piece Is any individual part of a workout called by a coach.

Port From the coxswain's point of view, the left side of the boat.

Port Side The left side of the boat.

Power ten Cox's command to increase power, but not number of strokes per minute, for 10 strokes.

Puddles The disturbances made by the oar blade being pulled through the water. The farther the puddles are pushed past the stern of the boat before each catch, the more run the boat is getting. See "Run" below.

Pull-through The portion of the stroke from the catch to the finish (when the oar is in the water). This is the propulsive part of the stroke.

Rack Support used to store a shell on.

Rate or Rating Number of strokes per minute being rowed by crew. This usually varies in each race from 42 to 50 on the start, 34 to 40 in mid-course, and 40 to 48 at the finish.

Ratio This is the relationship between how fast the rowers pull the oars through the water (the drive), versus how fast they move on their slides between the release and the catch (the recovery). The average ratio is 3:1 -- i.e., three times slower on the recovery than on the drive.

Recovery The act of bringing the oar back from the finish in preparation for another pull-through. This is the relaxation part of the stroke.

Release The point in the stroke cycle where the blade leaves the water.

Rigger A metal framework on the shell to support the oarlock. These are the metal appendages sticking out of the side of the shell. They allow the oarlocks to be outside the boat and therefore give the rowers better leverage.

Roller The wheels upon which the seat slide travels along its track.

Roll-it Tells the crew to flip the boat over together, from their heads.

Rudder Part of the boat that sticks below the water and is used to steer the shell.

Run Distance a shell travels during each stroke.

Rushing Term for when rowers move too quickly along their tracks into the catch. The boat will lose the feeling that it is gliding, or running out.

Scullers One who sculls a single or in a double or quad. A sculler uses two oars.

Set-it-up Reminds the rowers to keep the boat on keel.

Set-ready Commands the crew to move to the catch, blades buried, and be ready to start the race.

Settle A command and a part of the race. This tells the rowers that the crew is going to bring the stroke rate down for the body of the race, but still maintain the

pressure. This usually occurs in the middle of the race.

Shell A boat. A boat built for racing. An eight-oared shell usually is 61' long and 24" to 26" wide at the widest point and tapered at either end.

Ship Oars The act of removing the oars from the oarlocks and allowing them to float alongside the boat.

Shooting your slide Term used when an oarsman's seat moves toward the bow faster than his shoulders.

Shoulders, ready, up Tells the crew to lift the boat from any position below their shoulders to shoulder height. Can be reversed to lower the boat from heads to shoulders -- i.e., "*Shoulders, ready, down!*" This is the best position for carrying a shell.

Sit-in Tells the crew to get into the boat.

Slide The rolling seat which slides back and forth on parallel tracks in the shell when the rower takes a stroke.

Slings These are what you put a boat in to work on it, when it is not on the rack. Never leave a shell sitting on slings without anyone watching it when it is windy!

Spacing Distance between bowman's puddle on one stroke and point at which No. 7 rower catches water on next stroke.

Starboard The right side of the boat.

Start The beginning of the race. Also the term for the first four strokes, and subsequent tens taken at the start of a race.

Stern The rear section of the shell.

Stroke The rower farthest to the stern of the boat, who sets the pace for the rest

of the crew. Also, the sum total of the motion of the oar, from the catch to the release.

Stroke rate The number of strokes a crew takes in one minute. It usually is noted in this form "#spm." A stroke rate can range from 0spm (sitting still) to 44spm+ (go Speed Racer, go!) You can calculate the spm by counting the number of strokes taken in 15 seconds, and multiply that number by 4. Most amplifier systems have a meter to tell you what your stroke rate is.

Stroke or Stroke Oar The rower who sits in the number 8 seat, closest to the cox, who sets the beat for the rest of the crew to follow.

Stretcher One complete cycle of the oar consisting of both the pull-through and the recovery.

Super human 20 A crew's 20 strongest strokes, which usually occur in the middle of a race.

Sweep Sweeping is asymmetrical rowing -- i.e., rowing with one oar. The length of an oar is about 12'3" to 12'6".

Swing A feeling in the boat, when the rowers are driving and finishing their strokes strongly and getting good layback.

Track The assembly upon which the seat travels.

Walking When passing a boat, the cox announces each seat as it is passed.

Washing Out When an oar blade comes out of the water during drive and creates surface wash that causes the shell to lose power, and become unsteady.

Way-enough Tells the rowers to stop rowing.

Waist, ready, up Tells the crew to lift the shell to their waists.

You did what to the Boat? Phrase you should never be asked.