

## **COACHING GUIDELINES:**

Dock staff members are usually present to coach any team's practice. Depending on your experience, you may wish to use the Dock Staff to help your team.

## **COMMANDS:**

Hold Water!/Check it down - By far the most important, paddlers should stick their paddles in the water to slow/stop the boat. If boats are coming in too fast or are on a collision course, this is the command to use!

Ready Position/Paddles Up - Paddles above the water, reaching forward. Commonly used for starting the movement of a boat in a non-race situation.

Go/Take it away - Command to start paddling

Way enough/Let it run - Stop paddling and let the boat coast to a stop.

Starting position/Ready, Ready - Race command in a start situation for paddles to be placed in position for the first stroke (usually completely submerged in the water)

Power 10/20 - Set of 10 or 20 strokes that are more forceful and perhaps (but not necessarily) quicker

## **PADDLING:**

Parts of a stroke:

Catch - The catch phase is the most critical to the speed of the boat. The catch is the moment the paddle blade first bites into the water. The top hand is held over the water, and then drives down on the paddle with the outside arm relaxed and fully extended.

Pull - Once the paddle is fully submerged, the next component of the stroke is the pull phase. The paddles should pull back directly parallel with the boat. The top hand stabilizes the paddle as the bottom arm and back muscles pull back. To use the back muscles effectively, the paddler sits up while pulling and continues to drive the paddle downward with the top hand. Maximum power and endurance will come from using the larger muscles of the back, shoulder, and trunk rather than relying on the smaller arm muscles.

Exit - At the end of the stroke the paddle should exit the water at mid-thigh or the hip. Allowing the stroke to go past the hip results in the paddling blade being at an angle that would slow down the boat. The outside arm bends slightly to allow the paddler to clear the water and then it is pushed or snapped forward.

Recovery - The recovery speed plays a large role in determining the stroke rate. During

recovery, the torso rotates and leans forward to set up for another cycle of the stroke. When fully extended, the paddler should be facing the person sitting next to him/her with arms forward.

Synchronization is key! If the paddlers are not in perfect timing, the "out of stroke" paddlers are wasting their efforts. Ideally, all paddlers should have the exact same technique with same angles of entry, same top arm and lower arm motions, etc. When this occurs, the paddlers in the back of the boat can match the top arm motion of the people in the front and know that the paddles will enter the water at the same time.

### **PADDLER PLACEMENT:**

Generally; put experienced paddlers - small to medium sized in the front, big strong paddlers in the middle and lesser experienced, weaker, not too big, in the back. The main premise here is that paddling "badness" travels down the boat from bow to stern - if your front paddlers are short, you will have low power and if they get out of time your stern will too. But if your bow is quality, it sets a good example for the back to follow. This doesn't mean you should place your paddlers in rank order however, it's a little more involved than that.

The stroke positions (Seat 1) are very key. These individuals are experienced paddlers with good technique and fitness, a long stroke and can establish a consistent rhythm that is appropriate for the abilities of the crew. They are calm and confident and unlikely to panic during the heat of the race. They can establish rhythm with their seat partner that is rock solid together - even during tempo and water condition changes. They are strong enough paddlers to deal with slow flow of the bow. They understand pacing and won't burn out early. They are sensitive to crew and boat feel and can adjust tempo accordingly. They can maintain good technique and less likely to decompose throughout the race. They MUST be small enough able to fit in the seat comfortably. For 22 person crews this can be a challenge. For 18 member crews this is less so. The stroke position might be your best paddlers.

Seats 2/3 complete the front six and have as many qualities as the stroke has. Most important is they can paddle together with their bow mates, have good paddling technique and stroke length. Depending on boat speed, number of paddlers etc. one of them will have to deal with the bow wave. Paddlers with low recoveries sometime clip this bow wave and can set the whole crew off time as they stumble to get back in rhythm.

Seats 4-7. Sometimes called the engine room because often the strongest, most powerful 8 paddlers reside here. Their job is to provide horsepower and to paddle well together as a section. They paddle with length and good technique and are good examples for the back six to follow. Sometimes the strongest and best paddler is placed in seat 4 in order to lead the engine room and be close enough to the front to influence tempo.

Seats 8-10 are the back six. For competitive teams you want paddlers with explosive ability to drive the power up the boat when a series (power 20, pressure up etc.) is called. They are able to maintain paddle pressure during the entire stroke despite the fast flow of the stern. Back six paddlers are emotional, fearless and respond aggressively when called upon.

For recreational teams the back six often hold the least experienced paddlers. Sometimes they contain your special needs paddlers who need a well establish rhythm in front of them and when they are not able to maintain pace don't impact the crew significantly. Paddlers who might need special attention from the team captain/steersperson is placed in seat 10. In many respects the racing success of the back 6 impacts the crew the most. Water flow in the stern helps push the paddle through the water and can make it easier for them to get on top of the catch in time. The key is to get the back six to contribute as much as possible and sometimes moving an experienced paddler into the back 6 leader spot (seat 8) is sometimes necessary in order to get everyone together.

There are other factors that also effect paddler placement.

Practice or race? - in practice I might spread experience for teaching and example effect.

Width of seat - big people don't fit in small seats. Being comfortable is important.

Boat Track - the best is when a boat travels straight and doesn't curve left or right too much. If your steersperson is cranking on the oar often, the drag will slow you down. If your boat is hooking right you have too much power in the back left and not enough on the back right. Shift power left towards bow and move power right towards stern. Often just moving 1 or 2 people is enough.

Boat balance (left/right)- weight has more tilt effect towards the middle. If you have a balance problem try moving a big paddler one seat closer to the end and a small paddler towards the middle.

Boat balance (front/back)- level boats work best and this becomes more important the closer the crew weight is to sinking weight which is also effected by wind and wave conditions and boat capacity. 22 big paddlers in an old Hong Kong style boat in wavy conditions, you'd better get that thing flat.

Crew goals - for high level, results oriented teams small changes in positioning might be critical and necessary but for fun focused teams putting the sponsoring departments VP in the middle of things might be a better PR choice, for example.

Footboards - Some boats have footboards every other seat so the especially tall paddlers prefer seats that don't. This leaves room for their feet and legs.

This might help some coaches out. As far as dividing crews by gender - women front, men back - can't really think of why anyone would do this. Men in the middle somewhat makes sense because men tend to be bigger and might not fit in the smaller seats near the ends.

### **RACING TECHNIQUE:**

Starts - On a start the paddles should be fully submerged in the water while leaning forward. The first stroke must be powerful and done in unison. The first 3 to 5 strokes should be long and controlled while leaning forward. The next 10 strokes are called the sprint, where the boat must accelerate into the race pace. Once the racing speed is attained, the crew then slows down into the longer working stroke. The start uses more arm muscles for paddling quicker to get the boat up to race speed while the working stroke uses more back muscles with the twist and reach technique.

Middle - For the purpose of advancing race positions, teams often include one or more power series. A series is a set of 10 or 20 strokes that are harder and sometimes faster to help the boat speed up. The drummer may also use these series to get the boat back in sync.

Finish - The last 20-30 strokes on a race has its own elements. At this point in the race the objective is to bring the boat up in speed for the last finishing kick. It is similar to the 10 strokes of the start. The paddlers are leaning forward and using their arms only to accelerate the boat. Paddling with arms is quicker than paddling using your back although paddling with the back is much more powerful.

### **TRAINING BASICS AND THEORY:**

Generally the first half of the racing season is used for endurance work. This means a lot of longer pieces during practice, while working on technique. In the second half of the season, shorter pieces are done to develop speed and power. The stroke rates are significantly increased. This is when the majority of the sprint or power series work begins as well as start practice sessions.

### **RULES OF THE RIVER**

All dock staff need to remind the teams, please to abide by the rules of the river. Those are as follows:

When approaching the starting line on race days on the Charles River, teams shall stay close to the Boston Side of the River and shall not enter any racing lanes. Dragon Boats must give way to all craft. See rules for finish line.

Both the drummer and steerer must pay close attention to the river traffic.

Remember, use your common sense please.