

BOAT SKILLS - General Information

These single sculling skills are designed for beginner and advanced scullers to stimulate the basic feeling for a balanced boat and a relaxed body position. This has often been referred to in early coaching books as 'watermanship', but with the advent of more training on the ergometer and in the larger boats (fours and eights), there has been a tendency for some athletes to have no development of these reflex skills. This is often seen when some rowers with great strength and ergometer scores are unable to use their physical strength in a boat and are beaten by less powerful rower. The following drills can be of great use to help harness the strength and produce boat 'feel' and later - greater boat speed.

The exercises shown are not unique so coaches should develop their own and encourage rowers to think of challenging exercises themselves. The drills chosen are presented in order of increasing difficulty so that the athlete develops confidence and relaxation during the set.

For each exercise the coach should be aware of the reason for the exercise and look for the qualities in the execution of the skill. Usually the coach should be seeking quick, light relaxed movements allowing the boat to move underneath the athlete in a controlled manner. The movement here is similar to the requirements of many of the core strength exercises using 'unstable' medium such as the exercise ball.

To maintain incentive for improvement the athlete should count their own score while the coach times and records. Each athlete will have their own progression rate although some comparison of scores will provide a minor competition. The exercises shown are used by many schools and the World Class Start athletes, which provide an extensive set of norms at each age for comparison.

For the scores to mean anything to an improving athlete the quality control for scoring must be strictly adhered to. Any compromise will detract from the gains recorded and lose the interest of a motivated rower.

Specific Information:

CIRCLES

Look for fluid movement and the boat rocking under the athlete who sits with the body steady in the upright position. Only the hands and boat move.

BALANCE SKILL

This is mostly a fun exercise which measures static skill which is not as important as the dynamic balance shown in other exercises. The smaller athletes will be more efficient at this than the stronger rowers with a high centre of gravity. For time reasons we usually restrict the athlete to 10 trials. Scoring is done by the athlete counting aloud in 'empacher' ("one empacher...two empachers...three empachers"). Science has proved that one empacher is exactly equal to one metric second.

DOUBLE SLAPS

This exercise moves the athlete from a stable position (safety position) to the unstable situation with the blades off the water. Again the body should remain still

and only the hands drop with a lot of sensitivity for the blades leaving the water together (a similar skill to the blade release after the drive phase). Look for light and quick movements with a balanced boat. The exercise should be done with blades vertical (square blades) to prevent damage to boat.

SINGLE SLAPS

This skill uses the body weight to rock the boat from side to side but the rower must acquire great sensitivity for the boat if a significant score is to be achieved in the 30 seconds. Look for subtle movements of the body rather than gross body swings. Any fighting of the body against the boat and oars indicates that the athlete will not have a fine feel for a balanced position while rowing. Like most of the other skills here this is an acquired skill reached by practice of this type.

RIGGERS UNDER SITTING

An advanced movement using the same principles of the previous exercises. This can be difficult for some rowers but a great sense of achievement when they finally get there. This will challenge the athlete to use the blades and body to control the boat in an extreme boat roll position which is outside their comfort zone. The first one is quite difficult as they concentrate but, if strongly encouraged, the rower will quickly develop relaxed control of the boat and balance. High speed rigger dips indicates the feeling of balance and boat control has become automatic. While there will appear to be some regression of the skill at the start of the next session, each session will develop the automated skill to a higher level.

RIGGERS UNDER STANDING

Quite a complex skill for the advanced athlete. This is a significant test with boat control skills and confidence, which are not immediately apparent. Once the athlete achieves the standing position and then can put the riggers under, you will find their fear of the water disappears and aggression for rowing fast is enhanced – they will feel nothing is impossible. A very good sculler will have a higher score for the riggers under standing than sitting, due to the feel for balance through the feet and the ability to shift body weight lightly and quickly. Look for relaxed balance and easy control of body and boat with body steady and hands and feet moving – like a good snow skier quickly going over moguls.

360 DEGREE TURN

This is a good test of boat control. To do this the rower has to be able to stop and start the boat movement in a small area. If this skill can be achieved in less than 60 seconds you can feel confident the athletes can handle a boat on a row by themselves. Until they can turn in 60 secs scullers should not be allowed to leave the immediate vicinity of the boating area.

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