

The Regatta-Ready Coxswain, Part I

5 · March 8, 2004

The complexities of regattas throw a lot of new situations at the coxswain - it's part of how we earn those huge salaries you've heard about ; -). This is the first of two columns intended to help coxswains prepare for those demands, and also (for my readers who are rowers) to give rowers a sense of some of the ways they can rely on their coxswains. Naturally, not all of the following will apply to all coxswains. Rowing programs vary in their division of responsibilities, (paperwork, registration, etc.) but it is hoped the following will provide a good sampling.

Preparation

Because you and your crew will be generally be getting up very early for travel, have everything packed the night before so you can grab it, half-asleep. Make sure you have your Cox-Box charged, your tools, tape, sunscreen etc. all packed well ahead of time. Sleep with your Cox-Box and don't let it out of your sight. Encourage the people on your boat to pack the night before too. Extra sets of dry clothes are a must. Blankets for spreading out on the grass or under the tent are good to have. Regatta venues can be muddy, so it is best to bring your second-best (or third-best) pair of sneakers (or sandals).

Most crews appoint someone to be in charge of ensuring that everybody is awake in the morning. This is often the captain, who (depending on how many boat loads of people are involved) may choose to delegate part of reveille duty -not illogically -- to the coxswain(s). After all, who have the loudest voices?

Every coxswain should have a crate (or large plastic garbage bag) for the crew's shoes and clothes. Mark it with your boat's name or something to indicate whose stuff it is. This makes it easier to distinguish from the other crates of shoes in case - as often happens -- the person retrieving it for you at the recovery dock is different from the person who originally collected it when you launched. If the same crates are being used for multiple boats within your program, consider using temporary luggage tags (I periodically collect a handful from the local Greyhound bus terminal) that you can write your boat's name on for your heat/race, then tear off when you're done.

Be familiar with the information on the web sites for regattas. (Links can be found on row2k.com in the [calendar](#) and on [team and club Web sites](#)) Read the rules and instructions to coxswains, study the course maps, traffic patterns, launch/recovery dock locations etc. If there is time (and there won't always be) it is good to walk the course when you get to the regatta site. If that is not feasible, high-resolution satellite photographs of large swaths of most of the earth's surface, are available via the web. (Now that the Cold War is history, coxswains can use reconnaissance satellites for truly important stuff - such as winning crew races.)

Quick-Reference Heat Sheet

Carrying around the full heat sheets from the regatta is cumbersome, not to mention that the registration packet might only contain one or two, and they will invariably be locked in the truck just when you or someone on your boat needs to consult them. It's much handier to copy out your own condensed notes on a piece of paper small enough to tuck into your sock or toolkit. This personal heat sheet should include the following information, in whatever order makes the most sense to you:

Event/heat number, start time, your lane/bow number, the other crews in your race

listed by lane number, equipment to be used (oars, clams/no clams, etc.), as well as the two events preceding yours so that when you get to the marshalling area you can estimate from the boats milling around there how much time before your race will be called. In addition, you may want to include aid memoires, such as race plan, technique calls to make, etc. that you want to have with you. Also write out the oarlock washer combinations and footstretcher settings. This can avoid confusion on the water in situations where you might be hotseating a boat, or in case the spacers get moved.

Here is an example based on a composite of several coxswains' 'cheat sheets' and their own particular shorthands (along with a few grubby thumbprints): 'Spirit' was the name of the boat; "blue/red" indicated the oars, etc. Footstretcher settings have been changed to protect the innocent. This may seem like overkill if you are only coxing one race, but it can be a real sanity-saver if you are coxing multiple events in a large regatta.

65 - 17:05 - Lane 3 - Heat 2 - Spirit - blue/red - noclams - 2 to advance

follows men's int 2x and women's Lt 4+

1	2	3	4	5	6
CSUS	JMselect	NereidA	(that's US!)	NYACA	PennACA

Oarlock spacers

S 2 wide on bottom/6 thin on top

3 all on bottom

2 "

B 1 wide on bottom/6 thin, 1 wide on top

Footstretchers

S notches showing from stern

3 notches "

2 " "

b " "

Your rowers will come to you with questions ("What lane are we in?" "Who's in our heat?" "How many to advance?") and some of them may ask you the same question ten minutes later (it's their way of dealing with nerves). The more the coxswain knows, the more the rowers don't have to think about, and the more they can concentrate on the race to come.

A good mental check for coxswains is to ask yourself: "If all my coaches unexpectedly got called away to deal with something else, do I still know everything I need to know to get my boat launched?"

(Next month: Race-Ready Coxswain Part II: At the Course)