



## **ROWING 101**

### **Rowers and Coxswains**

Rowers, oarsmen, oarswomen – these are the athletes who hold an oar, sit backwards in the boat, and provide the power to move the boat down the course.

Coxswain (It is pronounced coxin) or cox; The cox is the athlete that steers the boat, calls the race plan, and motivates the rowers. The coxswain is in charge of the boat and is the only person who should be talking while moving boats on and off the water. This is paramount for safety and successful racing.

It is the coach's discretion where an athlete will be placed in a boat; some novice will start off as a coxswain before transitioning to rowing. Novice rowers typically do not race in the first regattas until they have acquired the necessary skills to safely navigate a racecourse.

### **What is a Uni?**

Uni is short for uniform and it is what the rowers wear while racing.

### **Catching a Crab**

“Catching a crab” is the term rowers use when the oar blade gets “caught” in the water. It is caused by a momentary flaw in oar technique – and it has happened to anyone who has ever rowed. A crab may be minor, allowing the rower to quickly recover, or it may be so forceful that the rower cannot recover, forcing the boat to stop and reset.

### **Sculling and Sweep**

There are two types of rowing, sculling and sweep. In sculling, each rower has two oars, and these boats almost never have a coxswain. In sweep rowing, each rower has only one oar. The smaller boats may or may not have a coxswain, 8's, the largest boat, always have a coxswain.

In boats with no coxswain, one of the rowers is responsible for steering the boat. This is usually the rower in the bow of the boat, the position closest to the end of the boat that would cross the finish line first. They steer by directing other rowers in the boat to adjust how hard they are pulling, but they may also have a toe-steer, meaning that their foot is attached to a wire that can move the rudder.

#### Sculling boats

- 1x – single, one rower
- 2x – double, two rowers
- 4x – quad, four rowers

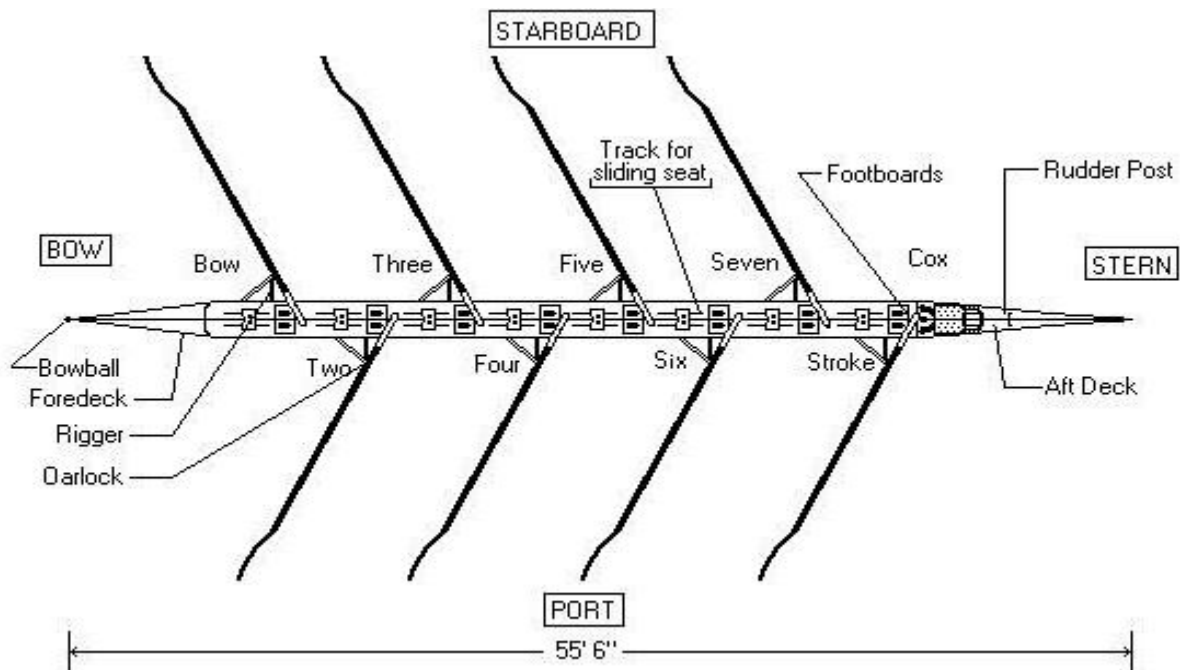
## Sweep boats

- 2- simply called a “pair”, no coxswain
- 2+ a pair with a coxswain or just a “pair with”
- 4- a straight 4 is a four person boat with no coxswain
- 4+ four rowers plus a coxswain
- 8+ an “8”, these boats always have a coxswain

In both kinds of racing, rowers take long powerful strokes with the oars because their seat moves, driven with their legs while their feet are in special shoes attached to a footboard.

## Oars

Oars not only move the boat through the water but act as balancers to help “set,” or balance the boat. Each oar is mounted in a swivel oarlock, which is attached to a rigger.



## Boat Seats/Position

Most novice rowers start out in an 8+, so we will use this boat as an example, shown above. There are eight rowing positions in an 8+ racing shell.

- Seats 1 and 2 are referred to as the bow pair and the person in position 1 is called bow. This pair sets the boat or balances the boat. Rowers in these positions must have a smooth and fluid technique. They also tend to be some of the lighter athletes in the boat.
- Seats 3, 4, 5 and 6 are referred to as the “engine room”. Rowers in these positions are usually big and strong and some of the heavier athletes in the boat.
- Seats 7 and 8 are referred to as the stern pair. The athlete in 8 is referred to as the “stroke”. This athlete is usually the best racer in the boat and sets a rhythm that is easy

for the rest of the boat to follow. They have a close relationship with the coxswain and help to keep the boat going as fast as it can.

It is important to remember that all three sections of the boat are equally important. A good winning boat consists of athletes rowing together as a team under the direction of their coxswain.

The coxswain's role on the water is very important as they must guide the boat to the starting line, get the boat lined up correctly and maintain position in the proper lane during the race. They also motivate the rowers and are the eyes and ears of the boat. Coxswains:

1. Steer the boat by giving directions to the rowers, keeping the boat in the proper lane to avoid penalties.
2. Spot rower errors and correct through voice commands. A coxswain must learn rowing technique/terms, so that if a correction is necessary, he or she will know what to do and who should do it.
3. Tell the crew where they are in relation to the other boats and how much farther they must go to the finish; motivating the crew to race their best race
4. Execute the coach's game plan, as the coach can't be with the boat during the race.

Coxswain Video:



### **The Rowing Motion**

The whole body is involved in moving a shell through the water, with each stroke made up of four parts: catch, drive, finish and recovery.

As the stroke begins, the rower is coiled forward on the sliding seat, with knees bent and arms outstretched – this is the **catch**. At the catch, he rows the oar into the water, picking up the speed of the boat and beginning to accelerate. At the beginning of the **drive**, the body position doesn't change, and the legs do all the work. As the upper body begins to

uncoil against the driving legs, the arms are hanging on the oar handle, prying the boat passed the oar. Finishing the drive, the rower moves his or her hands quickly into the body, which by this time is in a “layback” position. During the **finish**, the oar handle is moved down drawing the blade out of the water. At the same time, the rower feathers the oar, or turns the oar handle so that the blade changes from a vertical position to a horizontal one. This feathering cuts down wind resistance and avoids hitting the water. The oar remains out of the water as the rower begins the **recovery**, moving her hands away from the body and past the knees. The body follows the hands and the sliding seat moves forward until, knees bent, the rower is ready for the next catch.

## **Racing**

A competition in rowing is called a regatta. In the fall the regattas are called head races and are 4000- 5000 meters long. Boats are launched in waves and winners are determined by the best time in a race. In this form of racing, rowers race against the clock where the crew or rower completing the course in the shortest time in their age, ability and boat-class category is deemed the winner. It is not necessarily who crosses the finish line first.

In the spring, races are 1500 or 2000 meter sprints. Races are divided into flights—shells are grouped according to ability and size. For example, all Men’s JV 4+ will race against each other. The boats line up in lanes and race at the same time and the the winning boat is the one whose bow (signified by a bow ball on the shell) crosses the finish line first between designated markers; heats will be created if there are more than six boats in a category, and then the fastest time of all heats is the winner. Some regattas such as City Champs and the Stotesbury Cup hold semi-finals and finals, with racing on two consecutive days for those advancing to finals.

In the spring races, crews are held stationary by stake boat holders at the start of the race until the referee gives the go command. Should a crew anticipate this command and cause a false start, the boats will be called back to the start. A crew assessed two false starts may be disqualified. Once the race has begun, only the regatta marshal, following behind in a motor launch, may stop the crews. The boats are to stay in their lanes. Crews that stray out of their lane may be penalized if they interfere or impede any other competitors.

## **Parents and Families**

- There are designated areas for spectators at regattas to ensure safe movement of boats onto and off the water. We have tents to provide a comfortable spot for parents/spectators.
- Racing will take place in all types of weather. Check out our Regatta Packing List with suggested items for rowers and parents to bring on race day.
- Regattas are fun, family friendly events that typically last most of the day. There are a lot of ways for parents to become involved by helping with setup, food, takedown, and of course, cheering our rowers on as they race past!
- We also need parents to help with recruiting, fundraising, driving the chuckwagon and boat trailers – we always welcome any “Time, Treasure, Talent” that anyone has to offer. It takes a village!
- Regattas we typically attend are held in Philadelphia on the Schuylkill River, in Camden, NJ on the Cooper River, and in Princeton, NJ on Mercer Lake.