

Junior Rowing Q&A

PRACTICE: GENERAL

Medical information regarding your athlete is vital to the coaches! Changes to your athlete's conditions, medication must immediately be reported to the Head Coach!

1. Why shouldn't I ask my athlete what boat or seat he was placed in, in a daily practice?

The coaches frequently use mixed boats with various lineups in practices enabling rowers to learn from each other and become more adaptable to rowing with different teammates making the entire team better. Also, it is easier to coach boats with similar speed on water as they stay closer together while rowing.

2. Why isn't my rower ready to go at the end of practice?

The coaches try hard to end practice on time, but sometimes the coach will want to talk to the athletes after practice as a group to discuss an issue or prepare them for something coming up later in the week. Also, your athlete may have a particular issue they need to talk to the coach about.

3. Why is it such a big deal to miss or be late to practice?

Unlike most sports that high school athletes participate in, most athletes are rowing for the first time and are trying to go from learning basic skills to being competitive at a regional and national level in a couple of years. Coaches plan the lineups in the boats carefully and one unexpectedly missing rower can mess up the lineup or in the worst case, keep other rowers in a boat from being able to practice on the water.

4. My athlete is sick – who do I tell?

Send an email to absent@milehighrowing.org as early as possible before practice. Different coaches attend practice on different days. This email is monitored by all the coaches. By using this email you make sure the coach who is working on that day will know about the absence. If the rower sends the email, a parent or guardian must be cc'd. If your athlete has tested positive for COVID, please follow the current CDC guidelines for a safe return from quarantine.

5. What should my athlete wear to practice?

Spandex shorts or pants (rowing trou similar to bike shorts) should be worn to practice. It is important not to order your trou too big as it is designed to be snug fitting so that it does not get caught in the seat tracks in the boat. Some rowers wear shorts over their trou for running and weightlifting. Rowers will also need a comfortable shirt and running shoes. Be prepared for changes in Colorado weather with layers and do not wear cotton. When it is muddy at the reservoir, waterproof boots are very useful!

6. What else should they bring with them?

Bring sunglasses, sunscreen, water bottle, and hats for warmth and sun protection. Nalgene bottles are popular, but need to be wrapped in a rubber band or sock to protect the inside of the carbon fiber boats.
NO SHARING OF WATER BOTTLES!

7. Is it okay to take out equipment outside of supervised practices? Senior Photos?

Rowers must have permission from the Head Coach to use any equipment outside of regularly scheduled practices. Seniors need to make arrangements with the Head Coach if they wish to use equipment or our area for their Senior Photos.

8. Is it okay to come to the shed/dock to get my athlete after practice?

Parents are asked to not come to the shed or dock after practice unless other members of the team have left. The coach is probably talking with the rowers and your presence can be disruptive and/or embarrassing. If you want to speak with a coach, please contact them via email to set up an appointment.

9. Is there a lost and found?

Lost and found is located near the shed. Encourage your athlete to put their name on everything they wear to practice. Items not claimed at the end of the season will be donated.

10. I need to talk to the coach – should I just grab a few minutes before or after practice to talk?

A lot is going on before and after practice and you will probably be waiting for a while before the coach is free. It is best to email the coach and ask when would be a good time to talk. CoachMalacrida@outlook.com

PRACTICE: ON THE LAND

11. How can rowing practice be on the land?

Rowing involves stamina, strength, and technique. Running, weightlifting, and rowing on a rowing machine help build these. The work done on land helps to maximize the experience of being on the water. Also, a lot of the team bonding happens during these on-land activities.

12. What is an erg?

An ergometer or “erg” is a rowing machine. Ergometer means to measure work. Erging is rowing on a rowing machine. The rowing machine measures the time you rowed and how much power you generated and calculates a presumed distance rowed from that information.

13. Can you really learn to row on a machine?

You can't learn everything but you can learn a lot. The erg allows you to get a feel for how the parts of the stroke fit together without having to worry about the motion of the boat or coordinating your actions with another rower. Also, the rowing machine builds stamina and strength.

14. When my child comes home and starts spouting numbers about practice, what do they mean?

You may be confused when your child says something like: *“We did a 2 by 3K and for the last 500 of the second piece I pulled a 2:15:8.”* Or *“We did 5 by 5's and I broke 2.”* When the athletes practice on the erg, the coaches instruct them to do sets of exercises (called pieces) that are either to see how fast the rower can do a preset distance or how much distance they can cover in a given amount of time. Usually a piece is done multiple times in a single practice with short rests in between.

15. What is a 2K test and why is my athlete FREAKING out about it?

A 2K test is the standard method of comparing the power of various rowers; it is sort of the SAT of rowing. It is a test of how fast a rower can go 2000 meters on a rowing machine. Although a good 2K time does not guarantee that someone will be good on the water, it is indicative of their power which is a very critical element of rowing. Rowers often dread it because first, it is HARD. Rowers are expected to give it everything they physically have – imagine sprinting for seven to ten minutes! Second, it is fairly public. Your teammates know how well or poorly you do. Finally, it is a key element in how coaches evaluate rowers and is used by them to determine which boats rowers will be placed in.

16. What's a PR?

PR is an abbreviation for personal record. It refers to the best time a rower has gotten on the erg for a

particular type of piece. A PR is always good news. A PR on a 2K is great news!

PRACTICE: ON THE WATER

17. What does it mean that my athlete rowed “starboard” or “port”?

Starboard is a nautical term that means the right side of a boat from the boat’s point of view. Because rowers sit backwards in the boat, this can be confusing since the starboard side of the boat is on the rower’s left. Port is the term for the left side of the boat (on the rower’s right). When rowing in a “sweep” boat, each rower uses one oar. Rowers whose oars extend from the right side of the boat are called starboard rowers or “starboards.” Rowers whose oars extend from the left side of the boat are called port rowers or “ports.” Most rowers feel more comfortable on one side or another and usually settle into being a port or starboard rower. It is not uncommon for a coach to switch a rower from one side to the other, especially when the rower is a novice.

18. I was watching practice and only six of the rowers were rowing. Why?

The rowing stroke is a highly precise and technical set of movements and can be challenging to learn. It is more difficult to learn if the boat is leaning to one side or the other. For this reason, one or more pairs of rowers may be asked to sit out for a period of time to “set” the boat (i.e., help stabilize it) while the others work on their stroke. The people sitting out are rotated so everyone gets more or less the same amount of time rowing.

19. Why does my athlete row in a different seat every day?

In rowing, the idea is for all eight rowers to be rowing in perfect unison, with no motions that interfere with the forward motion of the boat. That said, the different positions in the boat have slightly different roles to play. Although any rower should be able to row in any position, the coaches will switch the rowers among seats to find out which rowers excel in which positions and which combination of rowers can move the boat fastest. All rowers need a combination of strengths: technique, rhythm, power, balance, and the ability to adapt to the motion of others. Each seat makes slightly different demands on the strengths of the individual.

- Eight seat, also called stroke, sits in the rear of the boat (or “stern”) nearest the coxswain. Since everyone sits backwards in a boat, this is the rower that all the other rowers must follow in order to row together. The stroke must have strong technique (since the others are matching his or her motion) and a good sense of rhythm (since s/he is responsible for adjusting the stroke rate in response to the instructions of the coxswain).
- Seven seat rows on the opposite side of the boat as stroke (i.e., if the stroke is a starboard, seven seat will be port and vice versa) and, like stroke, needs strong technique plus the ability to mirror the motions of the stroke (but on the opposite side). All the rowers who row on the same side of the seven seat mirror his or her actions. Stroke and seven seat together are called “stern pair.”
- The four middle rowers (six, five, four and three seat) while still demonstrating the combination of strengths, are generally the most powerful rowers, with six and five the stronger pair. You will sometimes hear the middle rowers referred to as the “engine room.”
- Bow pair is made up of two seat and bow seat (who is for some reason not called one seat) and amongst the pair’s other strengths excel at “setting” or stabilizing the boat to ensure effective forward motion.

20. What does a coxswain do? It looks pretty easy.

It is NOT easy. The coxswain or “cox” is the person in charge of the boat and the rowers, who sits in the stern (back) of the boat and is the only person without an oar and the only person facing forward. Coxing is hard because there are so many varied responsibilities:

Steering – an eight-person boat is almost 60 feet long – longer than anything most of us have ever driven. Now imagine driving something that long where there is a delay in the steering, may have more power on one

side (which pushes your vehicle to the opposite side), is greatly affected by wind and tide, and instead of an accelerator and brakes you have to control speed by telling your vehicle to speed up/slow down and use more/less power. Oh, and did I mention that you are probably short and can't see the front of the vehicle above the heads of the eight people in front of you but must avoid hitting logs and other debris at all costs? *Running drills* – a typical drill in a boat will be to have six rowers do one part of the stroke for x strokes, then add in another part of the stroke for x strokes, until the rowers are doing the full stroke. Pairs of rowers are switched in and out so that every rower does the drill three times and sets the boat one time. The cox (while still steering) has to keep track of the number of strokes and switch the rowers in and out of the drill. Alternatively, a drill will be for rowers to row at a set rate (e.g. 20 strokes per minute, and after x strokes increase the stroke rate to 22 strokes per minute). In this case the cox (still steering) is counting strokes and watching the monitor to keep track of the stroke rate.

“Coach in the boat” - the coxswain is also responsible for giving feedback to the rowers. S/he can tell whether they are moving together, whether they are at the correct stroke rate, whether one side of the boat is rowing more powerfully, etc. Additionally, the coxswain is expected to be able to motivate the rowers – knowing what to say when they are ready to give up, or bringing them back into a unified motion when they lose focus. In a race, the coxswain is responsible for the execution of the race plan and for making adjustments to reflect the actions of his or her own rowers and that of the competitor boats.

Safety of the boat – the coxswain has overall responsibility for the boat when it is on the water, coming in to dock and being moved on land. The cox is the person you will see walking by the boat when the others are carrying it, giving instructions to the rowers to make sure they are all moving together.

21. My athlete has terrible blisters. What should they do?

Blisters are part of rowing and comparing blisters is a common rower activity. We have found the best thing is to keep them clean, leave them uncovered during the school day so they dry out, and then put blister tape on them while rowing. Blisters turn into calluses and are not a frequent issue once your athlete has been rowing for a while. If a blister is raw and open, try to keep it dry and put antibiotic ointment on it to keep it from becoming infected. A great but painful treatment is called New Skin available at drug store. It burns while going on but creates a new layer of skin and it will feel better almost instantly.

22. My athlete said a teammate caught a crab today.

When a rower says that someone “caught a crab” they are describing a miss-stroke in which the rower is unable to release the oar blade from the water and the oar blade acts as a brake on the boat. Because the boat is still moving, the handle of the oar tends to come back with some force and the rower will often end up lying flat in the boat. It can be difficult for the rower to get the oar back into position until the boat has slowed sufficiently and reduced the pressure on the blade.

23. What is “seat-racing”?

Seat racing is one input that coaches use in figuring out the final line-up for a boat. By having two boats race during practice, then switching one rower at a time and racing again, the coach can see what impact a specific rower in a specific “seat” has on a boat and what combinations of rowers are most effective.

REGATTAS

24. How do I know what time my athlete's race is?

First, your athlete's coach will tell them the approximate time they are expected to race. Times can move around depending on competitor no shows, weather, and other factors outside the coaches' control, so be prepared to be flexible.

25. Why does my athlete have to get to the regatta so much earlier than the start time?

In addition to time for you to get lost or otherwise delayed on the way to the race site, there is a lot to do. If the boats have been brought to the race by a trailer, the athletes need to reattach the riggers (the part that has the oar lock and that sticks out from the side of the boat). For both home and away races, the athletes check over the boat and make sure it is ready to go. The athletes also need to warm up, get final instructions from the coach and get into a racing frame of mind.

26. How early should I get to a regatta to see my athlete compete?

For away regattas, most people come with their athlete and spend the entire day. The coaches will tell the rowers what time to arrive. For home regattas or if you are coming separately to an out of state regatta, you will want to get to the regatta site at least 30 minutes before your athlete is scheduled to row.

27. What is the difference between first, second and third boats?

The first boat is made up of the eight rowers (and the coxswain) that the coaches believe can together row faster than any other potential combination. Second boat is made up of the eight rowers out of the remaining rowers that can row fastest together. Third boat is the next eight.

28. My athlete is in a second boat but has a better erg time than an athlete in the first boat. Why?

Erg score is only one of the considerations that a coach uses to determine the line-up in a boat. In order to be good, a rower needs not only strength and stamina, but also good balance and the ability to move in unison with his or her teammates. Superior strength can make up for some weakness in form; the ability to consider the strengths and weakness of each rower and put together the fastest boat possible is one of the core jobs of the coaches. Additionally, the coaches are looking for athletes that they and the athlete's teammates can depend on. An athlete who misses practices or slacks off during practice may not get placed as highly as their skill level may warrant.

29. Is it okay to go over to the boat trailer to wish my athlete and team good luck?

No. The athletes and the coaches are busy before the race and the area around the trailer is generally very crowded. Although you stopping by will only take a few seconds, there are eight other rowers in that boat and several other boats – a parade of well-meaning parents is not really helpful. Also, the same applies for congratulating the athletes after a race. The rowers will return to the food tent as soon as they are through with the post-race activities.

30. The boats are really far away. How can I tell which one is the MHRC boat?

Look for the blue MHRC oar blades. Also, if you print out the heat sheet from the regatta website prior to the race, you can check a specific race to see which lane MHRC is in.

31. Should I yell out my athlete's name when they go past?

Probably not. Rowing is a team sport and the athletes learn to take pride in their accomplishments as a team. Generally, there will be groups of MHRC parents, siblings, friends, and grandparents in groups along the shoreline screaming "Go Mile High!" and ringing cowbells, which you can borrow in the tent.

32. If I don't know what time my athlete is racing, how do I know what time to sign up to volunteer work?

This can be a challenge since you generally sign up before you know what time your athlete is racing. Generally, the coach will give your child some idea of the time and the regatta website will have a general schedule. Also, all the other parents understand that you want to see your athlete race and are generally flexible about covering for you briefly if you need to step away to watch your athlete.

33. Is it okay to eat the food in the MHRC tent?

Typically, no – it is just for the athletes. During a regatta, the athletes will be provided with a healthy lunch, drinks, and snacks throughout the day. MHRC does not provide food for parents and families. Parents are however, welcome to come hang out at the tent to socialize, and tent volunteers are always needed!