

the good COXSWAIN

FURTHER DRILLS FOR THE COX AS COACH



the good COXSWAIN

FURTHER DRILLS FOR
THE COX AS COACH



11.1 Introduction	p5
Basic Technique Synopsis	6
Diagrams of correct technique	7
11.2 Parts of the Rowing Stroke	p8
The Catch & Drills	8
The Drive & Drills	10
The Finish & Drills	14
The Recovery & Drills	16
11.3 Video	p19
Quick Glossary	p21
The Good Coxswain knows...	p22

"All rowing would be perfect if the rower had everything in the right order and did not add anything further."



the good coxswain



11.1 INTRODUCTION

Unkind rowers over the years have characterised coxswains as frustrated coaches in miniature. Or alternatively, they have said that coaches are coxswains that have grown too big for their boots!

Certainly, **coxswains do make good coaches** because they have become finely attuned to the boat and how **each rower contributes to the success or failure of a crew**. The progression from cox to coach is a natural extension of the coxswain's knowledge base necessitating something more than the small space consigned to coxswains. At the risk of adding too much weight to the small coxing compartment, this booklet provides additional information to that already considered in *booklet #7*.

Booklet #7 - The Coxswain as Coach identified correct rowing technique and drills to reinforce the properties of good rowing. Functioning as a companion volume, this booklet will add further characteristics for the coxswain to observe in good and bad stroke making. It is by no means an exhaustive listing but it will add further dimension for the coxswain that is hungry to know more.

Also, there are technique drills to add to the coxswain's armoury in the fight against lax or bad technique – they will at least keep the rower sharp. But remember, although the cox has the latent potential to be a coach, these drills should always be considered in consultation **WITH** the coach.

Remember - Avoid the arrogance that confuses complexity and quantity with intelligence and quality. **When it comes to drills keep it real, keep it simple and keep it short.** The best coxswains, like the best rowers are those that make it look easy.

BASIC TECHNIQUE SYNOPSIS

Before beginning, it is worth acknowledging that nine out of ten technical problems in rowing will fall into two broad categories:

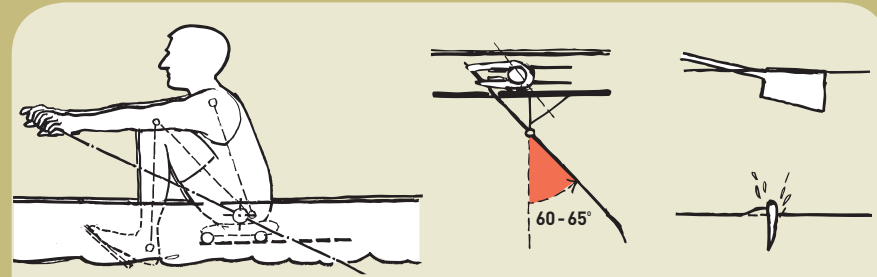
- 1 *Movements being performed out of order.*
For example: pushing the legs down **before** placing the oar in the water / opening the body angle **before** opening the leg angle.
- 2 *Adding extra movements that are not required.*
For example: Adding a lunge towards the feet / Adding a lift of the head at the entry

If these two points are kept in mind when dealing with technical problems and the identification of suitable drills for the rectification of problems, the cox should find himself applying drills that are best suited to the problem at hand.

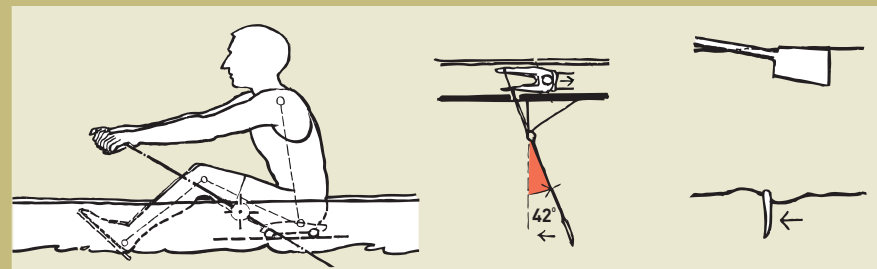
The following are to be added to the lists begun in *Booklet #7*. These are not the more salient points but offer a degree of detail beyond the earlier booklet.



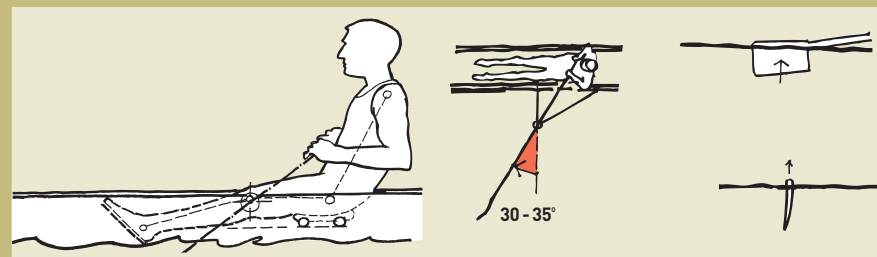
THE CATCH - The placement of the blade into the water.



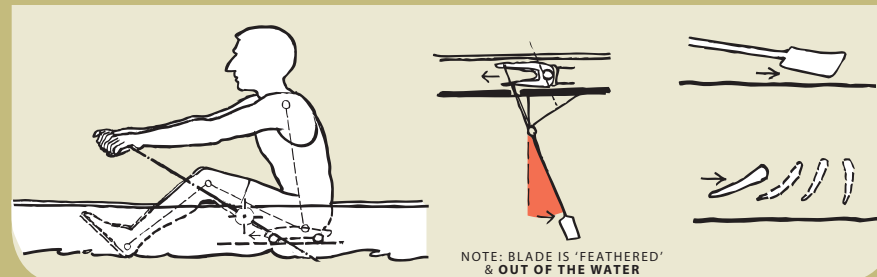
THE DRIVE - The maximum force exerted by the rower to move the blade through the water.



THE FINISH - The removal of the blade from the water at the completion of the drive.



THE RECOVERY - The carrying of the blade forward to the catch position.



11.2 PARTS OF THE ROWING STROKE



THE CATCH

The GOOD Catch *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

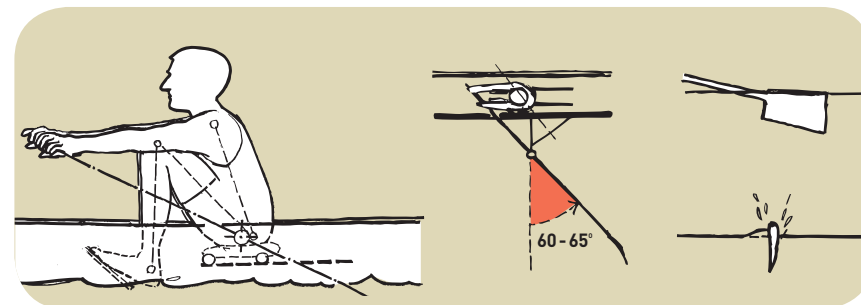
✓	Is prepared in advance when moving up the slide – anticipate.
✓	Is “placed” not “grabbed”.
✓	Will move the blade down into the water, not forward or back.
✓	Is the placing of a fully square blade into the water.
✓	Requires the entire blade to be just below the water.
✓	Will not disturb the run of the boat.
✓	May best be referred to as the “entry”.

The BAD Catch *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

✗	Results in heads (noses and chins) and shoulders being thrown upward to enter the blade in the water.
✗	Bends the arms at the catch and early in the stroke.
✗	Has the crew rushing forward without control to the catch position.
✗	Leaves the rower squaring the blade until the very last second.
✗	Has the rowers using their legs (slide) to place the oar in the water for the catch.



CATCH DRILLS (CONTINUED FROM BOOKLET #7)



Stuff the Duck – Place the blade into the water at the catch position as normal. Then reverse the seat by a few centimetres to initiate the drive. However, before going any further than a few centimetres on the slide, remove the blade from the water. Then move forward again those same few centimetres. Place the blade back in the water from the normal catch position and repeat. The rowers body position has remained the same, the arms have remained straight and extended. The only movement has been the slide resulting in the slight opening of the angle between the thigh and the calf.

Result – The rower will be able to maintain a relaxed and stable body position for the catch. The shoulders, the arms, the back are all taken out of the mix to leave the hands for taking the catch then instant leg push. It will also encourage the rower to place the oar in the water before using the legs – the order is very important.

Catch slap – Just like a normal stroke, hands are lifted upward to place the blade in the water, however, this time the blade remains feathered to “slap” the water before the rower then squares and places the blade in the water.

Result – The rower becomes more aware of the hands as the key to a good entry to the water. “Slap” is a word that is readily associated with a quick, sharp hand movement – not just in rowing; therefore, removing the arms, body and legs from the action. The slap is also a good sound by which the entire crew can hear whether they are taking the catch together. It should also reinforce the idea that the outside hand is more instrumental in the catch as it will allow the rower the greatest slap on the water. The catch, in this drill, also becomes part of the recovery rather than the drive – a very good thing.



THE DRIVE

The GOOD Drive *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

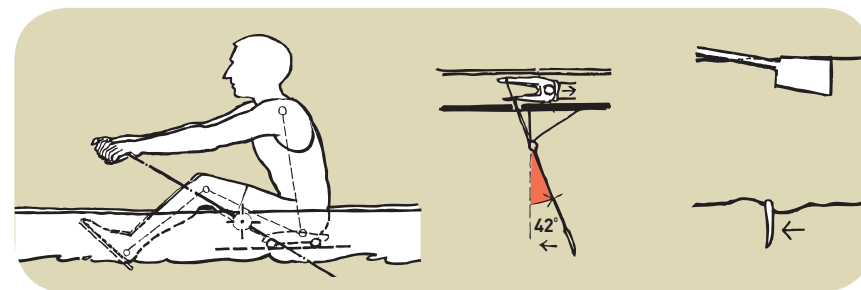
- ✓ Maintains the depth of the blade in the water.
- ✓ Requires the arm nearest the end of the handle to exert the most force.
- ✓ Should be in tune with the speed of the boat.
- ✓ Requires pressure to be exerted through the feet.
- ✓ Has hips and shoulders reversing at the same speed.
- ✓ Is initiated with the legs & will make the body feel light over the sliding seat as the weight is suspended between legs and arms.
- ✓ Will form a "hole" behind the blade contributing toward the ease at which the blade can be taken out of the water.

The BAD Drive *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

- ✗ Brings the blade floating toward the surface before the tap down.
- ✗ Results in "Shooting the slide" - the legs push back, leaving the oar handle behind.
- ✗ Means leaning away from the rigger during the drive, unbalancing the boat.
- ✗ Bends the arms before applying the legs.
- ✗ Results in a tight fist grip on the handle.
- ✗ Draws the handle through with the inside arm (closest to the rigger).
- ✗ Raises the shoulders toward the ears (hunching) during the arm draw.



DRIVE DRILLS (CONTINUED FROM BOOKLET #7)



Power Strokes – This serves as a strength workout for the crew as each has to "pick up" a very "heavy" boat. This is usually, achieved with an 'octopus strap' wrapped in foam, rag or pipe insulation, attached to the hull of a boat to create resistance. It has various names "hydro-brake", "power band", "resistance strap". Whatever it is called, it requires greater effort for the same boat speed from each rower. For the coxswain less equipped it can simply be achieved by some crew members becoming passengers in the crew while others row. It can also be done on an ergo with the drag factor increased (open fan).

Result – A crew that has to focus upon the power they can exert during the drive. The boat will slow very quickly with the resistance and each crewmember will take added responsibility to guarantee the boat is not stationary before the next stroke begins – therefore more effort has to be exerted and without delay. This can only be done with an equal contribution of legs, body and arms used correctly in the drive. For example, the rower that bends his arms to "lift" the boat or throws his back into the drive, will not be strong and the force will be ineffectual.

Power strokes are also a very good technical tool. They enable the rower to feel load and 'hang' from the handle. It is easier to perform a movement under load than it is without load. Take it to the extreme to understand – imagine how well you would perform technically if you were taking air strokes (another possible drill).



Safety warning on power strokes – the rower must employ correct technique, otherwise there is a risk of injury. This can best be performed in crew boats by using only part of the crew rather than applying a load with power bands.

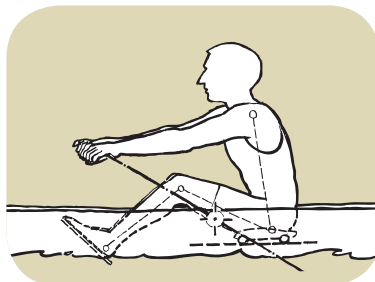
Square Blades - this eliminates the feathered blade, keeping the blade perpendicular to the water's surface. Effectively simplifies the stroke so that there is less manipulation of the handle, thus greater focus on direction and height of handle.

Result – This exercise ensures the effective placement of the blade into the water, the clean extraction from the water and the clearance off the water on the recovery. Square blades helps set reference points of where the crew is going to carry the hands (i.e. high hands will force the blade to make water contact that will impact upon the run of the boat – thus it is avoided).

DRIVE DRILLS cont'd

Blades on the water on the recovery

– Maintain contact with the water, running a fully feathered (flattened) blade along the water's surface. This puts additional pressure on the outside hand (end of handle) with a slight upward pressure. The challenge is not to lose contact with the water at any stage – this would be indicative of a varying handle height (i.e. poor technique).



Result – once again helps with reference points – water surfaces do not, under ideal circumstances, vary in height, nor should handle heights. The exercise also removes balance issues (it is like rowing with training wheels on) thus enabling the rower to work on sequence issues unaffected by a rolling boat.

Extension of the Drill – Blades on water (10), Square blade (10), Normal Rowing (or blades just off the water) (10) is a good combination for helping establish reference points for hands as well as sequence, balance etc.

Sometimes it is the combination of drills that may bring about the best effect, such as that outlined above.

Arms only rowing – Maintain a stable and erect body with legs flat in the boat (no use of slide). With shoulders relaxed and open, simply follow the normal hand pattern for the conventional stroke i.e. tap down, extend arms, lift hand in, draw flat through to body and then repeat.

Result – (this can be used in a similar way to half slide etc.) It allows the rower to focus on only one part of the stroke and thus perfecting that part of the stroke to include with the whole stroke. It limits confusion and distraction, eliminates variables that may contribute to an uneven handle path.

General Drills No Frills



Circle rowing – stop the boat and one person rows at a time in a sweep boat or the sculler rows one oar at a time. Disposes of issues relating to balance and the movement of the boat.

Single Hand Rowing – Inside hand vertical on the oar – best described as “karate chop hand” as it appears that the rower has their hand in a position similar to a karate chop. It encourages dominance in the outside hand as well as still educating the inside hand as to how it will operate on the recovery.

Wave with the inside hand mid recovery – takes the inside hand out of the picture like above but also ensure that we don't push out for extra movements with the inside arm

Clearance Focus (or fewer strokes over a distance) – This is a very ready measure of a crew's rhythm and effort. The coxswain can focus the crew on the puddles formed by the bow seat rower. The task is to see how far the crew can send the puddles toward the stern of the boat before taking the next stroke. For example, is it level with the stroke seat, the rudder or is it off the stern?

Also, challenge the crew in a competition against another crew to take fewer strokes over the same set distance. Alternatively, take a set number of strokes and compare the distance achieved to an opposing crew.

Result – This is a focused attempt at getting “more bang for your buck”. It reinforces the need to have all elements working efficiently together rather than how fast the strokes or how many strokes. Emphasis is on the power of legs, body and arms through the drive rather than the speed of movement forward. Also recommends the “sending” of puddles rather than the “muscling” of a boat.

Observation of the blade moving through the water – The rower, just like the coxswain, can gain much insight into his own rowing stroke movements by scrutinising the blade's path through the water (as discussed earlier). Ask the crew to check the depth of their blades – are they consistent, where do they vary? Also point them toward the puddle – is it clean, well defined, is there a “pocket/hole” behind the blade?

Ergometer rowing – Ergometers can always be used for immediate hands-on manipulation of the rower's technique, although not necessarily associated with the role of the coxswain it is nevertheless worthy of note. If used in conjunction with mirrors, video or other tools, major sequencing problems through the stroke can be addressed, as it allows immediate feedback and self-scrutiny.



THE FINISH

The GOOD Finish *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

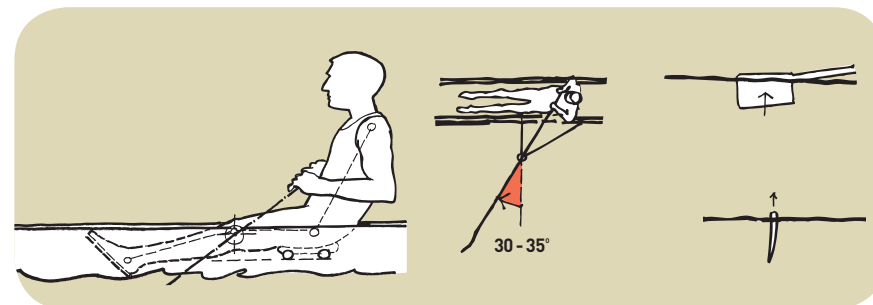
✓	Maintains a flat, in line draw, toward the lower rib (not lap).
✓	Requires flat wrists draw into the body.
✓	Is a downward rotation of the inside wrist to feather the blade.
✓	Requires the elbows to be drawn back past the body, with forearms parallel to the water.
✓	Is completed without pause or stopping.
✓	Is strongest when the body is stable and the blades are drawn to it.
✓	Requires the body to lean back from the vertical about 20 degrees.
✓	Has the rower's head level and looking straight ahead.

The BAD Finish *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

✗	Has the handle getting faster as it exits the water.
✗	Uses the body early in the leg drive, leaving no body contribution later.
✗	Is a hesitant, segmented movement around "the back turn".
✗	Creates an exaggerated "chicken wings" i.e. the elbows out, not through.
✗	Moves the body (chin) toward the handle rather than the handle toward the body.
✗	Curtails the stroke too early with a premature tap down and feather.
✗	Ends the stroke with an upright body.



FINISH DRILLS (CONTINUED FROM BOOKLET #7)



Body hold (or finish check) – A "freeze frame" where the rower sits at the rear of the slide in the perfect finish position, without moving. The rower should be made to hold this position until the back and abdominal muscles tire and then made to stay a little more.

Result – A tired rower complaining about sore muscles would be the first result. But the coxswain can assure them that the drill is to demonstrate appropriate finish position and the contribution of core stability to a good finish. The drill can also be an end in itself, contributing to strength and endurance.

Arms only – A very simple exercise where the rower sits at the rear of the slide using only his arms to move the oar – no body, no legs.

Result – This is similar to the previous body hold drill but this time with an emphasis upon the fluidity of movement from a stable body position. It also emphasises the handle pattern around the back turn of the stroke (recall the bike-chain analogy).

Double finish – This drill would be used for advanced crews. It requires the crewmembers to complete the regular drive sequence and finish but before proceeding up the slide for another stroke, they retain the body position of the finish and with arms only repeat the finish with an already feathered blade. Once they have completed two in and out movements of the hands to the body they continue up the slide for the next stroke.

Result – A natural progression from arms only drill. This will focus upon stable body positioning at the finish with a steadying and isolation of the finish movement. It will also emphasise the early body rock forward for the recovery upon the second of the finishes, having not moved the body for the first of the finishes.



THE RECOVERY

The GOOD Recovery *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

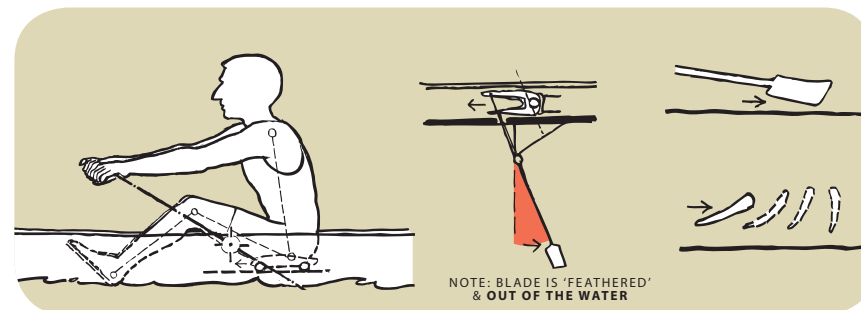
✓	Is completed with the oars not touching the water.
✓	Will allow the rower time to make adequate preparation for the catch.
✓	Will allow the body to be in position for the catch by ½ slide.
✓	Requires the slide speed to be constant.
✓	Requires the outside hand to carry the blade forward.
✓	Has the shoulders angled similarly to the oar angle.
✓	Allows the body to be high and long while still relaxed.
✓	Allows for the blade to be squared as the handle passes the ankles.
✓	Must have hands at a constant height with blades just above the water.

The BAD Recovery *(continued from Booklet # 7)*

✗	Shows the rower collapsed on to the knees.
✗	Has the body position changing after ½ slide.
✗	Has the blade travelling at an inconsistent height.
✗	Shows the outside shoulder falling down and away from the rigger.
✗	Has the arms remaining bent at a considerable angle.
✗	Shows the hips catching up to the shoulders on the way forward & decreases the body angle.
✗	Shows the rower's head falling in height.



RECOVERY DRILLS (CONTINUED FROM BOOKLET #7)



Square blade – When the blade is kept in the square position any variation in boat balance is keenly felt. The bottom of the blade will be very close to the water unlike the feathered blade. Therefore, if there are small variations in handle height on the recovery it risks the blade making contact with the water and checking the boat run.

Result – Therefore, the rower will be more deliberate in maintaining handle height and stepping in and out of the water with the blade at the same height and at the same time.

Alternatively, the coxswain can ask the crew to row alternate square blades i.e. one stroke square, one stroke feathered, one stroke square.

Two drills mentioned earlier, delayed feather and double finish, can be combined with square blade to assist the recovery also.

Checks or pauses – The rowers are asked to pause at a given point during the recovery before recommencing the recovery forward from that point. The point at which the pause is asked for will usually correspond with a given area of technical focus.

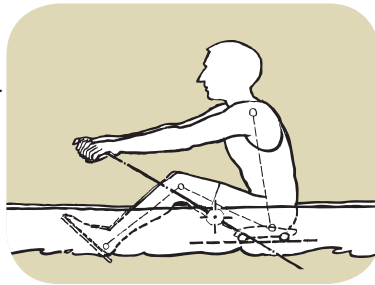
The common check points are: finish, hands away, bodies over, ¼ slide, ½ slide, ¾ slide or at a point designated by the coxswain. It can also be combination of all of these.

Pausing at “hands away” is good for crews that fail to sit back at the finish and allow their knees to rush up. This exercise will require them to hold their knees down while completing the finish. Understandably, it is also good for crews who need work on the timing of the finish and the (“hands away”) early part of the recovery.

The advanced coxswain will be aware of the problems that different hand speeds cause, especially as they can lead to different speeds up the slide between crew members. A pause at hands away will assist the rowers to find uniformity of movement. Obviously, different slide speeds will result in an unstable boat and no coxswain wants this.

RECOVERY DRILLS cont'd

Pausing at "bodies over" is ideal for encouraging those rowers who are reluctant to rock their bodies forward over from the hips from the finish position. Without an early body rock the rower will attempt to gain length later in the stroke where it may create further problems i.e. body lunge into front chocks (front end of slide).



Pausing at half-slide is a worthwhile exercise for contrasting the first part of the recovery with the second part of the recovery.

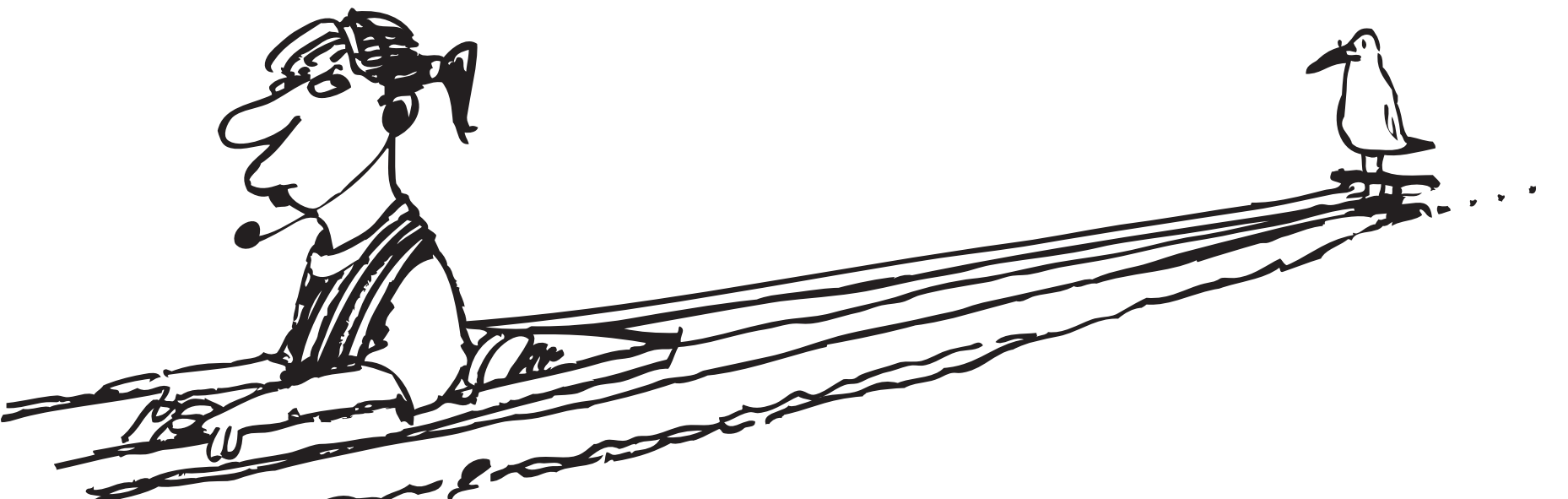
A pause at this point will reinforce the notion that all length of body, angle of body and stability of body has been set by half-slide. After the pause the body remains stable and the knees move toward the chest. The chest does not move toward the knees. There are no extra movements.

The good coxswain will utilise the slide checks or pauses more than many other exercises. While the entire crew is paused in the one position ("freeze frame") there is time to observe the variations between crewmembers - there will be many. Individuals will vary in blade height, timing, length and extra movement. Drawing the differences to the attention of the crewmember involved will ultimately serve as feedback the rower can use.

11.3 VIDEO

Finally, a digital video camera will be of great assistance to both coach and coxswain in drawing to the attention of the rowers technical strengths and weaknesses. Slow motion and freeze frame advance are functions that give the greatest insight. But it is an insight that should not be limited to the rowers; coach and coxswain can analyse, brainstorm and scrutinize through a private screening of their own.

The coxswain, being in the boat, often has a limited visual perspective on what ails his crew and is often unable to place in a context many of the observations and instructions of the coach. Although not taking a starring role on camera and benefiting directly from seeing himself, the coxswain should avail himself of this important tool to add a further dimension to the feedback he can provide to the crew. It is one of the single most effectual actions that a good coxswain can take if seeking the technical proficiency of a crew.

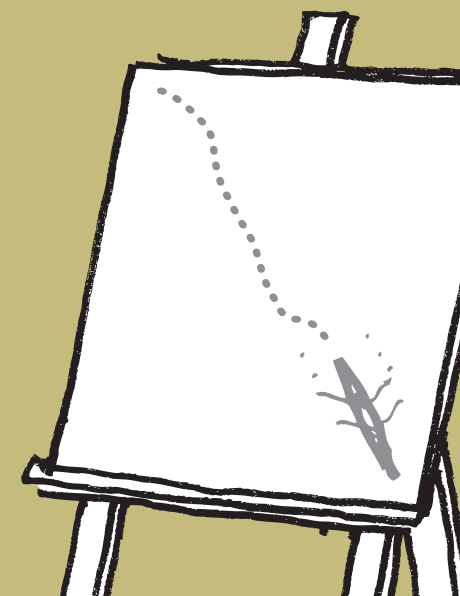


quick glossary

cont'd....

BACK-CHOCKS	The point to which the sliding seat can return with the rower's legs fully extended.
BURIED	The submersion of the blade beneath the surface of the water.
CATCH	The point in the rowing stroke where the oar is placed in the water.
CHECKS	A point at which the rower pauses during the stroke.
CLEARANCE	The distance between the puddle left by the bow seat rower and the stern of the boat at the completion of a stroke and before the next stroke.
DEPTH	Location of the blade beneath the water i.e. shallow, level or deep, during the stroke.
DRIVE	The force applied to move the oar through the water between catch and finish of stroke.
FEATHERING	The turning of the oar's blade to a flat horizontal position parallel with the water's surface.
FINISH	The point at which the oar is extracted from the water to complete the stroke.
FRONT-CHOCKS	The extreme forward point to which the sliding seat can travel up the slide.
HANDS AWAY	Term often used to refer to the incorporation of the finish and early recovery.
HEIGHT	The distance between the blade and the surface of the water.
LENGTH	The reach of the rower forward with body and arms to place the blade into the water.
POWER	For the cox this will usually translate into the effort being made by the rower to move the oar quickly through the water.

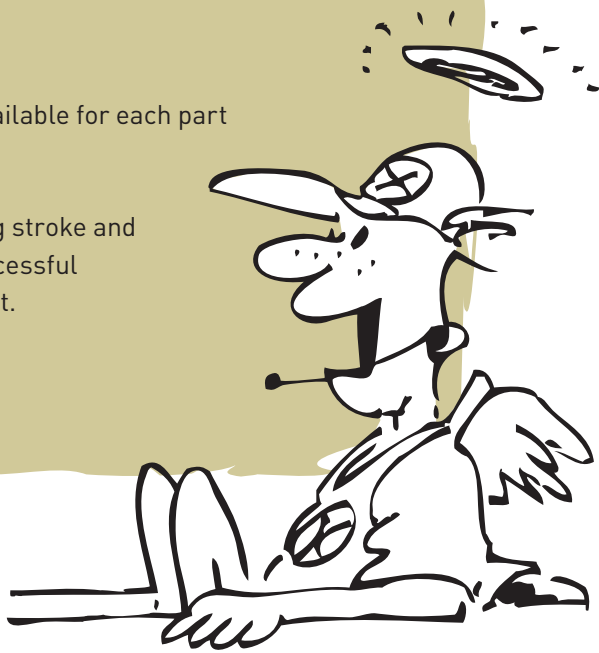
PRESSURE	The amount of effort to hold the oar in and through the water.
RATING	The number (regularity) of strokes taken per minute as a measure of speed and effort.
RATIO	The balance of time taken coming up the slide to going back on the slide (usually 2:1 or 3:1 – in favour of time up the slide).
RECOVERY	The rower's movement forward by which the oar is carried to be placed in the water again.
RHYTHM	A consistent pattern of stroke-making at a consistent and predictable speed.
RUN	Often a term used to describe the smooth continued momentum of the boat through the water after the completion of a stroke.
SQUARE BLADE	The positioning of the oar's blade so that it is perpendicular to the water (unfeathered).
SQUARING THE BLADE	The turning of the blade from the flat feather to the position necessary to take a stroke.
TECHNIQUE	Is the term used to describe the rower's movements relative to a recognised standard.
WASH	Water that is thrown up behind a motorised water vessel creating large undulating bodies of water (waves).



the good COXSWAIN

THE GOOD COXSWAIN WILL KNOW:

- ✓ How to function as an assistant to the coach.
- ✓ How to identify key indicators for assessing a crew's rowing technique.
- ✓ The effect that correct and incorrect technique has on the boat's movement.
- ✓ The drills available to improve rowing technique.
- ✓ The purpose of using drills to assist rower's technique.
- ✓ How to apply drills.
- ✓ A selection of drills available for each part of the rowing stroke.
- ✓ Each part of the rowing stroke and how to identify the successful completion of each part.



© 2007 Andrew O'Brien
RowEd
E-mail: info@rowed.com.au
www.rowed.com.au

First Published in 2008
Rowing Victoria Incorporated
Suite 13, 20 Commercial Rd,
Melbourne VIC 3004
Telephone: 03 9820 8888
www.rowingvictoria.asn.au

Cartoon Graphics
Will Goodwin
www.willgoodwin.com.au

Design / Production
Gillian Deeble
www.gjddesigns.com.au

The Good Coxswain title and the series of booklets are copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968 and any subsequent amendments, no part may be reproduced, stored in retrieval system or transmitted by any means or process whatsoever without prior written permission. Enquiries should be addressed to the Author - Andrew O'Brien, RowEd Australia.

Disclaimer

The author and publisher believe all material produced for The Good Coxswain is correctly and accurately researched. However, we give no warranty in relation thereto and disclaim liability for all claims against the publication, its employees or any person associated which may arise from any material contained within its pages which may be challenged by any persons. Views expressed by the Good Coxswain are not necessarily those of Rowing Australia or associated State Rowing bodies or associations.

Printed in Australia

IN ASSOCIATION WITH:

