

the good COXSWAIN

S T A R T I N G & R A C I N G



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9



9.1	Introduction	p 5
9.2	Warm Up	p 5
9.3	At the Start	p 10
	What does it mean to sit ready?	12
	Rule 66 - The Starting Procedure	13
	Overview of Starting Procedure – Held Start	14
	By-Law to Rule 66	15
9.4	Racing	p 18
	Rule 70 - Responsibility of the Rowers	23
	Rule 71 - Interference	23
	Rule 74 - Objections	23
	Motivating	28
	The Race Plan	32
	Regatta Checklist	39
	Quick Glossary	p 40
	The Good Coxswain knows...	p 42

"The harder I work,
the luckier I get."

ANONYMOUS



the good COXSWAIN



9.1 INTRODUCTION

It is race day and you are now on the water. You have applied your race day plans and routines outlined in *Booklet #8 Race Day – Preparation*. You have a crew that is race ready. You have the answers to the four very important questions: Where? When? How? and Why?

It is now time to "Just Do It!"

Nothing has been left to chance the familiar routine continues. Nearly all things you now do, as you set out, are predictable and known due to the implementation of a routine at training and the advanced discussions held between coach, coxswain and crew prior to racing and the regatta day. The crew will, nevertheless, be nervous and excited –it is only daunting in anticipation not in the doing.

9.2 WARM UP

The good coxswain will be the familiar voice of reason and calm; quickly settling the crew into the pre-race warm up routine. He will command their full attention and gain their immediate response. If the coxswain gains neither of these then he will be quick to seek greater focus from his crewmembers. It is more than likely that the crewmember that is not focused during the warm up will not be focused during the race. The good coxswain is best advised to do something about poor focus and attention prior to racing. Some common measures are:



Overuse the crewmember's name.



Demand more urgent responses.



Stop the boat and start the warm up again.



Inform the crew of the problem.



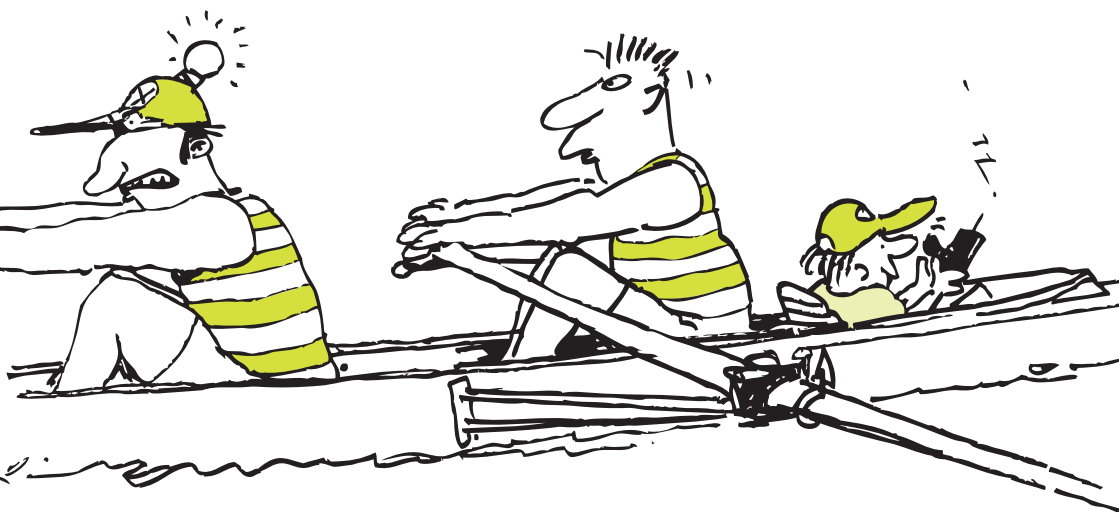
Repeat the command until it is done to the coxswain's satisfaction.

The warm up is not just to make the heart and circulatory system ready to deliver oxygen to the muscles or to give the body its full range of movement; it is also designed to arouse the crew's response to the psychological demands of racing. Is the crew alert, listening, and sensitive to the boat? Are their movements free-flowing or strained, stressed or relaxed, comfortable or tense? The warm up must be completed in expectation that it will not only reflect the physical demands of the race but also the psychological condition of the rower.

The coxswain, through the use of the warm up routine, must be able to stimulate the crew to be race ready. The 30 minutes that is normally allowed prior to racing for a warm up should be exacting and proceed from limited movements with lower rating, to the full range of movement at higher rating - all the time building the crew in confidence.

The warm up will include drills that may emphasise body movement, boat balance and boat acceleration. These elements will be used to "turn the crew on" and have them tuned into the boat's movement through the water and the race ahead. It will culminate in "start pieces" i.e. the first ten or fifteen strokes taken at the start of the race.

Whatever the warm up routine, it is advisable to have it memorised, if not written down (a logbook would be ideal), while still in training.



Often, I would push off from the bank on regatta day feeling like I had forgotten something. I lived in fear that I would only discover what it was when the race began. I spent so much time worrying what it might be on the way up the course that I neglected the crew. In the end the only thing I had forgotten was to make sure I was alert and that the crew was ready. With a checklist I gave myself the chance to relax and think about what we were doing and not what I might have forgotten.

Tess Harper, Coxswain

The coxswain should be very sure that the crew's warm up is suitable for the prevailing conditions and venue.

If it is very windy and choppy it may not be appropriate to try certain drills. If the course does not have a separate warm up area or there is not enough room for "start pieces" at the top of the course, or stopping points along the outside of the course, be sure to make alternate plans prior to getting on the water.

(Be warned: the warm-up routine opposite may not be appropriate on courses where the full crew is required to row at all times to avoid retarding the progress of other crews to the start.)



AN EXAMPLE OF A WARM UP FOR A COXED FOUR WITH LESS THAN THREE YEARS EXPERIENCE:

30 minutes prior to race:

Steady progression toward full strokes through drill application.



BOW PAIR - Rowing square blade

Arms only (10 strokes), back chock - arms and body (10 strokes), 1/4 slide (10 strokes), 1/2 slide (10 strokes), 3/4 slide (10 strokes), full slide (10 strokes), full slide - square blade - inside hand behind the back (10 strokes), full slide - square blade - inside hand flat palm on handle (10 strokes), both hands - full slide - 1/4 feather (10 strokes), delayed feather (10 strokes).



STERN PAIR - Repeat as above for bow pair

10-15 minutes prior to race:

Crew combines movements at higher ratings to accelerate boat.



FULL CREW

Weighted roll-up to catch position and hold, weighted roll-up with three strokes, weighted roll-up to catch position then hold before commencing start sequence @ conservative rating (10 strokes), start sequence @ race pace (10 strokes). Remember to comply with course traffic direction rules when completing the above.

5 minutes prior to race:

Crew is ready and available for starter marshal's instructions.



All crews are in the start area (beside the course or behind the start in a marshalling area) ready to be called to the line. Opportunity for the coxswain to ask all crewmembers to check that gates are secure, foot stretchers and rigging are secure, correct uniform is being worn (remove outer garments). The coxswain ascertains whether all crewmembers can hear the starter and know the start sequence from observation of preceding races.

Once in the marshalling area all crew talk is to stop - the coxswain should be the only one who speaks. Crews should listen intently for the starter's or marshal's instructions. The expectation is that these **instructions will not come via the coxswain** (although necessity may, in difficult circumstances, dictate that the coxswain issue limited commands - the coxswain nevertheless, is expected to defer to the race marshal). The crew will respond immediately to marshalling instructions without waiting for the coxswain to issue the same commands.

2 minutes prior to race: Crew is sitting at the starting line, ready.



Alignment of crews begin, starter begins roll-call of all crews competing in the race. Coxswain makes certain that boat is straight and will stay straight during the start sequence. If the coxswain is unable to position the boat by the beginning of the '2 minute' announcement the crew may be given a 'warning' that may result in a false start being awarded against the crew.

9.3 AT THE START

The start position may change according to the length of the race (normally determined by the class of participants). Different length courses used are normally 1000, 1500 and 2000 metres. **The shorter distances and river courses mainly use a "side" start** as a fixed starting installation is not used. That is, the starter is stationed on the bank to the side of the course. When performing a "side" start, the starter is sometimes required to perform the aligning duties as well. The coxswain should be mindful of the fact that crews furthest from the starter may have more difficulty hearing the starter than crews closer to that bank. The coxswain and the crew must be extra attentive.

However, in races over 2000 metres on championship courses, the starter is positioned in the centre approximately 40-50 metres behind the aligned crews and 3-6 metres above the starting pontoon. In these circumstances an aligner will be used to make sure all crews are evenly placed on the starting line.

It is expected that once a crew is in the starter's hands that all matters of alignment fall to the starter or his aligner. **The coxswain is expected to remain quiet so that the starter/aligner can be heard.** Nevertheless, if the boat is being buffeted by wind or being pushed from alignment by current or tide the coxswain must accept responsibility and give appropriately brief and succinct commands to the crew. It is unacceptable to anticipate making these adjustments after the start with the rudder – it will be far too late and give opposition crews too greater advantage (*remember: rudder creates drag and alters the pitch of the boat*).

Additionally, there is often not enough room for correction to be made after the start making for a high probability of collision immediately after the start – this is perhaps the greatest cause of race stoppages in the start zone.

When in the starter's hands it is best to assume that the starter will begin the race at any moment. Therefore, the coxswain must make doubly sure that the crew is sitting in a ready position in anticipation of the starter calling (for a side-start) "Quick start, (pause) "Attention" (variable pause), "Go!"

The one thing I find on the start with novice crews is that if you have bow pair touching it and stern pair sitting ready with square blades, you get grief rather than response and it will often throw the boat off a straight line.

Also when backing it down, I get the rowers who aren't backing to what I call "over feather" i.e. the leading edge of the blade doesn't catch the water. This makes the boat easier for those backing and once again avoids unwanted course deviations.

On occasions when it is necessary to take your first stroke when the boat is moving faster than the surface water, get the rowers to only half square on the "attention/are you ready?" call – this once again avoids a checked blade throwing off your line.

Sandy Mitchell, Coxswain

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO SIT READY?

The crew should be sitting at the length of slide that will be used for the first stroke. If alignment is necessary and the coxswain or aligner asks for an adjustment by a particular crewmember, then that rower should be using arms only and refrain from using the slide in case there is a call of "Go," from the starter. **Once the starter has started the 'roll-call' or is aligning boats he will take no notice of any coxswain that puts a hand into the air to indicate difficulty or a need for more time.**

It would not be the first time that a crew has been left at the start or veers radically from course because one or more crewmembers have been sitting at the back of the slide or with oars out of the water. The coxswain should be prepared to give commands that require arm rowing only (eg. "tap/touch it around" rather than "pull it around") with short sharp movements (from the front of the slide).

Of course, the opposite is also possible, where a crew is "too ready" and moves from the start in advance of the starter's call - this is called a false start. In these circumstances the starter will recall the race and issue the crew with a yellow card, if the crew was to attract two yellow cards, they will be excluded from the race. The good coxswain will not panic if issued with a yellow card and will simply calm the crew and return quickly to the start.

(Yellow cards can be issued for a variety of infringements including the disregard of local traffic rules or ignoring the directives of officials.)

A held start is becoming more and more common. That is where boats are backed into a starting pontoon where a boat holder is situated to take hold of the boat's stern. An aligner will normally be used on such occasions and give direct instructions to the boat holders to move the boat forward or back (the crew and coxswain may be unaware of this due to a "silent" communication system).

RULE 66 – THE STARTING PROCEDURE

The following rules will vary from country to country, association to association but they will remain generically true of each standard regatta. Please check your local rules for confirmation.

- 66.1** The Starter shall inform the crews of their starting positions. He shall start the race when the crews are ready and when the Judge at the Start indicates that the crews are correctly aligned.
- 66.2** The Judge at the Start alone shall decide if the boats are correctly aligned and if one or more crews have committed a false start.
- 66.3** Should the Judge at the Start deem the start to be faulty, the Starter shall stop the race and shall award a Yellow Card to the crew or crews which, in the opinion of the Judge at the Start, caused the false start. A crew receiving two Yellow Cards which apply to the same race, for any infringement whatsoever, shall be excluded from the event.

Extract from Rowing Australia Rules of Racing and Related By-Laws (2006 Edition)



OVERVIEW OF STARTING PROCEDURE – HELD START

- ➔ **Starter calls 2 minutes.**
- ➔ **Alignment of crews begins.**
- ➔ **Starter advises crews if the start procedure is to be a “Quick start” and which method of “Go” signal is to be used**
e.g. buzzer, lights, spoken “Go” etc.
- ➔ **Aligner raises white flag to indicate alignment of crews.**
- ➔ **Starter begins ‘Roll-call’.**
- ➔ **Starter prepares crews for start – gives warning command “Attention” and raisers starter’s flag.**
- ➔ **Starter gives starting command “GO” while dropping the starter’s flag to the side.**
- ➔ **Crew/s leaving early – red flag is raised, bell is rung and the crews are signalled by starter and umpire to return.**

All races within a category will have the same start procedure. Nevertheless, this may vary throughout the day according to conditions. If the weather becomes windy then the starter may change the starting procedure from what it was early in the day. The starter should advise all starting crews of any changes – this may take the form of a “Quick start”.

More and more, in domestic regattas, the “**Quick Start**” is being used as the preferred start (with or without the boat being held). This is a shorter start procedure that removes the ‘two minute warning’ and ‘roll-call’. It accounts for poor weather but also allows for a quick succession of races. Crews will be aligned and then given a warning command “QUICK START, ATTENTION” and the starter’s flag is raised. After a variable pause the starting command “GO” is given as the starters flag is dropped to one side.

BY-LAW TO RULE 66

Extract from Rowing Australia Rules of Racing and Related By-Laws (2006 Edition)

Starting Procedure (with flags)

Crews must attach themselves to their start pontoons at least two minutes before the starting time of their race. Two minutes before the designated start time, the Starter shall announce “Two minutes” and this shall signify to the crews that they are formally under Starter’s orders. The announcement of “Two minutes” shall also be an instruction to the crews to prepare to race i.e. remove additional clothing, check equipment etc.

Before giving the start commands, the Starter shall ensure that the Umpire and the Judge at the Start are ready. When the boats are aligned and the crews are ready to race, the Starter shall make a roll-call by announcing - in lane order - the names of each of the crews in the race. Once the roll-call begins the crews must make sure that their boats are straight. Each crew is responsible for being both straight and ready to race at the end of the roll-call

Once the roll-call begins the Starter shall take no further notice of any crew which then indicates that it is not ready or that it is not straight. After the last crew has been named in the roll-call the Starter shall check that the Judge at the Start is indicating that the crews are still correctly aligned and shall then say: “Attention”.

The Starter shall then raise the red flag.

After a clear pause the Starter shall give the start by dropping the red flag quickly to one side and simultaneously saying: “Go” The pause between the raising of the flag and the start command (dropping the red flag and saying “Go”) shall be clear and variable.

If the starting procedure is interrupted for any reason external to the crews or for a false start then the Starter must begin the procedure again, starting with the roll-call.

Starting Procedure (with traffic lights)

Once the roll-call begins, the Starter shall take no further notice of any crew that then indicates it is not ready or it is not straight. After the last crew has been named in the roll-call the Starter shall check that the Judge at the Start is indicating that the crews are still correctly aligned and shall then say: “Attention”.

The Starter shall then press a button (or switch) to change the traffic lights from the neutral position to red. After a clear pause, the Starter shall give the start by pressing a button that shall, at the same moment:

- a) **Change the red light to green;**
- b) **Make the audible signal through the loudspeakers;**
- c) **Start the timing system for the race**


The pause between the red light and the start command (and the green light and the audible signal) shall be clear and variable.



9.3 AT THE START cont'd...

When all crews have cleared the starting line, the starter, may control the race for the first 100 metres, but **the umpire is in control of the entire race**. They must be satisfied that the race has started without incident i.e. no crew has false-started or interfered with another crew. They must also be satisfied that there have been no **equipment breakages**. If there is equipment failure **within the 'start zone'** (first 100 metres), this will usually entitle the crew to a restart. The good coxswain will raise his hand immediately and do everything possible to attract the attention of the starter or umpire to communicate the problem. The relevant boat race official will then stop the race. If the boat race officials are alert to the breakage, and the program allows, then they will give the crew time to make repairs before requiring a re-start.

On such occasions the coxswain must make an immediate withdrawal from the course and assess the breakage from the side of the course. The umpire will also examine the damage and decide whether the crew's claim was justified. In cooperation with the crewmembers the coxswain should ascertain whether a replacement part is necessary. Boat race officials are often willing to relay a message to the finish to inform the coach, or relevant club member, of the circumstances. It is best to be very clear with communication if parts need to be relayed to the start for repairs.













 **Be sure to note:** a crewmember coming off a seat, a seat coming off a slide or an oar coming out of an open gate, **does not** constitute a breakage.

The circumstances and procedures vary from regatta to regatta – all coxswains should be aware of these variables prior to their crew's race. **Visit the start, if time allows, or take very careful note of the starting circumstances in the earlier races while waiting for your own race.** Be sure to pass this information on to your crew so that they are adequately prepared.

The calm, professional coxswain will keep his crew alert and race ready. If there are unforeseen delays prior to the race beginning, do not allow the crew to sit idle and become increasingly nervous or cold. There are a number of exercises or routines that can be applied in such circumstances. They require little space and should not interfere with other crews.



DRILLS TO DO AT THE START WHEN YOUR RACE IS DELAYED:

-  **Complete a weighted roll-up**
-  Back the oar through the water to the catch position while moving up the slide.
-  **Tap downs**
-  Sit at finish position and complete the tap down out of the water repeatedly in time together.
-  **Roll-up**
-  Starting in the finish position move up the slide to catch position together.
-  **Tap ins**
-  Sit at catch position and move the blade in and out of the water in unison.
-  **Stuff-the-duck**
-  From the catch position move the legs back a quarter of slide (one off or repeatedly).
-  **Hold the finish position**
-  Maintain posture suitable for finish of the stroke without slumping or lowering shoulders, back or head – this can be done for a set time specified by the coxswain.

Each of these does not need to be used consecutively but can be done intermittently to break up the waiting time. It will keep the crew both physically and mentally ready without exhausting them or increasing their nervousness. Creating a familiar structured environment builds a crew's confidence.

If permitted, and time allows, the coxswain can take the crew to some less congested space for further exercises or drills. However, the coxswain should always be aware of the time available and not venture too far from the marshals that will call the coxswain's particular race to the line.

9.4 RACING

The good coxswain should never underestimate his ability to contribute to the success or failure of a crew in a race. Successful coaches and realistic rowers know, from experience, that the coxswain can be the glue that holds a crew together under race conditions. It is not unheard of to hear a coach prior to racing, saying to his coxswain, **"They are the brawn but you are the brains."** The experienced know that racing is not just a mindless exercise in demonstrating superior strength; it is the application of finesse, the efficiency of technique and the realisation of a plan. Each is in the hands of the coxswain, especially in the absence of the coach.

Over the course of months the coach has been building a crew that is race ready. In other words, **the crew knows: what they are to do, how they are to do it, why they are doing it and when it should be done – a race draws all of these into full focus.**

The coxswain is the coach's insurance policy. It can never be left to chance that all things learnt will remain learnt under the pressure of racing – the coxswain will prompt, enthuse, remind, measure, analyse, decide and inform during the course of a race. All of these are high order skills that require much alertness and thought from the coxswain – after all, who else is going to do it; the coach is waiting at the finish line and the rowers are otherwise occupied – it needs to be done.

During a race there are four main responsibilities:



Steering the boat on a straight course (the primary responsibility).



Informing the rowers of their position relative to other crews and distance travelled.



Motivating the crew toward achieving their best.



Communicating and applying to the crew the race plan.

*"... reading, writing
and arithmetic?
Rowing has its own
three 'Rs': rhythm,
rating and grrrrr!"*



Steering should be the least of a good coxswain's concerns on race day.

The boat and its reaction to the rudder will be familiar to the cox that has trained regularly with the same crew in the same boat. Nevertheless, a coxswain can diverge from a straight course and these can come down to some very common, but often avoidable, causes:

Inattentiveness

Distracted by the noise and excitement of racing crews side by side. Too often coxswains look toward the boats beside them and inadvertently steer in that same direction or forget to look ahead.



Good Cox – remains focused on the progress of his crew and looks sparingly at opposition.

Unfamiliarity

Unaware of special circumstances existing on this particular course. The course may bend slightly or selected navigation points are not aligned with racing lanes. Also, the coxswain may not be aware of the influence traffic, tide or current has on the boat's course.



Good Cox – walks the course in advance of racing, speaks with other coxswains and plans ahead.

Bad conditions

Weather can sometimes be an unknown variable. If the wind is blowing across the course it may prove difficult to stay aligned. If the sun is shining in the coxswain's eyes from above or reflected off the water, then it will be difficult to see ahead.



Good Cox – knows how to adjust steering to compensate for weather conditions and will wear sunglasses to combat excessive glare.

Poor rowing

Crews will sometimes do the unexpected. "Catching a crab" will dramatically change the course of a boat. Enthusiastic, stronger rowers will always pull around listless weaker rowers. Competition can bring out the worst or the best in a rower.



Good Cox – has in place a procedure for handling the eventuality of a crab and knows who his weaker/stronger rowers are and how to compensate for this while steering.



With the assistance of the rowers, the coxswain should always be aware of the umpire's directions. The umpire will either be on the bank or travelling behind the race in a motor boat. **It is the umpire's job to guarantee the safety, then the fairness of competition and deliver an 'all clear' at the race's completion.**

Throughout the race he may direct wayward crews to correct their steering by waving directional flags (usually white) and giving direction through a megaphone. The coxswain, of course, will be looking ahead and will not see the umpire's flag waving behind him. Therefore, the stroke should be prepared to advise the coxswain of the direction advised by the umpire.

To ignore the umpire's direction is to risk removal from the event. Be sure that the stroke is aware of this responsibility before racing.

Ultimately, the good coxswain will use his rudder as little as possible.

The following rules are taken from the *Rowing Australia Rule Book, 2006 Edition*. Although the relevant rules may vary from country to country – they remain true in broad principle in most rowing nations *(check local rules for detail)*. It is worth noting the action to be taken **when lodging a protest /objection below – the crew should not leave the finish line until there has been official acknowledgement of the arm raised in protest / objection.**

RULE 70 - RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ROWERS

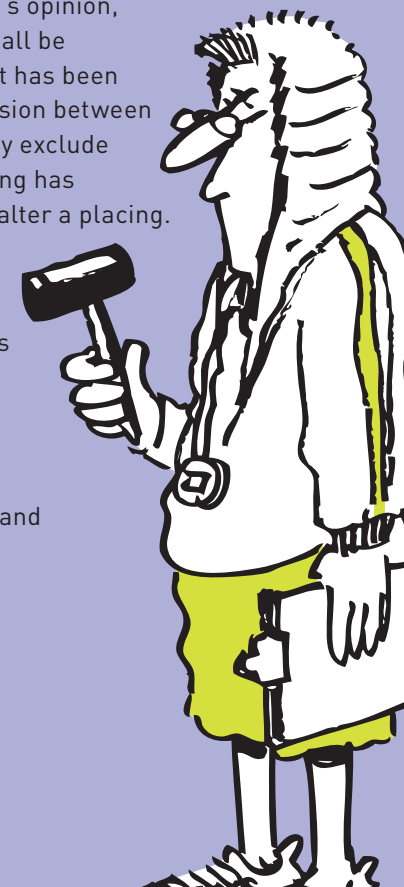
All rowers shall compete in their races in accordance with the rules. Rowers are responsible for their own steering. Each crew shall have a lane reserved for its own use and shall remain completely (i.e., including its oars or sculls) within this lane throughout the race. If a crew leaves its own lane then it does so at its own risk. If it impedes or interferes with any of its opponents or gains any advantage thereby, it may be penalised.

RULE 71 - INTERFERENCE

A crew causes interference to its opponents if its oars, sculls or boat encroach into the opponent's lane and cause a disadvantage to its opponents by contact, its wash or other distraction, or in any other way. The Umpire alone shall decide if a crew is in its own lane or if it is interfering with another crew and causing them a disadvantage. If a crew has caused interference to another crew and has, in the Umpire's opinion, affected the finishing position of that crew then it shall be excluded by the Umpire but, in principle, only after it has been warned by the Umpire. In the situation where a collision between boats or oars or sculls has occurred the Umpire may exclude the crew causing the collision even if no prior warning has been given to that crew. In no case may the Umpire alter a placing.

RULE 74 - OBJECTIONS

A crew claiming that its race was not in order or was improperly judged may make an objection to the Umpire immediately after the finish of the race and before leaving the finish area by raising an arm. The Umpire of the race decides on the objection and communicates his decision to the crews in the race and to the other race officials.



Informing the rowers in the crew of their position relative to other crews may, on the surface, sound very straightforward. **But how does a coxswain distinguish between being a “tourist guide”, a “commentator”, an “observer” or a “race-caller”.** Each of these roles would inform the crew of their position within the race but each would communicate that information differently. **Which of these should the coxswain be?**

The 'Tourist guide coxswain'

Uses a voice that sounds informed about things that have happened but by reading a set script sounds detached from those things that are happening.

The 'Commentator coxswain'

Makes observations and fills the quiet with a steady flow of banter and analysis.

The 'Observer coxswain'

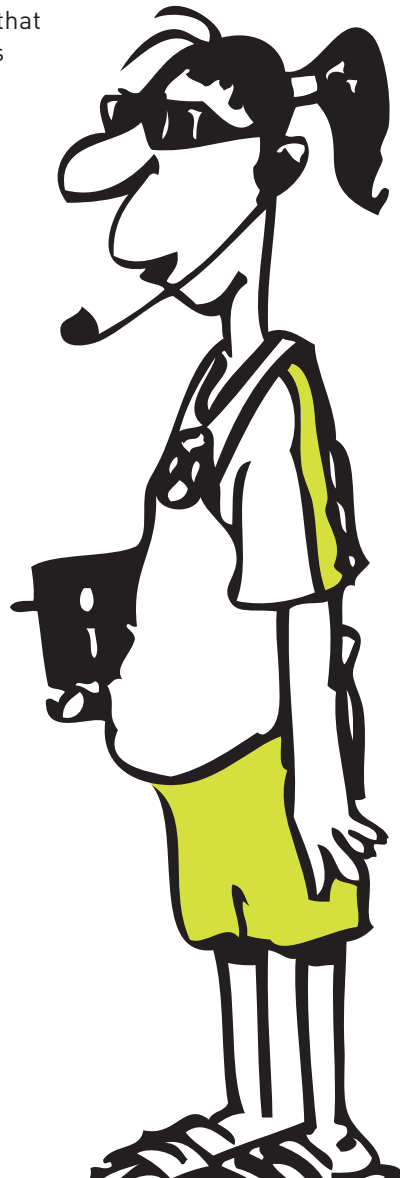
Has no such qualms – he speaks infrequently and remains detached.

The 'Race-caller coxswain'

Is excited, whipping up enthusiasm with fast delivery and continuous wordage.

The coxswain, advisedly, should be none of these.

The coxswain walks the fine line between saying too much and saying too little; being too excited or not excited enough; including all information or just some information; dwelling on what has happened or what is happening.



The good coxswain should decide in consultation with his crew and coach **what information is necessary to assist the crew during the race** and how it can be best delivered. This should not be a random free-flow of thoughts but part of the race plan. The crew's position relative to others and distances travelled can be factored in to the more technical aspects of the race plan at various intervals in the race.

If the crew is expected to be with the rest of the field after the start, (eg. 200 metres) then this may be the point in the race for a comment. The coxswain will assess the relative difference and inform the crew in positive terms of the distances between themselves and others: “We are doing well; we have a canvas on the field,” or “We are in touch; hold your form,” or “We have given them half a length, let’s take it back.” According to the race plan the crew may even be required to be relatively slow out of the start, “They have half a length out of the start, the plan is on track, let’s hold them at that.”

The same scenario may be repeated at agreed intervals down the course and each time **the coxswain’s delivery will reflect the importance, urgency and required mental state of the crew.** It would be inappropriate, for the 200 metre mark example given above, to have a coxswain making the calls in excited tirades of increasing volume. The crew would require from the coxswain a sense of building a foundation – a “steady as she goes” attitude. **The coxswain, like the crew, can go out too hard, too early and be left with nowhere to go at the end of the race.** There is no benefit in building to an artificial climax 200 metres into a race – it cannot be sustained nor will it allow a settling into a measured rhythm by cox or crew.

Experienced, and maybe not so experienced, rowers fear the call that goes something like, "That's 200 metres down, only 1800 metres to go." It is the quickest way to knock the wind out of a rower's sails. It is recommended that when informing a crew as to how far they have travelled that it should be relative to the middle distance i.e. before half way inform the crew as to how far they have travelled, after half way let them know what distance remains. For example, if two hundred metres into a one thousand metre race it is better to say "We are at the 200 metre point," rather than "we have 800 metres to go".

The crew during a race would like to know and often must know:



Where the crew is relative to start or finish line

e.g. "We have five hundred metres remaining."



Where the crew is relative to other crews in the race

e.g. "Their bow is now level with our two seat, and they are gaining."



Where the crew is relative to expectation

e.g. "We knew they would be fast early, now we settle in and break them down."



Where the crew is relative to the race plan

e.g. "This is where we make our stride to the line, in five, four, three, two, one – stride!"



MOTIVATING

The good coxswain should know what strings to pull in steering a boat but will also know what 'buttons to push' - the 'buttons' being referred to are motivational. The coxswain, in selecting the right buttons for each rower, will know that the boat is likely to be faster if he pushes the right one.

If a rower responds well to the "encouragement button" then it should be pushed. If the rower responds well to the "aggression button" then that too must be pushed. **Each rower will respond differently to different calls from the coxswain and the coxswain must know the calls, how to make the calls and when to make the calls.**

Of course, there are crew calls that become an integral part of the race plan. The coxswain, in consultation with the coach and crew (during training), will have predetermined points throughout the race where an extra effort is required or a change of focus is necessary. These will be prompted by a clear, concise call from the coxswain that, in delivery and word selection, reflects the amount of effort and degree of focus required from the rowers.

The word "now" is one such word that sharpens the focus, and when delivered with full exclamation, prompts a strong response. Or it can be a quiet, drawn out word indicating a slow transition with gradual variation "I want you to stride with longer strokes, nnnnoowww." Alternatively, it can be a sharp, demanding word that requires an instantaneous response, "I want full effort, now!"

Circumstances change from race to race – the calls made by a coxswain of a crew languishing in last place, will be different from the coxswain that races bow-ball to bow-ball heading toward the finishing line. On each occasion **the coxswain will demonstrate his value by knowing the right buttons to push, the right calls to make.**

"That's better, we've reclaimed some water," would **not** be the ideal call for a crew slowly falling behind the field as the finish line closes. However, it may work for a crew immediately after they have made a mid-race push. For the losing crew nearing the finish it may simply be evidence of their continuing failure; for the other crew, it may reinforce their sense of progress and the reward for continued effort.

(Remember, if trailing the field the good coxswain will preserve the dignity of his crew by taking the focus off external elements beyond the crews control and shift the emphasis to isolated internal "boat goals" e.g. clean exits from the water, 10 strokes without looking out of the boat.)

It will depend upon the delivery. If the call was made with enthusiasm, volume and a sense of triumph then it would work so much better than if delivered with a sense of inevitable defeat.



The crew that has a race plan that requires a lead in the first 200 metres will benefit from a coxswain that begins his race calls with high energy, short sharp statements and a sense of urgency. However, this cannot be maintained by crew or coxswain indefinitely. Therefore, the race plan may dictate that from the 200 metre mark the crew steady their rate, row long and find a good rhythm. The coxswain's calls will reflect this:



The Bad Coxswain

"We're two hundred metres in...keep it going...you've got the lead...harder, let's see what you are made of...leg drive, leg drive...go, go, go...we can beat them...let's leave them in our wake...push...push again!"



The Good Coxswain

"We're two hundred metres in...we are up by a canvas...over five strokes let's lengthen out...hold that power...let's steady the slide...five...four...three...steady...two... one...long now... and hold them off."

The outcome for each of the crews can be determined at this point.

The bad coxswain will seek to whip his crew indefinitely, assaulting them with his words until they have nothing more to give or they become deaf to the constant badgering. They will tire very quickly and the coxswain will have no words left to inspire a further effort.

The good coxswain, on the other hand, will look for appropriate points within the race to vary the delivery and content of his calls. He will steady their rhythm while modulating his voice, he will be considered in his delivery and the crew will respond with stroke control. In fact, the good coxswain may build to a point where he can use the bad coxswain's call above.

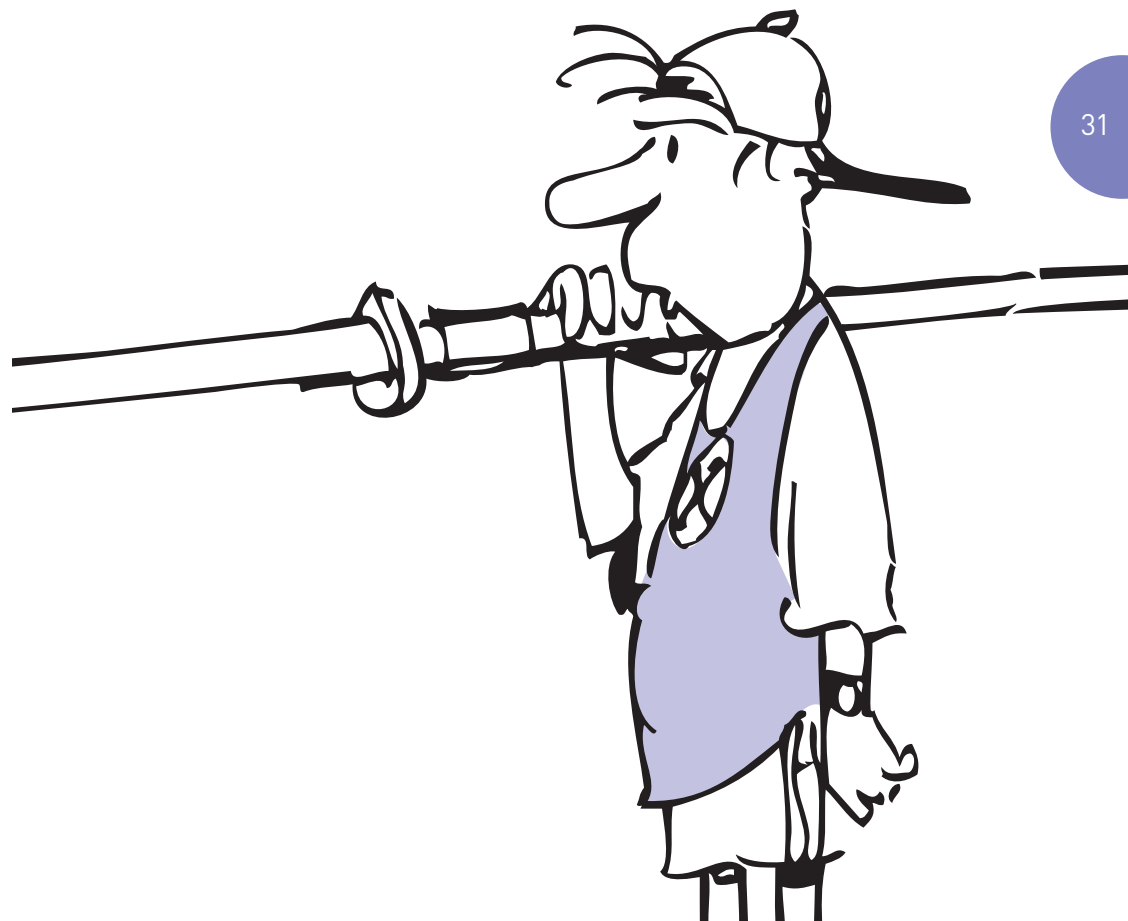
The 'bad coxswain call' would be especially appropriate at the end of the race to be used by the good coxswain; over the **last** two hundred metres – it could prove to be just the motivation needed. The crew will increase their aggression, spend their energy and not keep anything in reserve in their bid to cross the finish line first. The crew that has suffered under the tirade of the bad coxswain for the duration of the race would not be able to differentiate between the call in the first two hundred and the last two hundred metres.

Being able to interchange these two calls suggests that the call of the bad coxswain is not bad in itself; it is simply applied at an inopportune or inappropriate time.

It is worthwhile for each coxswain to discuss with their crew the words that work best to motivate them. There is a large variety in current usage for different parts of the race and each will evoke a different response, depending on the circumstances, depending on the crew.

Here is an assortment of words used by a coxswain to motivate a crew to do something more: **Jump!, Charge!, Squeeze!, Press!, Take!, Power!, Steal!, More!, Rage!, Go!**

These calls are only limited by the coxswain's imagination or the crew's knowledge of what works for them.



THE RACE PLAN (EXAMPLE)



DISTANCE	Major CALL Example	Sub-Major CALL Example	Crew Focus Example	Coaching Aim
0-250 METRES	Build	'Hold out' 'Fast legs back' 'Legs/hold'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hold 1,2,3, speed & Legs 4&5. Fast legs, sit tall & boat speed with everything. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking to create momentum – stroke rating and length increasing with every stroke – not to rush.
250 METRES				
	3 Push for Three	'Push the boat out' 'Run the boat' 'Breath'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The three hardest strokes. Push for length – long at catch and finish. Hips back together. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Boat has reached maximum speed, rowers are settling into a sustainable rating, length and rhythm.
500 METRES				
	Mid Drive Push	'Squeeze legs out' 'Hold the legs down' '@ 500m mark'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heads up, push all legs down together. Max pressure at mid drive. This takes us into the 2nd 500m. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain boat speed through legs not speed on slide. Length of stroke. Settling period.
750 METRES				
	Sharp Catches	'Hips sharp off the front' 'Place & push'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Long & Flat at the front. Place right where we reach. Back splash. Outside arm hangs, hips first. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Accurate catch placement, not missing any water, bodies up in boat. Legs are working.
1000 METRES		'Heads steady look up, sit tall...'		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draw rowers focus back into the boat with specific tech calls for efficiency of effort.
	Relax & Speed	'Speed together' 'Stay central' 'Efficient movements'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Random technical calls for each person. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Re-assess, re-group relax the shoulders, disciplined movement.
1250 METRES			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preparing for run to the line, be sure of timing, relaxed aggression, tech Framework & speed of movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mid-race push to begin again with renewed vigour and conviction. Point in race where "other" crews feel the pinch
	Re-Start	'No mercy – shut them out' 'Take the race''		
1500 METRES			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launch Attack on last 750 good water. Build for 5, speed up for 10. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coxswain must 'talk it up' sell the possibilities for the run home.
	Breathe Build (just before 1500m)	'Heads up' 'Move together' 'Lift the boat'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heads up/ big breath. With the hips and swing. Energy of the boat. Rate 1 point. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tiring rowers must sit up and finish strokes off. Acceleration through the water MUST be maintained. Coxswain keeps crew relaxed and focused.
1750 METRES				
	Step Legs!	'Build over 3' 'Hold for 3' 'Step'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jump off the feet – together – don't rip/stay long in the water. Swing back with the bodies, hold legs down firmly. Draw high, carry handle momentum thru to body and away. Everything you have. Pull yourself forward, rate UP, UP, UP. 	
2000 METRES				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crew builds rating over a number of separate steps of 10 strokes allowing the crew to work their way through "the gears". As the rating goes up the boat speed must also increase. All energy must be spent by the crew.
	Step Swing Back!			
	Step Arms Crank!			
	GO!!			

Each rowing season has its one major race to which all glory and honour is attached. It is in the heat of competition that the strengths and weaknesses of a rowing crew are magnified under the public gaze. The good coxswain, like a biblical David - small in stature, can stride with confidence onto this stage to do battle with the rowing Goliaths; **armed with rowing's equivalent of a sling shot – a proven race plan** (See previous page).

Size really does not matter, preparation does. A finally honed race plan that accounts for the crew's strengths and the opposition's weaknesses can tip the scales of competition in favour of the prepared coxswain's crew.

The race plan is the culmination of weeks of training and race practice. It is the notes and observations made by coach and coxswain, the feedback offered by crewmembers and the acknowledgement that both success and failure can each teach a valuable lesson.

From every failure or false step there is an opportunity to learn.

- ➔ "Why did we have nothing left over the last 500 metres?"
- ➔ "Why were other crews faster than us out of the start?"
- ➔ "Why is there always a drop in rating at the 1200 metre mark?"
- ➔ "Why does two seat beat stroke seat into the water over the second half of the race?"
- ➔ "Why can't we sustain a ten stroke push?"

There are answers to each of these questions – some can be addressed in training (time permitting) and others, more specific to racing, can be addressed by the race plan. Taking the question, "Why can't we sustain a ten stroke push?" as an example, there is a course of action to address this that is relevant to race planning for coach, cox and crew.

For instance, it may be a question of the ten stroke push being asked for when the crew is settling and the call countermands their efforts to create a steady rhythm. Or it may be that having already made an extra push at the 1000m mark and being left with little reserved energy a second push immediately after the first is counter productive.

From the coxswain's perspective it may be that his call is less than adequate. His call of **"Ten hard, now."** Gives the crew little preparation time to make a unified and comprehensive response – a call that gives the crew time to make mental and physical preparation ahead of the effort would be better i.e. **"In five, we are going for a push of ten hard strokes."**

Additionally, **the coxswain may need to rethink his delivery making the call as a demand rather than a request to be taken up or ignored.**

The call must reflect the absolute necessity of an immediate response, "I want, and I will get, your ten best strokes, NOW!"

The crew might also have a different interpretation of the call. For example, two seat, typically slow in his responses, waits two strokes before joining in the effort. Three seat believes that a ten stroke effort is a build over five strokes to a maximum effort over the next five. At the same time bow seat is prone to washing out at the end of his stroke and is very tentative about applying too much pressure in fear of the consequences. Subsequently, the stroke seat rower, having made the supreme effort to lift his crew from the very first stroke after the coxswain made the call, finds himself rowing on his own to lift the boat – after three of these strokes, lifting the boat on his own, he is exhausted and cannot complete the seven remaining strokes.

A good coxswain will, with the assistance of the coach and feedback from the crew, find the most appropriate means to rectify these problems in the race plan.



A primary concern of coxswain's when using a race plan is what to do if the opposition is making a major effort or they are taking the race initiative. In other words: "What do we do if things don't go to plan?"

Put simply, the coxswain must be prepared to adapt.

This does not mean to "throw the baby out with the bath water" by abandoning the race plan completely. The opposition must not be allowed to dictate the coxswain's race calls – but the coxswain ignores the opposition at the crew's peril. To have uncompromising adherence to the plan or complete abandonment are inappropriate responses for the good coxswain. **Fortunately, the good coxswain will have a 'plan B'!**

- ➔ "What are we to do if the opposition makes a push?"
- ➔ "What are we to do if we catch a crab?"
- ➔ "What are we to do if we are behind at the 1500m mark?"
- ➔ "What are we to do if we are five lengths up with 300 metres to go?"

Many coaches, crews and coxswains are afraid to ask these questions in fear of "tempting fate". In other words, the head in the sand is safer than acknowledging that something might go wrong. **It is not enough to plan for the best case scenario; planning should also be made for the worst case scenario.**

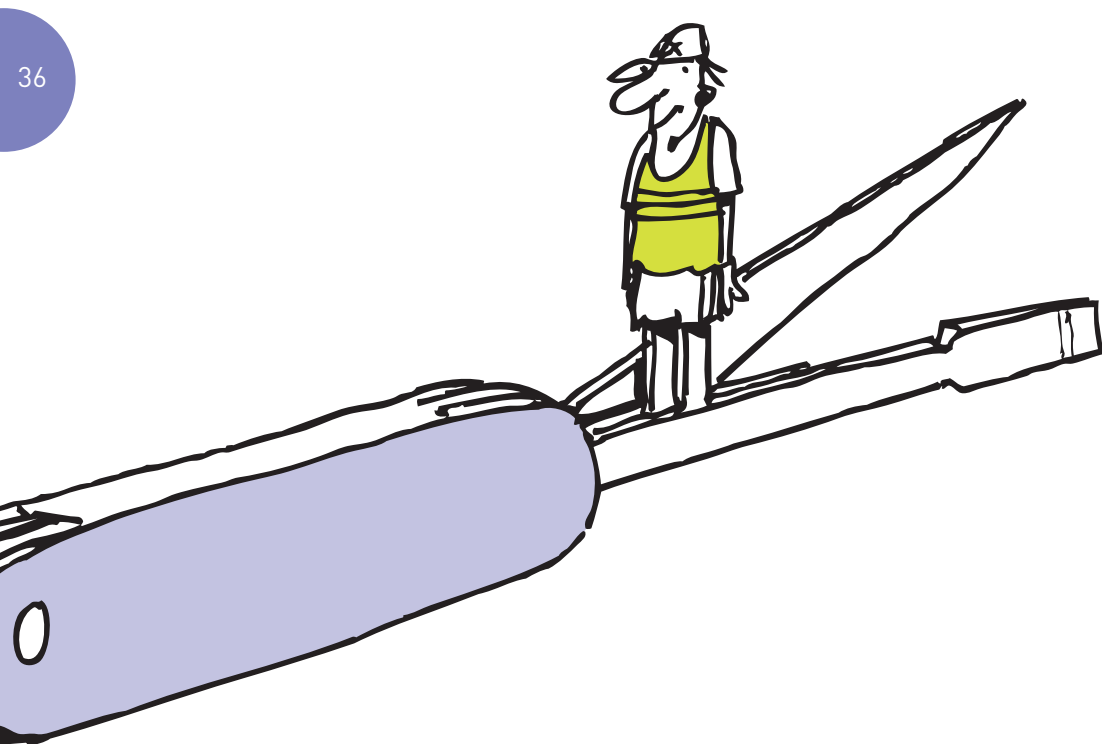
Each problem has a solution and it is best that these are considered in advance. The good coxswain will speak with his coach and crew to ascertain the best response under possible circumstances that vary from the essential race plan.

Finally, the good crew builds on success; it does not take it for granted.

One success can often provide a template for future success. The good coxswain and coach will note the circumstances that led to the crew enjoying a victory and seek to replicate them (circumstances allowing) when next racing.

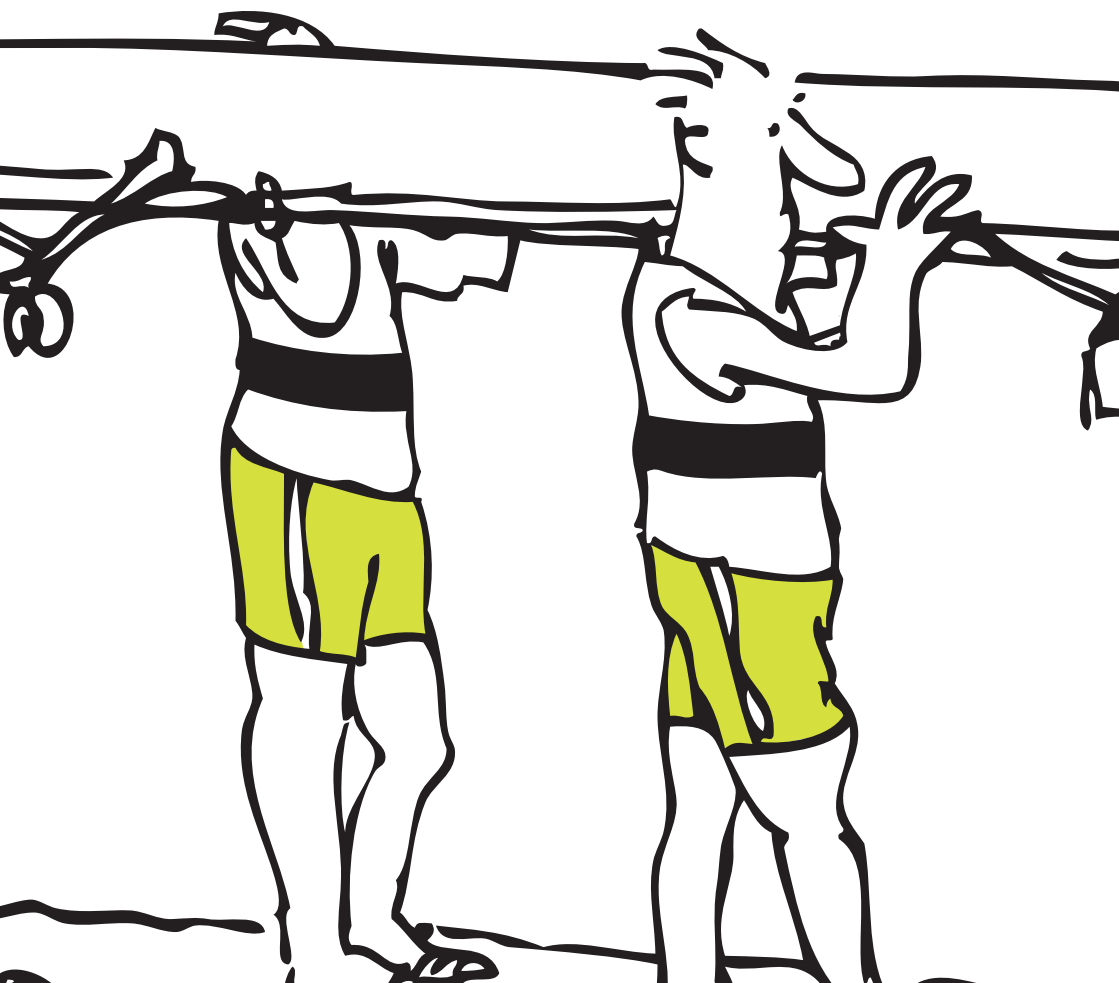
But remember, the race plan may be a small part of what needs to be replicated to secure success. It may have been the 9:30 curfew the night before, the leisurely breakfast recommended by a dietician, the packed rowing bag at the front door, the early arrival at the course, a race day schedule pinned to the trailer, an inspiring speech made by the coach. These are all variables that can, with thorough planning, become comforting constants in the life of a crew on race day.

The good coxswain will facilitate all routines, schedules and plans, allowing the rower free to focus upon a faster boat, and the coach, able to give his full attention to the crew. Without any word of doubt, the good coxswain is not only relevant on regatta day but ultimately indispensable.



9.4 RACING cont'd...

On the right is a helpful checklist to be used prior to the regatta to assist in the good coxswain's preparation. *[This has also been included at the back of The Good Coxswain's Logbook].*



REGATTA CHECKLIST

To be considered prior to competing in a regatta



PRE-RACE DAY PREP	Clothing	I know that I will be suitably dressed for racing and the conditions?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Tools	I have all necessary tools for boat maintenance and racing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Information	I know when, where and what I am racing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Money	I have money enough to cover likely costs for race day?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Food/Drink	Am I required to bring my own food and drink?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
PRE-RACE SCHEDULE	Arrival	I know when to leave home and arrive at the regatta?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Rigging	I know where the boat will be rigged and racked?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Race start	I know how much time I must allow to get to the start?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Weigh-in	I know when and where I should weigh-in, if necessary?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
BOAT PREP	Coxbox	I know that the coxbox is charged and will work?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Steering	I know that the boat will steer straight?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Parts	I know that the boat will function as designed?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Bow Number	I know where and how to obtain a bow number, if necessary?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
RACE PREP	Briefing	The crew and I know what is expected of us in the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Race Plan	I have a detailed race plan for this particular race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Warm up	I know what is the crew's warm-up routine?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Race information	I know event, time, race number, lane, opposition, progression?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Course rules	I know the course traffic rules to take me safely to the start?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Responses	I know what to do if faced with 'bad luck' or emergency?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Distance markers	I know what to look for to judge distances on the course?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
STARTS	Marshalling	I know where I am to report prior to the start of the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Start Procedure	I know what will be the procedure for starting the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Alignment Adjustments	I know how to change my steering for varied water conditions?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Delayed Start	I know what to do if at the start and the starting time is delayed?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
RACING	Plan	I know my race plan off by heart?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Voice	I have control over my voice and emotions for good rowing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Calls	I have calls for each part of the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Data	I know how to use the information my coxbox provides?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Steering	I know the course layout and where I am to steer?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Responses	I have calls for when winning, when level and for when losing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Observation	I know how to identify my crew's good or bad rowing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Feedback	I know what to say to my crew to encourage better rowing?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Relative Position	I know how to provide my crew with info re their placing in the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Motivation	I know what I can say to motivate my crew to perform at their best?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
POST-RACE	Support	I know how to offer encouragement to the crew after the race?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Protest	I know how to lodge a protest, if necessary?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Feedback	I know when and how to offer race feedback to the coach?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No
	Packing and Loading	I know how I can assist with packing and loading after the regatta?	<input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No

quick glossary

cont'd....

BACK CHOCK The most distant point toward the bow that a sliding seat may move on its tracks.

CANVAS The distance between bow ball and bow seat used as a standard measure for margins between boats (or a fraction thereof i.e. half a canvas).

CATCHING A CRAB An uncontrolled submersion of the blade well below its usual depth, often caused by poor rowing technique. It may result in the boat stopping and/or the rower being thrown from their seat.

CATCH POSITION The rower's position at the front of the slide as the oar is placed in the water.

CLEAR WATER A descriptive term used to indicate the distance between competing boats where there is no overlap in the margin.

HELD START A form of race start that requires boats to be held in place by their stern prior to a set starting routine for racing.

LANDMARK An object easily seen and serving as a guide to the coxswain when travelling down a course.

LENGTH A standard measure for margins between crews equalling the full length of the boat being raced (or fractions thereof i.e. three-quarters of a length or half a length).

PUSH A descriptive term used to indicate a concerted increase in effort made by crewmembers during a race.

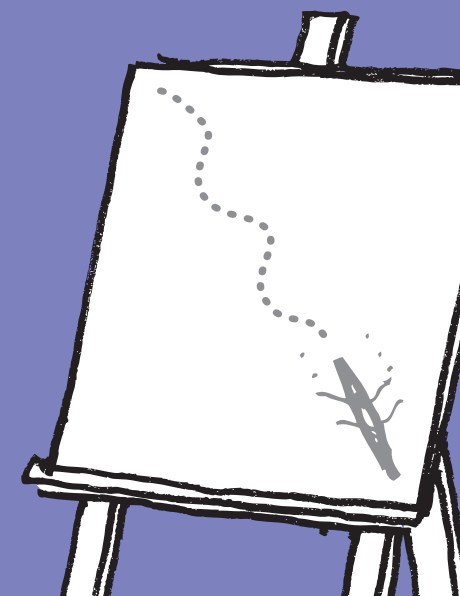
QUICK START Shorter start procedure that can be implemented when there are time restraints.

RACE PLAN A structure for racing worked out prior to competing that the crew is to implement under the coxswain's instruction.

ROLL-UP An exercise where the rower begins at the finish position (oar at body, legs down) and then proceeds up the slide completing all required movements to place the oar in the water at the catch

STRIDE A descriptive term used to call for a change in crew rhythm and rating.

WEIGHTED ROLL-UP An exercise pushing the squared oar through the water while advancing to the front of the slide then holding the oar at the catch position.



the good COXSWAIN

THE GOOD COXSWAIN WILL:

- ✓ Have in place a detailed and familiar warm-up routine pre-race.
- ✓ Know the various start routines used by starters in regattas.
- ✓ Have a contingency plan while in the marshalling area for a delayed start.
- ✓ Know what form a race plan should take.
- ✓ Be familiar with what should be said during a race.
- ✓ Identifies how a crew can be motivated to perform at their best.
- ✓ Understands how to respond to changing circumstances in a race.
- ✓ Have a checklist of 'things-to-do' and 'things-to-know' prior to a regatta.



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