

the good **COXSWAIN**

THE COXSWAIN AS COACH

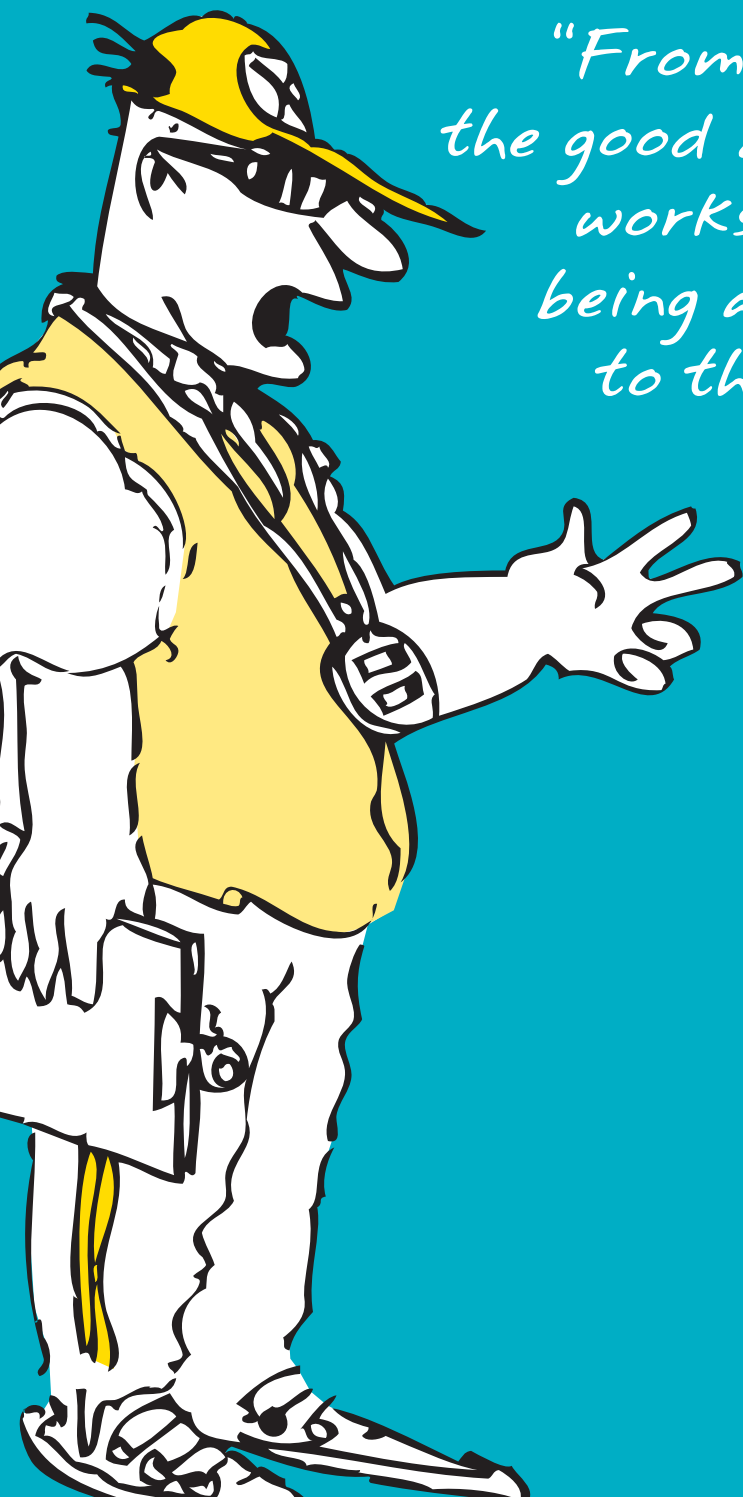


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*"From day one
the good coxswain
works toward
being assistant
to the coach"*

the good COXSWAIN



7.1 INTRODUCTION

Without a good coxswain a coach does not have amplification, immediacy or a failsafe backup within the boat. The good coxswain, speaking to his crew, will guarantee that the coach's instructions are not only heard but heard when the crew most needs to hear them. As the adrenaline pumps through veins, the gnawing doubts invade the mind and the fatigue invades every limb, the rower should know that there is one certainty - **the cox will know what to do and when to do it!**

At its most effective, the coxswain's voice will be heard when the rower most wants to hear it. This is most often when the coach's own voice cannot be heard or when the coach's voice needs emphasis and reinforcement. The good coxswain will know the strengths and weaknesses of each and every rower within the crew. He will know what it takes to address the weakness and what it will take to bring out the strengths. The cox knows this because he has listened to, observed and experienced the evolution of his crew under the attention of the coach.

Training has been such that the coach has given his crew every likely scenario and the means by which to respond to it. He has worked their bodies and their minds - building strength, fitness, knowledge and resilience.

The coxswain has not been a disinterested observer or a passenger. Nor has he been just a glorified navigator. In fact, he has been a keenly observant, participant in the entire process. He has learnt much from the coach and has offered his own insights on a regular basis. He has spoken often with the coach and is fully aware of what the coach expects of him and of the crew. The process of acquiring knowledge has been so successful that the coach now trusts the cox to speak on his behalf - in training and during the race!

From day one the good coxswain will work toward achieving the title **"assistant to the coach"** - this booklet is designed to assist this process.

7.2 TECHNIQUE - FAULT CORRECTION

For the coxswain to achieve the honorary title, "assistant to the coach", he must begin with the objective that is central to all rowing:

Improve the functioning of the crew for the purpose of making the boat go faster.

This is a clearly stated, undeniable truth that all coaches and good coxswains must have as their core value when preparing a crew - to improve rowing technique.

It took a while, but I eventually knew what the boat should feel like. All the rowers used to talk about the "bubbles" under the boat.

I thought it was some kind of magical fantasy the rowers entertained - "when the boat is sitting up and singing, you can hear the bubbles under the hull." One day I heard them and I knew that at that moment we had found our own kind of rowing perfection.

Felix Cashin, Coxswain

'Rowing technique' is the general term used to describe the pattern of stroke making used to move a boat. Each nation within the world's rowing community has arrived at their "style" of rowing but the building blocks remain the same - only emphasis changes. In Australia there is a standardised, commonly agreed to rowing style that is endorsed by Rowing Australia, the national rowing body. For uniformity and national selection purposes this style is required of all clubs and schools. Australia's rowing success in recent years, should recommend it as the preferred technique. It will be the technique that forms the basis of the following pages' instruction.

For some, the ability to give the right technical advice at the right time requires the coxswain to spend many hours in the coxswain seat developing the ability to listen, understand and commit to memory the instructions of the coach. But it is not just about listening from the coxswain's seat; for the good coxswain it also about seeing and feeling. The good coxswain knows that for every command a coach or coxswain gives there should be a resulting influence on the boat - the good coxswain will see, hear and feel this influence. If he does not, then he must either improve his awareness or assume a lack of responsiveness from the crew. Either way, the coxswain has some work to do.



The bottom line: being a good coxswain is not about how much you can repeat of what the coach has said, but how much of what is said you can see, hear and feel. Remember, words have no purpose unless they make the boat go faster.

REMEMBERING WHAT THE COACH SAYS

Of course there will be a great deal said by the coach and not all of it will be remembered or understood. To address this there are four pieces of advice that a new coxswain should be given:



Use what is understood and remain silent on what is not understood. The coxswain who regurgitates what the coach says without understanding is likely to cause more troubles than he will solve. The coxswain is not required to remember and speak on everything. Work with what you have got and do it well!



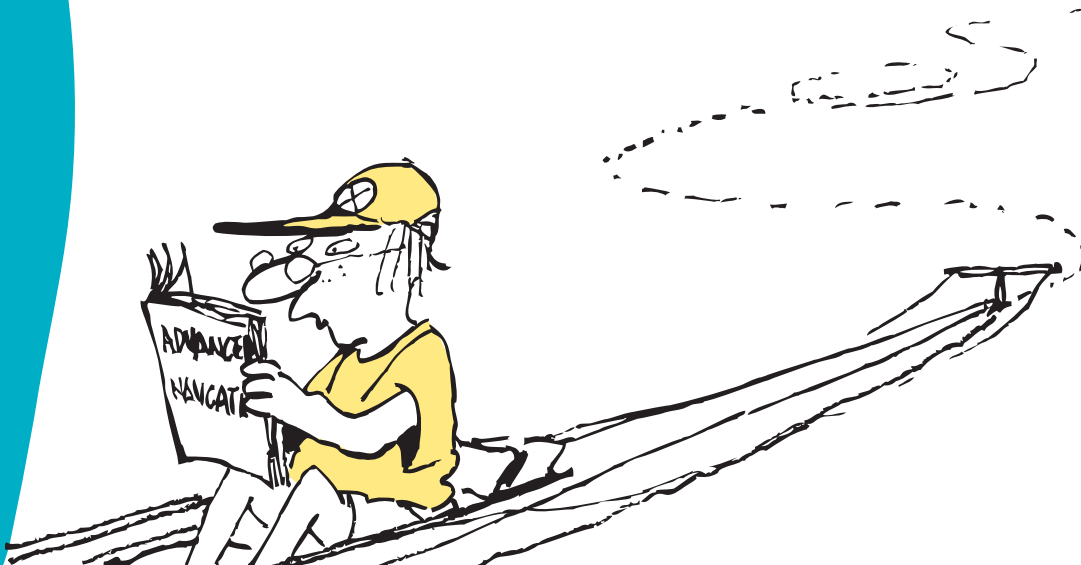
"Use it or lose it!" Using the words of the coach and then repeating those words in the training session will make them "stick" in your memory.



Use the "before and after" comparison. With senses keenly tuned, the coxswain will be able to feel, see or hear what is happening in the boat. When the coach recommends a change the cox will move to "alert" and be a sensitive instrument to measure difference. He may ask himself the question "What has changed?" The senses, not just the head, should remember.



Go for a row. There is nothing to say that a coxswain cannot use a moving seat every now and then. After spending some time in the coxswain seat the cox will benefit from spending some time rowing. There is no better reinforcement of a coach's instructions than for you to give them practical application. A single scull should suffice or a coxswains' scratch crew!



... I was shocked; it was like sitting some kind of exam that I didn't even know about. He just kept asking me "how did it feel?" What could I say - I didn't know; I didn't even understand the question.

I hated the coach in those first few weeks. Every time we did a piece or got off the water he would ask "how did it feel?" After a while I had to have something to say so I started taking notice of changes in the boat - did it sit up, did it fall to one side, did it lie low in the water or sit high, was it noisy and uneven? I started to be sensitive to every little movement and sound. Eventually, he didn't have to ask - I was sensitive, fine tuned, giving him all the in-boat feedback he needed. He had done me and the crew a favour.

Felix Cashin, Coxswain

HOW TO IDENTIFY CORRECT TECHNIQUE

The good coxswain will quickly realise that there are only **three important questions for the coxswain to ask** in ascertaining whether a crew has correct technique:



3 QUESTIONS TO ASSESS CORRECT TECHNIQUE

1

Is the boat moving on an even keel – is it balanced?

KEY INDICATOR: As coxswain am I feeling the boat rocking from side to side and can I see the oars of one side of the boat on the water and the other higher off the water?

2

Are all the rowers constant in their effort and movement – is there uniformity?

KEY INDICATOR: As coxswain on a straight course, am I having to use the rudder all of the time to keep the boat on course? Can I see the oars entering and exiting at different times? Are the rowers moving forward and back at different times and with different movements?

3

Is the boat moving consistently forward through the water – is it fast for the effort?

KEY INDICATOR: As coxswain am I feeling a jolting sensation forward and back? Is the boat sitting low in the water, is the boat moving at a variable speed?

There is a fair chance that there will be very few coxswains that will be able to answer any of these major topical questions with a bold “Yes!” The coach will always have work to do on technique and the cox will always be there to help him/her.

But use these questions as a place to begin – from these key elements the good coxswain can work logically and methodically backwards.



“I know the boat should be on a balanced keel and it is not – to which side is the boat leaning?”



“I know that all the rowers should be moving together and they are not – who is different from the others and where does that difference lie?”



“I know that the boat should be moving forward with a consistent forward momentum, and it is not, when does it lose speed or when does it jolt?”

If the coxswain pinpoints the absence of a key element, such as the boat being on an even keel, for example, then he can narrow-in on a likely cause “The bow seat rower is leaning to stroke-side” then he will be required to draw it to the attention of his crew, “Bow you are leaning away from your rigger.”

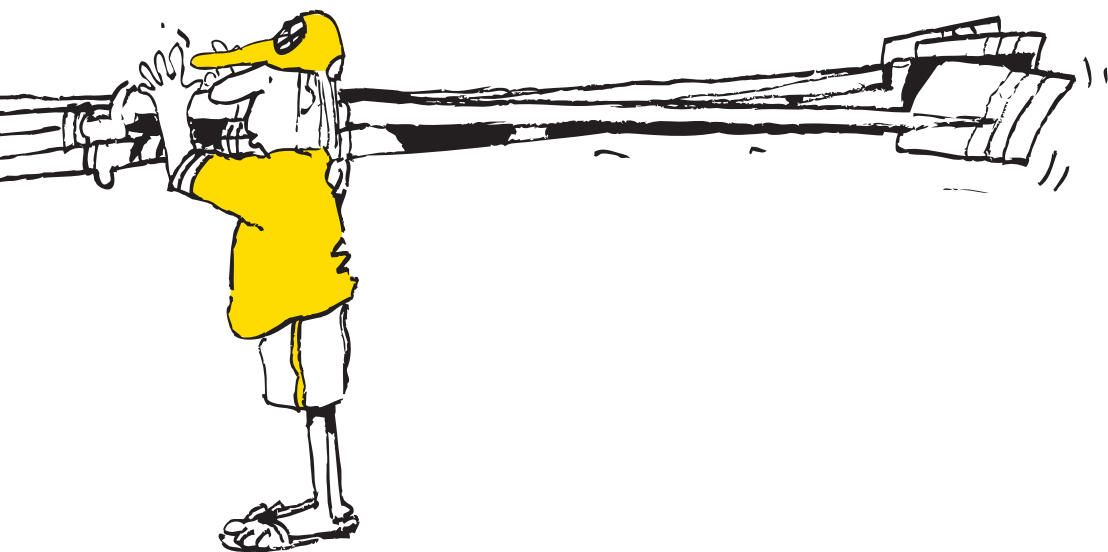
All the same, these key elements are ideal for assessing the general technique of a crew or crewmember – they allow the coxswain to see the bigger picture (i.e. rowers and a boat not an elbow here or a finger there).

7.3 USING THE BLADE TO ASSESS TECHNIQUE

Beginning with the bigger picture and working backwards can be ably assisted by looking at the entire rowing stroke as seen through the path of an oar's blade – after all, it is the rower's **"tool of trade"**. It is invariably, the quickest and easiest assessment of the rower and the parts of the rowing stroke – if this is not right, then those key elements listed above will certainly not be right. This is the 'easy access' way in to "rowing stroke technique".

The novice coxswain will often begin by coxing a boat from the stern. It is an ideal place to begin because it allows the inexperienced coxswain to see the entire stroke in action and also allows him to see some of the rowers. Unfortunately, he cannot see all of the rowers but he will quickly learn that there is a connection between what the oar does and what the rower he cannot see is doing – they are not independent of each other. It is, therefore, logical to assume, that if the path the blade is taking is incorrect, then the rower is doing something wrong and will make the boat go slower.

Certainly, it may take some time to work out what that connection is between the blade and what should be said to the rower to improve his technique. Nevertheless, if the cox knows the correct path for the oar then he will be able to identify when the rower is doing something incorrect and make the connection with the key elements (even if the cox is unable to see the rower).



CORRECT TECHNIQUE - WHAT THE BLADE SHOULD DO

The coxswain who watches the correct course of the blade will see that it is, from the beginning of the stroke:

- ➔ fully squared in the water
- ➔ fully buried in the water
- ➔ travelling through the water at a consistent depth
- ➔ creating a 'hole' in the water behind the moving blade
- ➔ exiting the water from its full depth while still square
- ➔ exiting the water by just a few centimetres
- ➔ feathering (to flat blade) immediately after the exit
- ➔ moving above the water by a few centimetres at a consistent height
- ➔ squaring up slowly as it progresses toward the water entry
- ➔ entering the water fully square and from the same height
- ➔ entering the water while still moving toward the bow end

The result if each rower performs this same disciplined movement of the blade at the same time?

- ➔ a boat will sit evenly on its keel,
- ➔ each rower will be able to exercise their maximum force
- ➔ each rower will work in effective combination together for a faster boat

Thus each of the key elements raised earlier will have been addressed. The good coxswain should be reluctant to see any of these positive characteristics vary. It is the coxswain's job as "assistant to the coach" to make sure that they do not vary.

If there were to be any variation it will invite the coxswain's intervention.

Many understand what coaches are saying when they insist the blade enter the water on the way forward. However, for the benefit of beginners, I think that coaches need to reinforce that the blade and rower will be travelling in opposite directions - so the blade enters heading towards the bow whilst the rower moves towards the stern - I don't really know how to put this in simple language. This is, I think, the hardest for people to understand at a rudimentary level.

Sandy Mitchell, Coach and Coxswain

Oars in the water are easier to understand than rowers in the boat. Boats win races, rowers don't. Make the boat travel fast and fastest - you win the race. Oars are the tools.

Mark Donohue, Coach

THE COXSWAIN'S RESPONSE TO POOR TECHNIQUE

For the novice coxswain, the response may be to draw one of the 'best practice characteristics', listed on pg 13, to the attention of the rower(s). For example if a rower is not, with his blade, "travelling through the water at a consistent depth", then the cox may respond with "Bow, keep your blade buried."

For the advanced coxswain it will be his role to not only identify but to recommend a technical response from the rower that may address the problem e.g. "Bow, your blade is floating out - hold the power through."

Whether advanced or beginner, the coxswain should always be prepared to give the crew member immediate feedback after making a call:



Did they respond?



Did they respond appropriately?



Did they do it well?



Should they try again?

Each of these questions should move through the mind of a coxswain immediately after calling for a correction to technique. The coxswain must follow up his commands, not just throw them to the wind with hope.

It is far too easy for the coxswain (and coach) to become a "technical nit-picker." The rowers are not machines with which the coxswain and coach constantly "tinker". **Be prepared to give praise when something has been attempted or completed successfully.** Rowers need and want feedback i.e. "Well done, bow. You have made an immediate change." This will serve to reinforce the positive technical model.

Alternatively, the feedback can be reproachful if a rower has not made the appropriate effort or a change has not been observed. "Keep trying bow, I have not seen a change yet - keep at it - tap down away."

7.4 DRILLS FOR IMPROVING TECHNIQUE

Sometimes, the rower needs to have the problem isolated or clearly defined in the stroke cycle. The coach will normally do this but it can be the role of the good coxswain to prescribe an exercise or drill that will not only recognise but address the problem. Drills, in the end, are devices for the improvement of technique and they are highly recommended.

Under the technical circumstances outlined above i.e. rower is not “travelling through the water at a consistent depth” with his blade, then the coach may prescribe, via the coxswain, the exercise: “All crew, delayed feather on three strokes... one... two... three; delayed feather.” The ‘Delayed Feather Drill’ is just one of many drills the coach or coxswain may employ to troubleshoot a poor finish to the stroke. (Refer to: Good Release Drills for the Good Coxswain later in this booklet.)

Usually, the coach will inform a coxswain of his intentions to use a particular drill before setting out on the water. This should give the coxswain opportunity to familiarise himself with the drill or ask any questions.

Once familiar with the intended drill the coxswain is responsible, UNDER THE COACHES INSTRUCTION, for the implementation of that drill on the water.

REASONS FOR USING A DRILL

- ➔ **Highlight and rectify a fault in technique**
- ➔ **Provide a model of best technical practice**
- ➔ **Demonstrate crew discipline and the coxswain’s control of the crew**

It is true to say that the precision and timing of a drill is directly linked to the ability of the coxswain in the issuing of his commands. If the response to a command is not immediate or consistent across the entire crew then it will not serve its technical purpose nor will it encourage a pride in the crew’s stroke-making ability.

HOW THE GOOD COXSWAIN APPLIES THE DRILL

If the precision and timing of movement springs from the commands of the coxswain then the good coxswain will:



Give forewarning of his intention to call for a drill;



Give brief explanation as to what is expected in completing the drill (best practice);



Give the crew time to digest the information;



Give the crew a precise moment in time (eg. three strokes) when the drill will begin;



Give the drill command at the precise moment (eg. entry to the water) during the stroke were it will have the greatest benefit;

Timing of command is often as important as the command given. It would be inappropriate to expect to implement a drill that is designed to address the blades exit from the water at the very moment when the blade is exiting. Reaction times may vary between crew members but also, the crewmembers need time to process the information they have been given. This “thinking time” will guarantee a unified correct application of the drill both physically and mentally.

It is not unheard of for some coaches to use drills as a key indicator of a rower’s capacity to adapt readily to instruction or to display a discipline of focus. Because most drills require an ability to move outside the predictable movements of a rowing stroke, the coach can call for a drill with little warning and gauge, for example, which of his rowers is listening, adaptable or even coordinated. It can be rowing’s equivalent of ‘Simon Says’ (i.e. ‘Coxswain Says’). Something that coxswains can use to keep a crew interested, focused and disciplined.

It would be unrealistic to expect all rowers to be able to do all drills immediately. After all, it is one of the chief purposes of drills to pinpoint weaknesses and work systematically toward improvement. Persistence and perseverance are as vital for the coxswain as they are for the rower and the coach.



The coxswain must pick his moment for applying drills. Any drill that requires a slowing of the boat is best done with no immediate traffic to the stern. A drill that requires an increase in power and rating will best be left until there is no traffic blocking to the bow. Also, when drills necessitate a well balanced boat it would be unfortunate to attempt them in rough weather or when using a lot of rudder.

Drills can often be included in a crew's regular warm-up routine. The partial slide warm-ups, in pairs, referred to in *Booklet 6 - On the Water* are themselves drills. The coxswain in consultation with the coach may wish to add particular drills to the warm-up that focus the crew on particular aspects of their rowing that need improvement or reinforcement. The coxswain would be encouraged to retain a list of the drills and the sequence in which they are applied. It could then be routinely used during training and before races.

In summation, **the coxswain will be a keen observer, an attentive listener and a sensitive instrument to the changes affected by a coach's instructions.** Then, independently, the cox will begin to see, hear and feel the boat and understand how the rower and his use of the oar moves the boat. The cox is expected and qualified to make judgements commensurate with his knowledge. Consequently, it is the good coxswain's responsibility to then issue instruction, give commands, provide exercises and encourage the rower(s) to help make a faster boat.

As already discussed, the path of the blade is one very important and effective point of referral for any coxswain wishing to contribute to the crew's rowing technique. If the blade is consistent of timing, height, depth and speed, then, according to the standardised criteria for a rowing stroke, the technique is good. But there are other key reference points, of which a coxswain should be aware, in order to make change to the blade path and raise the competency of the crew.

"Perfect technique has all movements in order with no added extras."



7.5 PARTS OF THE ROWING STROKE

For ease of reference the rowing stroke is divided into four major parts and the good coxswain should be at least familiar with these parts and the words or phrases used to describe them. Certainly, the coach will speak this “language” and the cox will need to understand, speak and sometimes translate.

These four major parts can also be related back to the rower’s utilisation of the blade: **the catch, the drive, the finish & the recovery** (refer to table on the opposite page).

The coxswain will need to know these parts. However, it is best understood that these parts are all interdependent and **the rowing stroke is a continuous, fluid cycle of perpetual motion**. All parts overlap seamlessly when applied by a good rower.

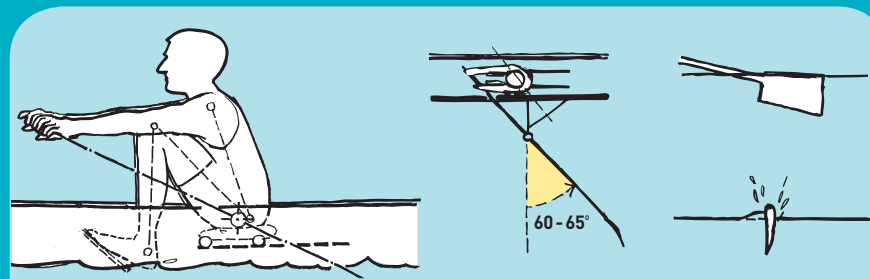
Although the term “finish” would suggest an ending or a point at which to stop, there is no point at which the blade or the stroke finishes. Like a circle there is no point of beginning or ending. It is for this reason that “the finish” is often referred to as “the release”.

Coaches use many different analogies to impress this sense of continuity. A common analogy is the ‘**bicycle chain**’ – continuous motion of the chain around a front and rear cog; just as the pattern of the oar handle through the motion of a rowing stroke.

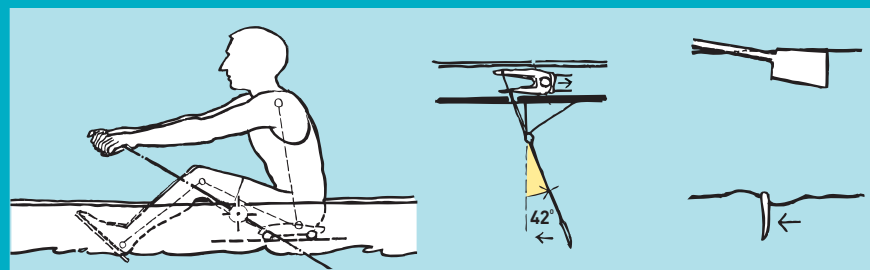
The good coxswain will never lose sight of this continuity of motion when narrowing in on any one of the parts as detailed below.

What follows on the next pages is a sketched characterisation of “good” and “bad” rowing - the tips of two very large “icebergs”. (The reader may refer to *Booklet 11 - Further Drills for the Cox as Coach* for additional characteristics and drills.) It is to be used only as a broad indicator and is neither detailed nor exhaustive in its scope. Hopefully, it will raise just as many questions as answers. At best, it will prompt further discussion between the coxswain and their coach. *[Please note: all technique illustrations, exercises and discussion included here have a sweep-oared emphasis].*

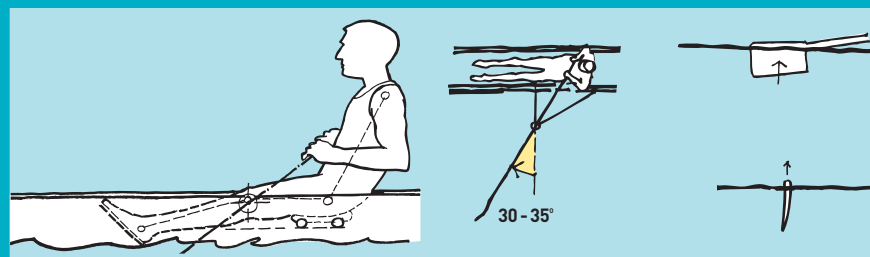
THE CATCH - The placement of the blade into the water.



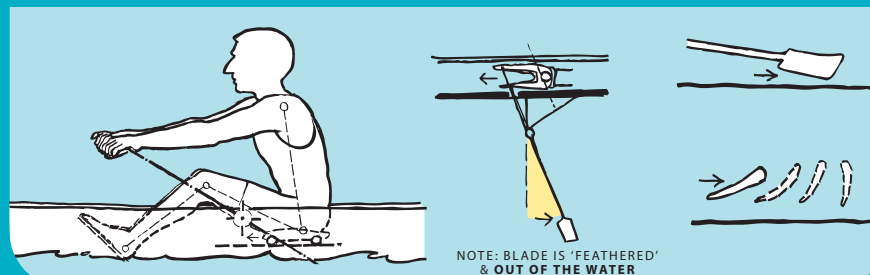
THE DRIVE - The maximum force exerted by the rower to move the blade through the water.



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.



GOOD CATCH DRILLS FOR THE GOOD COXSWAIN

Early squaring – spending more time with a square blade before going into the water at the catch. The rower rolls the blade to a square position as the knees are passed (instead of the ankles).

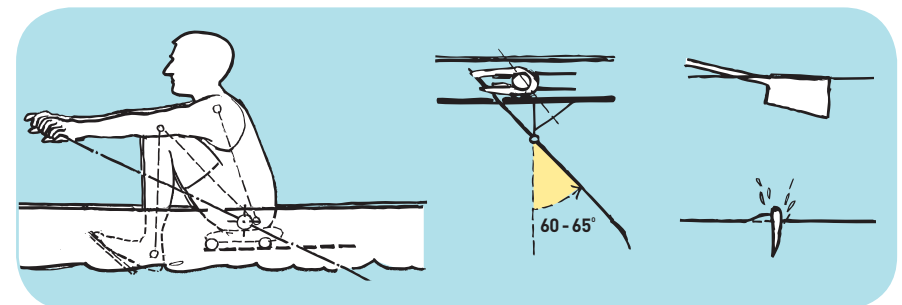
Result – the catch is prepared well in advance to avoid any delays going into the water. The rower will have less to do at the last minute; therefore his entry to the water will be better timed and made less complex.

Roll ups/strikes – with square blades at the “finish” position the rower taps the hands down to take the blade from the water, feathers, and moves slowly up the slide with his fellow crewmembers to the catch position. The crew places their oars in the water together. This is the equivalent of a slow motion preparation for entry to the water.

Result – the catch becomes part of the movement forward. The drill emphasises the advice that – “the catch is the last thing you do forward not the first thing you do back.” The crew will appreciate the time taken to prepare for the catch. The crew will also enjoy the silence being punctuated by the catch (blade to water) at the end of the movement forward in this exercise.

Feet out – The rowers remove their feet from their footstretchers and place them on top of the bindings.

Result – a controlled, slow, well-considered approach to the catch without the rush that comes when rowers pull themselves forward by their feet. The rower’s shins will only come as far as vertical and make for a stronger catch position. The body positioning is also relaxed and balanced, ideal for the entry to the water.



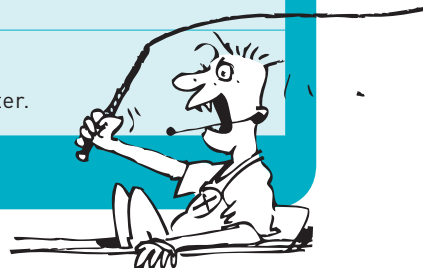
THE CATCH

The GOOD coxswain will reinforce the following:

- ✓ The catch is a small movement made by the hands.
- ✓ The catch is the last thing the rower does on the way forward during the recovery.
- ✓ The catch creates an even splash to the front and back of the blade at the same time.
- ✓ The catch requires the body to remain still and stable.
- ✓ The catch will be timed to go in with the stroke seat rower.

The BAD coxswain will accept the following:

- ✗ Blades moving toward the stern OUT of the water.
- ✗ The rower's chest falls onto the knees just before the blade enters the water.
- ✗ Blades skyed in the air before going into the water.
- ✗ Blade splashes water toward the stern.
- ✗ The rower's shoulders lift and back straightens as the blade enters the water.



GOOD DRIVE DRILLS FOR THE GOOD COXSWAIN

Pressure Variation (e.g. 30% -70%) - The crew rows with varying degrees of effort at varying parts of the drive. For example they may row 20 strokes with very light catches building to light finishes, then 20 strokes with light catches building to 1/2 pressure finishes, then 20 strokes building to 3/4 pressure finishes, then 20 strokes with light catches building to full pressure finishes.

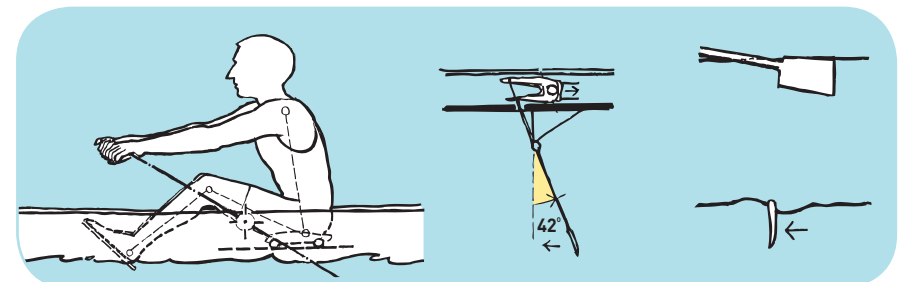
Result: the crew gains a better understanding of the building of effort through the drive. The emphasis is placed upon the contribution of legs in the early to mid drive, the body from mid-drive to late drive and the arms for the later part of the drive. Each overlaps and adds its own unique contribution to the power of the stroke and speed of the boat. The crew should also be able to see what these varying pressures do to the depth of the blade in the water i.e. the greater the effort, the deeper the blade; the lighter the effort the shallower the blade. Momentum gathers through the drive.

Legs only - The rowers leave their upper bodies in the catch position while the legs push back through the drive taking the handle with them. The legs are fully extended and the body is still in the catch position with arms extended. The legs have been the only contributors to the oars movement through the water. The blade is extracted at this point and the rowers go back up the slide without needing to feather (this is an extension of "stuff the duck").

Result: The rowers avoid taking the catch with the upper body and the lower body exaggerates its contribution to the drive. Legs become all the more important.

Working up the slide - All crewmembers start at the back of the slide, with legs fully extended and then by degrees work toward a full slide movement. For example, the crew rows with arms only for 20 strokes, then 20 strokes with body swing, 20 at 1/4 slide, 20 at 1/2 slide, 20 at 3/4 slide, then full slide.

Result - the crew is able to see how each added part contributes to the drive. All parts are isolated within the drive by the amount of slide being used. The crew begins to appreciate the necessity of all parts contributing to the maximum boat speed and what can be sacrificed if the stroke lacks sequence or the full range of movement.



THE DRIVE

The GOOD coxswain will reinforce the following:

- ✓ The drive is begun by the legs after the catch.
- ✓ The drive is to begin with the rower's weight centred on the feet.
- ✓ The drive combines, in order, the legs, body and arms – each overlapping.
- ✓ The drive gathers speed of movement through to the finish.
- ✓ The drive requires a flat path of oar handle through to the body.

The BAD coxswain will accept the following:

- ✗ The blade "bouncing" up and down at variable depth in the water.
- ✗ The deep burial of blade (and the shaft) at the catch.
- ✗ The blade "washes out" by coming out of the water at the end of the drive (before the finish).
- ✗ The legs push back, leaving the oar handle behind.
- ✗ The head and shoulders are thrown back to initiate the drive.





THE FINISH / RELEASE

The GOOD coxswain will reinforce the following:

- ✓ The finish allows the blade to be taken from the water at the completion of the drive.
- ✓ The finish requires the hands to move at the same speed into and away from the body.
- ✓ The finish, done well, allows the "pocket of air" behind the blade to remain defined.
- ✓ The finish requires the blade to be extracted cleanly without wash encompassing the blade.
- ✓ The finish requires the handle to be tapped down by the outside hand.

The BAD coxswain will accept the following:

- ✗ The blade throwing up water.
- ✗ The handle being drawn down into the lap.
- ✗ The rower leaning back too far and forcing the handle to move down with the body.
- ✗ The boat dipping in the water at the finish.
- ✗ The handle slowing down at the finish and getting faster as it exits the water.



7.5 PARTS OF THE ROWING STROKE cont'd...

GOOD RELEASE DRILLS FOR THE GOOD COXSWAIN

A good finish connects the drive with the recovery, therefore they share many drills. The coxswain should feel free to interchange the drills included in this section between each part of the stroke.

Tap down away exercise – the crew sits in the finish position and in unison tap the handle down and away repeatedly.

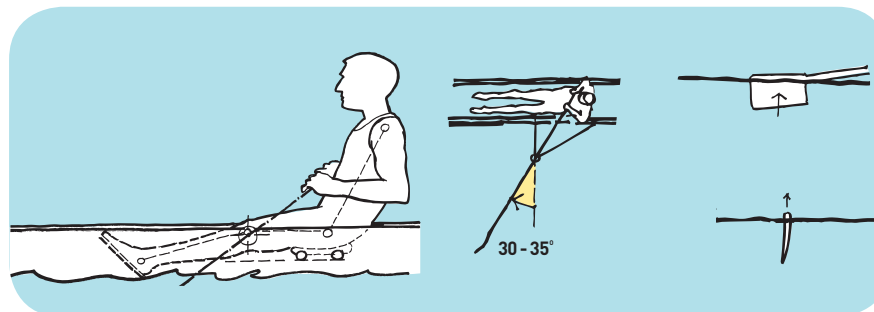
Result: The finish movements are clearly defined in appropriate sequence and with a well timed unity of purpose. The drill also emphasises the continuity of movement out of the water and forward. Crews like to listen to the sounds made when sitting very still and then moving together to create a 'chorus' between them.

Square blade – simply put, the crew does not feather the blade it maintains the blade at a right angle to the water for the duration of the stroke.

Result: A single-minded focus upon the blade's extraction from the water without added complexity to the movement of the handle, such as feathering. The rower is sure to "step out" of the water before doing anything else. It will also guarantee that the handle has been tapped down far enough to keep the blade clear of the water.

Delayed feather – each member of the crew extracts the blade vertically then feathers the blade once it is moving above the water in the recovery.

Result: The crew makes sure that each tap down and feather is done well without a confused blending of the two to make a "dump" or "wash-out". It can also emphasise the separate tasks each hand has to complete within the sweep boat i.e. the inside hand feathers, the outside hand taps and guides.





THE RECOVERY

The GOOD coxswain will reinforce the following:

- ✓ The recovery will carry the blades forward to the catch position.
- ✓ The recovery sequence is - hands move away from the finish drawing the shoulders over from the hips, with the knees lifting slowly after the hands pass the knees.
- ✓ The recovery is a time for just that "recovering" - allow relief and breathing
- ✓ The recovery should take at least twice as long to complete as the drive.
- ✓ The recovery sets the rhythm of the boat.

The BAD coxswain will accept the following:

- ✗ A "tic-toc" rhythm - equal time in the stroke devoted to the drive and recovery.
- ✗ A boat lunging toward the stern.
- ✗ Rowers remaining stiff / upright without body swing.
- ✗ The rower hunches over from the middle of the back.
- ✗ The rower looks to the bottom of the boat.



7.5 PARTS OF THE ROWING STROKE cont'd...

GOOD RECOVERY DRILLS FOR THE GOOD COXSWAIN

Recovery count: The coxswain counts out loud the time to be taken up the slide i.e. begin count on '1' at the finish, '2' at mid-recovery (1/2 slide), '3' at the catch. Repeat until rhythm is achieved. ('4' could be added for the drive.)

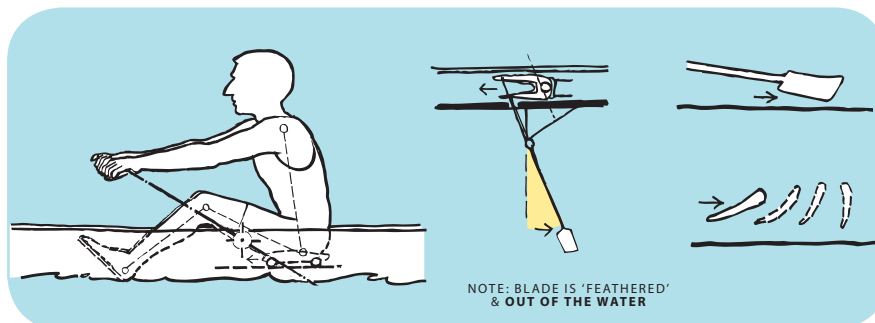
Result: A crew challenged to establish a rhythm that allows full recovery time. It will also encourage a balanced, proportionate ratio between drive and recovery. This will also impose strict crew uniformity.

Feet out rowing: The rowers are asked to remove their feet from the foot-stretcher and place them on top of the bindings - not secured.

Result: This exercise is ideal for stopping a crew from imposing an artificial rhythm by pulling themselves up too speedily on the slide by their feet. It will also stop rowers from lying too far back in the boat at the finish - very embarrassing for the rower that falls off the back of the seat. Also, without secure foot holdings the rower is required to balance through the hands - height and speed of hands become very important.

Outside arm only: The rower removes the hand closest to the rigger from the handle (placing it behind his back), leaving the hand closest to the end of the handle on the grip. The stroke will then be taken with a square blade.

Result: The outside hand will lead the body forward and retain the height of the handle on the recovery - as it is required to do. It will encourage the longest reach and most erect positioning of the body. Not to forget that this exercise is just as important for the absence of the other hand reinforcing the need to relax the inside hand in the recovery process.



The 'recovery count' is my favourite exercise, but I disagree with the application of the count used by some coaches. I guess it's my background as a musician that does it for me. Your first beat is the strongest, so from an emphasis point of view should be placed at the catch, your 2nd beat at the finish and your 3rd beat mid-recovery. This provides you with your ideal race tempo 2:1 ratio (twice as long on recovery compared to the drive).

For added slide control add in fourth and fifth beats but always the third beat begins at the breaking of the seat during the recovery.

1. **Catch** (emphasis of effort or in music your "downbeat")
2. **Finish** (not so much - beginning of a new beat but signifies completion of the first beat)
3. **Break seat** (hands & body already over) - the "upbeat" (preparatory) or in extended slide pieces add in extra beats for the slide (4 or 5).

Sandy Mitchell, Coach

"Coxswain Says" is a game I play all the time with my crew to keep them alert while doing drills to improve their rowing. My challenge as coxswain is to group together the drills that they need with other drills and then put them in a selected order. I then tell the crew that they are to do five strokes, each with a different drill and the first to confuse the order or fail to complete the drill successfully is 'out'.

If they do this for 2000 metres they usually end up mentally exhausted from the concentration it requires.

Rob Glover, Coxswain

7.6 CONSIDERING THE COMPLETE STROKE

To put all of these drills into perspective the coxswain should not become a technical “nit-picker”, constantly “tinkering” with the rower’s stroke - drills are a means to an end, they are not the end. The drills are not ‘poses’ to assume but efficient overlapping movements that must be uniform, balanced, consistent, free-flowing and rhythmical.

The coxswain that retains a clearly defined image of (and feeling for) the entire stroke in its most efficient form, while looking to correct technical faults, is going to have the faster crew.

Therefore, the good coxswain will make the following integral to the bigger picture:

Timing - Uniformity of movement



Good Cox – “My crew moves as one to enter the water, push the blade through the water, exit the water and return together to begin another stroke.”

Rhythm - Consistent ratio between recovery and drive



Good Cox – “My crew moves up the slide to place the oar in the water, more slowly than the time taken to row the oar through the water. The crew’s blades spend twice as much time out of the water as they spend in the water, no matter what the circumstances, and for every stroke. Their stroke is very predictable.”

Motion - Forward and back direction



Good Cox – “My crew works on the same level plane of motion. Their heads, limbs and bodies work forward and back, not up and down. Nothing falls, nothing lifts. They know the height at which they should operate.”

Rating - Strokes taken per minute



Good Cox – “My crew is in control of the number of strokes taken per minute. They regulate the cadence of their movement to govern the speed of our boat. They sit on the rating they are asked to sit on by me or the coach – they are in control.”

Exertion - Amount of effort made



Good Cox – “My crew spends the required amount of energy asked of them to make the boat respond. They each make an equivalent effort, at the same time, for the same length of time and in the same way.”

The good coxswain, that retains his focus and is able to suggest to his crew small technical improvements, will gain centimetres of improvement in every stroke. Very rarely will the coxswain have an opportunity to make the “big impact” statement that turns a crew’s fortunes around. The good coxswain will make a difference by degrees; his ambition should be balanced by patience and perseverance.

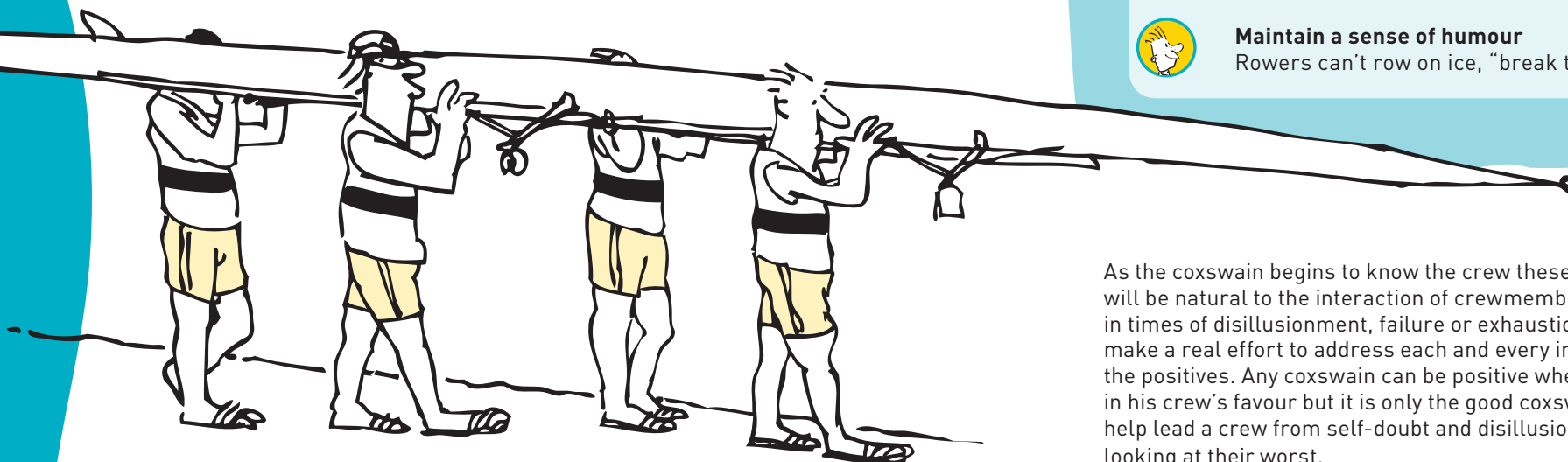
It is worthwhile remembering that each crew will row between 100 and 130 strokes over a 1000m race. If each of those strokes was improved by five centimetres then the crew will have gained nearly half the length of a boat – a boat need only win by a bow ball!



7.7 TEAM BUILDING

As has often been said, “**The coxswain should make a difference not just a noise**”. That difference, if only centimetres, can be attributed to, not just technical commands or steering but the coxswain’s management of the crew. A large part of this is the feedback a coxswain gives to his crew. It is not difficult to appreciate that the coxswain that begins each of his commands with “Don’t do...” will quieten the natural enthusiasms of a crew. If the negatives begin to outweigh the positives then crew moral becomes a slippery downhill slope. Obviously, the coxswain can stop this – **he can set the tone and mood with frequent, specific, positive feedback and a confident delivery**. The cox can also be real; a character that makes contact with the crewmembers on a personal level.

The bad coxswain will fail to see the person attached to the end of the oar. The good coxswain will recognise that the oar is only as effective as the person using it. Therefore, it is necessary to meet some of the needs of the person, not just the rower.



HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR ROWER



Acknowledge each crewmember as an individual

A smile or ‘hello’ might be enough



Acknowledge the effort not just the result

Encouragement is fuel for effort



Offer personal praise to a rower during the session

It is indicative of progress



Encourage identification with “the crew”

What are “we” going to do about it



Listen to the rower

After all, the rower is always listening to the cox



Offer help or assistance

Each rower is worthy of the coxswain’s time and effort

















Maintain a sense of humour

Rowers can’t row on ice, “break the ice”

As the coxswain begins to know the crew these will come easily as they will be natural to the interaction of crewmembers. However, it is often in times of disillusionment, failure or exhaustion that the coxswain must make a real effort to address each and every individual and emphasise the positives. Any coxswain can be positive when everything is working in his crew’s favour but it is only the good coxswain that can step up and help lead a crew from self-doubt and disillusionment when things are looking at their worst.

the bad COXSWAIN

... WHAT THE BAD COX SAYS:

-  Only 1300 metres to go.
-  Don't get tired, yet.
-  What do we do now?
-  Hang on, I'm not ready.
-  Bow, let me know if I'm going to hit anything?
-  You're still dying, give me another ten.
-  Row faster!
-  Two, can't you row more like seven!
-  It's not my problem – just row harder.
-  C'mon, put your back into it.
-  You just wait until I tell the coach...
-  Straighten the boat... you heard me, straighten the boat!
-  I'd be a better rower than you.
-  Easy all, in three...








THE COXSWAIN DURING LAND TRAINING

When the rowers extend their training to include cross-training and land-based activities such as weights and ergos – where is the coxswain? Mistakenly, many coxswains believe they should be elsewhere. However, **the coxswain's development goes hand in hand with the rowers' development.** The coxswain's complete integration into the crew will only be complete if he is seen to possess the same commitment as his fellow crewmembers. Each land-based activity is geared toward improving the crew – what better place is there for the coxswain to function as an “assistant to the coach”, learn more and **be an integral team member.**

“Don't do as I do, do as I say.” These words could be the mantra of the bad cox that slumbers while the crew works in the gym – he can talk the talk but he can't walk the walk? How much weight do the words “team”, “crew”, “us” and “together” carry if they are used by a coxswain that excludes himself from the hard work and dedication of his crew? The simple answer is: very little.

The command “**I want more, NOW!**” at a climactic point during a race may ring strangely hollow coming from a coxswain that was home in bed when the crew gave more on the ergo and in the gym.

Land-based training is an ideal time for coxswains to learn:

-  What level of hard work is required to succeed.
-  What the strengths and weaknesses are of crewmembers.
-  How to encourage others.
-  How to improve the rowing stroke.
-  How to gain the respect of the crewmembers.

To participate or observe, is a question often asked by coxswains. But the answer is obvious in the light of the learning opportunities listed above – coxswains are best advised to be an active contributor not a passive observer. It is far too easy for the coxswain to become the crew's 'fifth leg' – unnecessary and irrelevant if allowed to exclude themselves from the crew's activities. It is safe to say that in a dynamic land-based rowing environment a coxswain is an integral part.

Here are some contributions a coxswain may make in land-based activities:



Motivate the rower with encouragement and by using their name.



Clarify or remind the crewmember of the required splits, repetitions, times etc.



Record splits, times, heart rates, repetitions, weights etc on behalf of the coach.



Complete the activity or a modified "coxswain's version" of the activity.



Reinforce the technical calls of the coach.



Help marshal, shepherd and organise the crew to complete their training.



Count out loud repetitions, time for holding a stretch, strokes remaining etc.



Challenge the rower to "beat the cox" or others.

The coxswain that can complete these tasks is contributing to the crew and is going to make a difference – he is the coach's assistant! He is unlikely to be neglected or ignored but, most importantly, **the cox is establishing respect and creating a dynamic with the crew** that will have its greatest advantage when on the water.

In effect the crew will feel as if they have an extra contributor to the speed of the boat that is both crewmember and coach.

quick glossary

| | |
|--------------------|--|
| BACK-CHECKS | The point at which the sliding seat can reverse no further i.e. the full extension of the straightened legs. |
| 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 in the water during the stroke i.e. deep, level or shallow. |
| 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. |



quick glossary

cont'd....

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.

SQUARING THE BLADE

The turning of the blade from the flat feather to the position necessary to take a stroke.

TAP-DOWN

The downward movement of the oar handle to extract the blade from the water.

TECHNIQUE

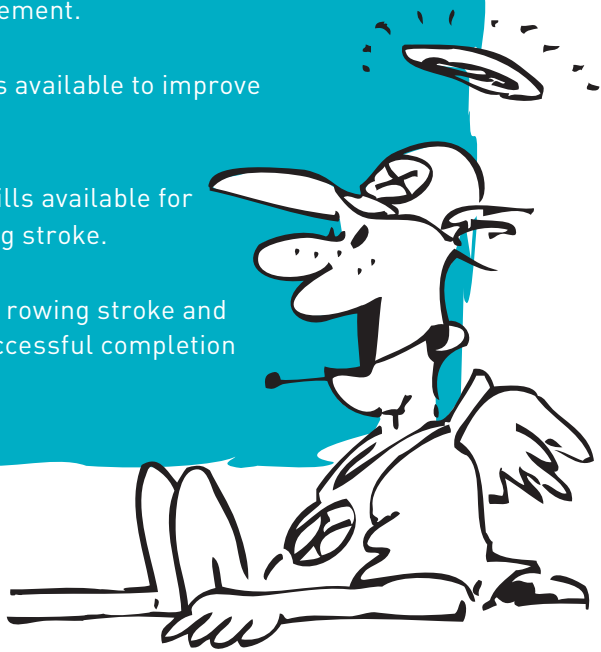
Is the term used to describe the rower's movements relative to a recognised standard.



the good COXSWAIN

SO WHAT SHOULD THE GOOD COXSWAIN NOW KNOW FROM READING THIS BOOKLET:

- ✓ Know how to function as an assistant to the coach.
- ✓ Be aware of methods available to him to remember technique calls.
- ✓ Identify key indicators for assessing a crew's rowing technique.
- ✓ Know the desired path of a blade through the water.
- ✓ Be aware of the affect correct and incorrect technique has on the boat's movement.
- ✓ Understands the drills available to improve rowing technique.
- ✓ Have a selection of drills available for each part of the rowing stroke.
- ✓ Know each part of the rowing stroke and how to identify the successful completion of each part.



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