Australian Rowing Coaches Conference 2026

Personal notes and practical takeaways

24–26 October 2026 · Gold Coast, Queensland **Organised by Rowing Australia**

Lachlan Davey · Decent Rowing

A note from me

I attended the 2026 Australian Rowing Coaches Conference and took more than 20 pages of notes during the presentations. I've done my best to convey the speakers' main ideas, their reasoning and the examples that helped me understand them. I've since worked back through my shorthand to make these notes clearer and more useful to other rowers and coaches.

These are **my personal notes and interpretations, not a transcript or an official account of the conference**. Inevitably, some details will have been missed, misunderstood or recalled imperfectly, especially in fast-moving discussions and sessions with several presenters. Any mistakes are mine, not the speakers'.

I hope you find something here that helps you coach more effectively or make a boat go a little faster.

— Lachlan

SATURDAY 24 OCTOBER

01 • My Coxing Journey

Hayley Verbunt · 6:40 pm

The coxswain is a coaching partner

A coxswain can do far more than steer and motivate: they can help teach and develop the crew from inside the boat. Most coaches probably involve their coxswains too little, although it is also possible to delegate so much that the coach stops providing proper guidance. The effective relationship sits between those extremes: the coach and coxswain agree what needs improving and work together to deliver it.

Use one voice at a time. When the coach is talking, the coxswain should be quiet; when the coxswain is coaching the crew, the coach should avoid speaking over them. Otherwise even good instruction becomes noise. Coach and coxswain can coordinate this handover with a radio, brief messages or agreed hand signals, allowing each instruction time to register before the next voice takes over.

Coxswains should also discover their own leadership style. Some are calm and precise; others are more energetic. Copying a famous coxswain's personality without it fitting your own rarely works. Like rowers, coxswains need a progressive pathway: observe, practise simple calls, manage pieces, develop technical coaching skills and eventually lead more demanding racing situations. **Crawl, walk, run, race**—don't drop a novice into a role they haven't been taught to handle.

Practical idea: before an outing, agree one or two technical priorities with the coxswain, who will speak when, and what feedback will be discussed afterwards.

SUNDAY 25 OCTOBER

02 • School Rowing Programs Need...

Nick Bartlett & Cameron Kennedy · 8:30 am

Build a culture where learning is safe

Rowing is technically complicated. Young rowers need to be able to attempt a skill, get it wrong, and try again without being embarrassed or punished for ordinary mistakes. That does not mean tolerating unsafe practices; it means distinguishing a learning error from a safety or behaviour issue. A good culture makes experimentation possible.

Athlete questionnaires and goal sheets can help coaches understand individual motivations. Athletes with similar ambitions may benefit from training together, but the larger point is to help them take ownership of their progression. Short-, medium- and long-term goals, combined with agreed behaviours, allow the coach to operate more as a facilitator than a dictator. Develop people, not just interchangeable parts for a crew.

Hand over responsibility early, then check in. Giving athletes ownership does not mean leaving them unguided. Step back when they can make a decision themselves, but revisit the direction and correct it when necessary so that independence is learned with support.

Let technique determine the training distance

Use **geofencing** to let technique set the range of an outing. Instead of sending developing rowers on long outings and accepting declining technique, start with a short stretch of water they can row well. As their skills and fitness improve, gradually allow them farther up the river. The new distance becomes a milestone: reaching a landmark farther up the river gives developing crews a tangible sense of progress.

The aim is not to avoid fitness training. It is to build it on a foundation of movements the rower can execute reliably. If conditions change or technique falls apart, shortening a session may be smarter than completing the planned kilometres. The fastest boat at the end of the season may be the one that was most patient early on.

Separating **age-group coordination** from **specialist boat coaching** allows people to contribute where their strengths are greatest. Skilled volunteers may be excellent at managing the people and culture of an age group, while professional coaches focus on technical work. They are different jobs requiring different strengths.

Practical idea: progress the workload when athletes can retain the agreed technique, not simply when the calendar says it's time.

03 • In Time: What Rowing Can Learn from Music

Bourby Webster & Hayley Verbunt · 9:15 am

A crew is an ensemble

Think of the crew as an orchestra. The stroke rower provides a physical rhythm for others to follow; the coxswain helps coordinate the crew with timing, clear communication and a shared purpose. The best contributions are not always the loudest. A well-functioning group needs everyone contributing to the same rhythm.

An experienced rower in the stroke seat can be an extraordinary teacher to a novice crew. Even 15 minutes following someone who genuinely understands the movement may communicate timing and coordination more effectively than a long explanation. Good rowers are often reluctant to join slower boats, but a short, deliberate teaching session can be worthwhile.

Practise technical fundamentals the way musicians practise **scales**. Even with limited time, repeat the essential movements. Rowing drills serve the same purpose: isolate a small part of the stroke and practise it until the timing and control carry over into the complete movement.

Teach the coxswain what their calls actually produce

In a bow-coxed boat, the coxswain cannot see most of the rowers clearly. That makes it difficult to know how the crew is responding to a call or progression, particularly for juniors. Involve the coxswain in **ergometer sessions** where they can watch the athletes respond to the very calls they will make on the water. Then they can link each instruction to the movement it is meant to create.

Know the waterway, maintain all-round situational awareness and work with the natural pulse of the stroke. A capable coxswain learns to recognise good rowing through **what the boat looks, feels and sounds like**. For example, a coordinated catch has a distinctive collective sound; a separated sequence of blade entries can be heard, especially from a bow-coxed position where the oars are harder to see. Getting coxswains involved in technical coaching early develops that judgement.

Beyond steering and calls, good coxswains learn the crew's goals, each athlete's needs, the technical plan, the training programme, race strategy and how to work with coaches and support staff. That is not an exhaustive checklist, but it shows how broad the job can be.

Coxing with the voice of a conductor

Use your **voice to demonstrate the change you want from the crew**, not just to describe it. To encourage relaxation, speak in a relaxed tone. To reinforce rhythm, deliver calls in time with the stroke rather than against the boat's pulse.

Conduct the crew with your voice. Signal a large change through a stronger shift in inflection, emphasis or volume; signal a small adjustment through a more subtle change in delivery. Instead of a conductor's hand movements, use **timing, pitch, pace and tone** to shape the crew's response. *How* a call is delivered can be as important as the words.

That extends to racing. Athletes often start at full intensity, but a coxswain need not match that emotion immediately. **Stay composed at the start and build the voice towards a crescendo at the finish.** A controlled, deliberate rise in urgency leaves somewhere to go as the race unfolds.

Practical idea: involve coxswains in technical erg progressions and ask them to practise delivering a call with the timing and tone that matches the change they want.

04 • What Makes the Quad Move Fast

John Driessen & Duncan Free · 11:00 am

Power, confidence and rhythm

Aerobic fitness and natural power matter, but so do trust in the crew, technical confidence and rhythm. A fast quad is not created by endlessly adjusting equipment or pursuing a theoretically perfect stroke. The crew has to believe in what it is doing and learn how to let the boat move efficiently.

A wide range of rowers can make a quad go fast. Quads can accommodate athletes with different heights, force-application patterns and movement styles. Adjust the coaching and technical approach to the people in the boat rather than forcing every crew into one template.

Feel the shell's natural fore–aft pitch as the rowers shift their weight. At different rates, the boat has a different rhythmic character. The job is to row *with* that movement rather than fight it through unnecessary tension. This does not mean deliberately rocking the shell; it means being sensitive to its rhythm.

Some worthwhile technical details

At the front end, the shoulders should be comfortably extended rather than snatching or grabbing at the catch. Place the blade and initiate the drive with the legs.

Use the connection between opposite ends of the stroke: **to improve the catch, work on the finish; to improve the finish, work on the catch**. The movements are connected. What happens at one end influences how the rower arrives at and executes the other, so the best correction may be somewhere other than where the problem first appears.

A small rigging change can have a large effect. In one successful quad, moving the foot stretchers **roughly 3 cm towards the bow** made the finish more comfortable while preserving a similar catch position and was associated with an immediate improvement in boat speed. The lesson is to test well-chosen adjustments, not to move every quad by the same amount.

Drills and a revealing example

- **Pushback drill:** feel pressure and connection through the legs, with the glutes contributing to the movement.
- **Two-fingered roll-up:** teach relaxed hands, finesse and how little force is needed to control the oar on the recovery.
- **Lazy feather:** practise a simple tap-down and relaxed rolling of the handle, allowing the blade's interaction with the water to assist release.
- **Square-blade rowing and delayed feather:** useful balance and blade-handling challenges when appropriately coached.

A useful end-of-session challenge is **2 km at rate 20**, as hard as the crew can row while staying technically composed. In the example discussed, top speed emerged only after about 500 m, as rhythm settled. The lesson: **trying harder isn't necessarily the same as rowing faster; rhythm may take time to settle**.

Use doubles to develop skills that carry into a quad. Bow- and stern-coxed arrangements each have advantages; neither is automatically the better choice.

05 · Effectively Engaging Young People Today

Lt Col Elizabeth (Liz) Stephens · 11:45 am

Engagement must be active

Make learners participate mentally rather than merely listen. In military training, recruits who do not ask questions about instructions may be questioned themselves afterwards. The point is to keep them engaged and able to explain what they have heard.

Ask athletes to explain what the next exercise involves and why, rather than relying on “Does everyone understand?” The idea is to establish comprehension, not to catch people out.

Bring a proposed solution and a reason to say yes, not just a problem. Leading a team of specialists does not mean knowing more than every specialist; it means encouraging people to use their expertise and take initiative. Rowers can do the same when plans change or unexpected problems arise. It shares responsibility and makes the team more capable when the coach is absent.

Feedback and feedforward

Feedback looks at what happened; **feedforward** establishes what we will do now or next. Both are valuable, but the second creates an immediately usable plan. “The catches were uneven” is an observation. “On the next piece, prioritise arriving together at the last quarter of the recovery” is a possible feedforward cue.

Normalise difficult conversations from the outset. Recruits, like athletes, can be told early that direct and sometimes uncomfortable feedback is a normal, useful part of the process. When a hard conversation eventually becomes necessary, neither person should experience it as a sudden breakdown in the relationship. It is part of helping each other improve.

The best instructors invest in people

Invest in people individually. Make time for targeted, one-to-one conversations, take a genuine interest in each learner and help them succeed. Consistent personal attention can have a lasting effect on confidence and development.

Start from each recruit's current abilities, account for injuries and build progressively instead of forcing everyone through one punishing training model. **Crawl, walk, run, perform** is a useful philosophy for rowing as well.

A related progression was **individual fundamentals → team problem-solving → performance under pressure**. First learn the skill, then learn to apply it with other people, then learn to execute it when the situation becomes demanding. Rowers follow the same progression: learn individual skills, apply them in a crew and then execute under race pressure.

06 · Rowing the 8

Nicolo Maurogiovanni & Randall Martin · 1:30 pm

Start with the crew, not the coach's vision

Let athletes establish their own vision before shaping the plan. In the Australian men's eight, the athletes met first without the coach to agree what they wanted. The coach joined a second meeting to help turn that vision into action. This preserves genuine athlete ownership without removing coaching support.

Build squad depth over years, not weeks. Queensland's King's Cup-winning eight drew on several years of recruitment, development and belief. When late replacements were needed, the wider squad was prepared to step in.

Select the racing eight, coxswain and separate reserves clearly and transparently. Reserves are not interchangeable extras to be moved in and out without explanation; they are a valued part of the team, prepared to step in immediately when needed. Everyone should understand their role, why it matters and when changes might occur. Clear selection decisions, consistent team values and respectful competition protect the whole squad's commitment to the result.

Last quarter in, first quarter out

A central technical priority in the Australian eight was the **final quarter of the recovery into the catch and the first quarter of the drive away from it**. This includes the catch and the movements directly around it. Improving that priority section does not mean drilling it exclusively. Work on the finish, earlier recovery and other movements whenever they are limiting what happens around the catch.

That is a useful distinction between **where a problem is visible** and **where its cause begins**. If the catch is poor, repeatedly shouting “better catch” may not be the solution. The crew may first need to organise what happens before it.

Simple shared front-end cues included arriving long, organised and ready to suspend on the handle once the blade is placed. The crew also used a **shin check**: rowers glanced down at their shins at the catch to see whether they had reached the intended position together. It is a straightforward way of making a usually abstract body-position instruction visible, provided the crew knows what position it is trying to achieve.

An eight as a very large pair

Think of an eight as a large sweep pair. In a fast pair, the stroke may apply proportionally more force earlier in the drive, while the bow contributes more later. Use that principle to consider complementary technical and force-application roles when seating an eight.

Position	Characteristics to consider
8 — stroke	A tough, technically reliable rhythm-setter who tends to load the drive earlier.
7–6	Strong, technically capable rowers who support that rhythm, often with relatively early force.
5–3	The power-producing middle, with strong athletes and more balanced drive profiles.
2–1	Technically excellent rowers who help carry power later through the drive and finish cleanly.

This is **a useful seating framework, not a universal rule**. Boat speed, crew compatibility, individual technique and experimentation still determine whether a combination works. The key insight is to treat eight rowers as a coordinated system.

One message, not eight competing theories

Fast eights can quickly spiral out of control when too many people offer competing instructions. Agree a technical direction, use clear language and avoid continual arguments during work. The coaching team might consider many variables, but the crew needs a coherent message.

Be selective with data. Measures such as **length, effective length and power** can be useful, but recording more numbers does not necessarily provide a clearer answer. A good coach's eyes and the feel and performance of the boat remain essential. Decide what you are trying to achieve first, then choose the few measurements that help you judge it.

Study other boats, not just your own. Watch and dissect a wide range of rowing footage, particularly elite crews, to identify what makes different boats fast. Compare those observations with your crew to develop a sharper technical eye and ideas to test—not copy blindly.

“Fun and dangerous”

The Australian men's eight used **“fun and dangerous”** as a shared pre-race and campaign philosophy. Enjoyment helped athletes stay loose and engaged, and that freedom made them dangerous competitors. This does not mean taking racing lightly. It is a way of pairing serious competitive intent with a mental state in which good rowing can happen.

Both the **Australian men's eight** and the **Queensland King's Cup eight** distinguished between being **on**—focused and professional during training—and **off**, when athletes could relax, connect and consider possible race-day disruptions without everything becoming a formal meeting. Those informal discussions helped build trust and resilience. Rowing combines art and science: **"an arty science."**

The Australian eight's training structure included approximately **18–25 hours per week**, four intensity sessions and two competitive sessions, including one on an ergometer. The competitive sessions kept **healthy competition alive within the squad** without making every outing feel like a selection trial. This is an example from an elite programme, not a workload prescription for other crews.

07 · Building Resilience and Positive Youth Outcomes

Andrew Service · 2:15 pm

Create sporting environments where young people can flourish. One of the most powerful influences is **an encouraging, committed adult who believes in an athlete**. That relationship can be a powerful force in confidence, resilience and personal development.

Clubs should not have to rely on the luck of one charismatic person. A stronger organisation creates opportunities for mentoring, positive relationships and supportive behaviour throughout the programme.

08 · How Para Rowing Can Help You

Christine MacLaren & Caz Pijpers · 3:30 pm

A pathway that athletes and coaches may overlook

Rowers already training and competing in mainstream school or club programmes may also be eligible for **PR3 para rowing**. Some athletes may never have considered classification, or realised that it could open up an additional competition and development pathway—including national events and, for some, the possibility of representing Australia.

PR3 includes rowers who can use their legs, trunk and arms with a sliding seat, and who meet the relevant criteria for a physical or vision impairment. **Eligibility must be determined through formal classification**, rather than assumed by a coach or athlete. Becoming familiar with these pathways can help clubs recognise opportunities they might otherwise miss. For current categories and classification information, see Rowing Australia's para-rowing guidance.

09 · How Coaching Overseas Benefited My Coaching

Paul Thompson, James Harris, Xavier Dorfman & Nadia Bleaken · 4:15 pm

A crew can benefit from **two complementary specialists**: a technical coach responsible for how the boat is rowed and a physiologist responsible for much of the training prescription. They work together on one programme rather than delivering competing instructions. This collaborative structure may become more common.

There are **no silver bullets**. Technical knowledge travels widely; success is more likely to come from how a programme integrates coaching, training and its people than from importing one fashionable trick.

Adapt your coaching to the culture of the programme. Working overseas can challenge assumptions about communication, leadership, athlete expectations and how sport fits into the wider culture. Understand the environment before deciding how to coach within it, and be willing to adapt your approach.

Arrive with two eyes, two ears and one mouth—and use them in that proportion. When joining a new programme, spend more time observing and listening than talking. Respect the people and practices already there before trying to change them. It is valuable advice for any coach entering an unfamiliar team, not only those working overseas.

10 · Successfully Coaching School & Youth Athletes in 2026

John Smyth & Wade Hall-Craggs · 5:00 pm

Coach the whole programme, not just the first eight

In a large school programme, almost all participants are **outside the first eight**. Too often, the flagship crew absorbs a disproportionate share of attention. A well-designed programme gives the entire squad a positive experience and a clear pathway, with shared camps, food and activities helping create a common identity.

When athletes are in the shed, there is no admin

When athletes are in the shed, prioritise them over administration. Stay available to encourage them, notice how they interact and make small corrections to behaviour before unhelpful norms develop, without hovering over them. Young people are still learning what a healthy team culture looks like. Administrative work can be done later; an important conversation or teachable moment may not come again.

MONDAY 26 OCTOBER

11 · Why Benchmarking and Erg Standards Matter

Jason Lane · 8:30 am

A benchmark is information, not an identity

Use age-related benchmarks to understand progression towards higher-performance pathways. Such frameworks may include erg performance alongside technical, physical and psychological development, wellbeing and life balance. Development is individual and not always linear.

The trend matters more than a one-off result. Repeated, prescribed testing allows selectors and development programmes to see whether an athlete is progressing across time, rather than relying on a single standout performance. Athletes hoping to enter national pathways benefit from completing the required tests consistently so there is a useful record on which decisions can be based.

The useful distinction is between **being capable of producing a particular erg score** and **being well suited to a demanding elite training pathway**. **Be upfront about the commitment, sacrifices and uncertain prospects of an elite pathway.** Young athletes deserve enough information to make an informed decision about the life they would be choosing.

12 · Opportunities for Female Coaches Today

Michelle de Highden, Beth Bryan & Nadia Bleaken · 9:30 am

The right opportunity at the right time

Match the right learning to the right time, coach and environment. Opportunity alone is insufficient if someone lacks the support, timing or context to make the most of it.

Development depends on **culture, behaviour and environment**, as well as targeted access to opportunities, useful structures and guidance from experienced people. Offering someone a coaching role is only the start; they need meaningful responsibilities, mentoring and an environment in which they can improve. Stories of successful coaches can help others see a pathway for themselves.

Build relationships before a new team meets in person. For an Australian squad assembled from around the world, group messaging and short video introductions helped members share who they were, what mattered to them and what they could contribute. These small actions began building trust before the first training session together.

Check that athletes understand, rather than merely comply

Compliance is not the same as understanding. A rower might follow an instruction without knowing what changed or why. Ask athletes to describe the task in their own words and explain how they will recognise a better stroke.

A deliberate, safe contrast can also help: briefly do a small technical action the wrong way, then correctly, to make the difference easier to feel. Before racing, focus on preparation, purpose, controllable actions and the pursuit of small, continuous improvements—*kaizen*.

13 · Learnings from Working with Younger Athletes

Scott Fairweather ("The Renovator") · 11:15 am

Standards describe where you want to finish

A **standard** describes the quality of the eventual outcome—not simply where you start or how hard you work in the middle. "Train hard" is an intention. "At the end of this block, we can execute the planned piece with stable technique" is closer to an observable standard. Different athletes may need different paths to reach it.

That standard works best when coaches and athletes share **a common language, agreed expectations, trust and accountability**. If everyone means something different by the same instruction, a standard is hard to pursue. Culture is built when the language and behaviours used every day match what the programme says it values.

A **trusted intermediary** can be valuable in a coach–athlete relationship. Someone who understands both people can help bridge communication gaps, advocate constructively for each side and support a healthier environment. Not every partnership needs this, but it can be valuable when expectations and communication become complicated.

14 • Impactful Coaching and Sustainable Athlete Outcomes: Develop the Person, Not the Performance

Dr Liam McCarthy · 12:00 pm · Keynote

Look upstream of the question

An athlete's immediate question may be the end of a chain of assumptions or decisions. Sometimes the better answer comes from going back and asking **what problem led to this question in the first place?** Coaching then becomes help with defining and navigating a problem, rather than simply implementing a ready-made answer.

Athlete and coach as investigators

Use a repeated learning loop:

Notice → Frame → Experiment → Evaluate → Notice again.

Notice what is happening, frame a useful question, experiment with one change and evaluate what actually changed. Repeat. The athlete becomes an investigator, not just a recipient of instructions, and the coach is willing to be a co-learner rather than pretending to have every answer.

Let the athlete go first in feedback. Before offering a verdict, ask what they noticed, whether the movement worked and what they would change. Then ask what good technique *felt like*. Being able to recognise a successful stroke for oneself is fundamental to improving without a coach giving a running commentary. Invite athletes to seek feedback rather than only receive it.

The coach should make their own experimentation visible too: *'This is my best idea at the moment; let's try it and see.'* Some experiments will work; others will not. Presenting coaching as a shared process of investigation—rather than one expert delivering certainty—makes it easier for athletes to contribute, question and learn.

Resist rescuing too early. Constantly solving the problem for someone can make them dependent on your presence. Sometimes a carefully chosen obstacle, question or delay gives a person the opportunity to solve it themselves. That must be proportionate to their capability and never compromise safety.

The quality of coaching can be judged partly by what remains when the coach is absent: can the athlete notice, reason, make decisions and adapt on their own? Time spent together is not automatically the same as meaningful learning.

Coaches need coaching too. Deliberate development, mentoring and the willingness to keep learning should not stop when someone becomes a coach. Seeking support and testing your own assumptions is part of doing the job well.

15 · Child Safe-guarding

Keaton Guymer & Matt Sinclair (Sport Integrity Australia) · 2:00 pm

Reduce opportunities for harm

Sporting organisations cannot rely on appearance or intuition to identify someone who might harm a child. The practical approach is to set **clear behavioural boundaries and systems that reduce opportunities for inappropriate conduct**, support people who raise concerns, and act on worrying behaviour. Think about risk in terms of motivation, vulnerability and opportunity; organisations can most directly reduce **opportunity**.

For technique analysis of junior athletes, avoid relying on **a coach's personal phone**. Use a club- or school-owned device with clear rules for consent, recording, access, storage and deletion. This is exactly the kind of everyday practice a club should check against its safeguarding policy.

Safeguarding also lives in ordinary logistics: **who supervises drop-off and pick-up, how adults communicate with young athletes online, what happens on away trips and at regattas, and whether volunteers know the rules**. Recruitment checks and clear reporting systems matter, but so do the everyday arrangements that reduce isolated or ambiguous situations.

Sport Integrity Australia's *Children and Young People Safe Practices Do's & Don'ts* covers professional boundaries, supervision, digital communication, photographs and video, travel and other common situations. It is worth reading the actual guidance rather than relying on a short summary.

Safeguarding concerns can be raised through Rowing Australia's integrity process and, where applicable, Sport Integrity Australia. Follow current reporting procedures and urgent child-protection obligations where relevant.

Resources: Sport Integrity Australia – Safe Practices Do's & Don'ts · Rowing Australia – Integrity Complaints

16 · Training for Adaptation and the Individual

Paul Thompson · 2:45 pm · Closing session

Similar 2 km erg times can hide different athletes

Two rowers can produce the same 2 km erg time with very different **aerobic and anaerobic contributions**, and therefore have different opportunities for improvement. Testing can help build a power profile—using efforts at different durations, ergometer data and, where available, physiological testing—rather than treating a single score as a complete diagnosis.

A relatively anaerobically dependent athlete may benefit from a different emphasis than an athlete whose performance is limited elsewhere. The goal is not to make every athlete's profile identical; it is to work out what is limiting the next improvement. The principle is to assess each athlete's performance profile before deciding which part of their training needs the greatest emphasis.

The technique must survive the race

Distance per stroke was identified by Rowing Australia as a key metric for good performance. Fixed-rate ergometer sessions are one way to train it. Technical quality at steady rate is only part of the job, however. Athletes also need to move the boat well at race rate and in the final 500 m when fatigue and pressure are high. **Build stroke rate progressively to stress-test the technique:** observe when the movement starts to unravel, work on the limiting skill, then raise the demand again. It is a more deliberate progression than jumping straight from steady-state rowing to race intensity.

Force-application profiles can differ between successful athletes. **Rowing Australia aims for a steep rise in force soon after blade placement**, while recognising that athletes can win with different force curves. Natural characteristics, coordination and timing may all contribute.

Individual programmes must account for flexibility, trunk strength, exercise selection and **recovery outside training hours**. For example, a back squat may be limited by trunk strength before the legs are fully challenged, making a different exercise useful for a particular athlete. Choose training around the individual and its objective, not a universally preferred exercise.

Closing reflection

The strongest recurring theme was **creating the conditions for athletes to become less dependent on the coach**: set clear standards, develop technique patiently, use data selectively, make time for people and give the crew genuine ownership of performance. The coach provides guidance, but ultimately the athlete must be able to think, feel and perform when it matters.

References

Conference programme: Rowing Australia 2026 programme · Conference webpage.

Safeguarding: Sport Integrity Australia — Safe Practices Do's & Don'ts.

Para rowing: Rowing Australia — classifications and pathways.

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