

# NOTRE DAME **ROWING 101**





**Blade:** The end of the oar that pulls the boat through the water.

**Bow:** The forward end of the boat that crosses the finish line first. Also, the rower in the nearest seat to the forward end of a shell, who typically has a quick catch, stable technique and a shorter arc.

**Bucket Rigging:** Two riggers on the same side next to each other instead of alternated.

**Catching a Crab:** "Catching a crab" is a phrase used to describe what happens when a rower's oar enters the water at an angle other than perpendicular. At an angle, the oar gets caught under the surface of the water and, depending on the severity of the situation, can cause a boat to lose ground in a race.

**The Course:** Spring races are contested on a 2,000-meter (about 1-1/4 mile) course.

**Coxswain:** (Pronounced cox-n) The coxswain is the person who sits in the stern of the boat and is responsible for steering and commanding the crew. During a race, the coxswain will be steering, calling strategic moves and giving motivational cues.

**Eight vs. Four:** An Eight (8+) has eight rowers and a coxswain, and a Four (4+) has four rowers and a coxswain. The Eight and Four are the most common collegiate competitions and the two events held at the NCAA Championships. The plus sign indicates a coxswain on board.

**Ergs:** Short for ergometer, an individualized rowing simulator that helps strength and conditioning.

**Head Race:** The traditional fall regatta, in which boats cross the starting line at full speed in roughly 15-second intervals. The course usually involves navigating three miles of river, around bends and under bridges.

**Lightweight:** A crew in which each athlete weighs under a specified amount (under 130 pounds for women).

**Racing Categories:** There are several boats that race in either the varsity or novice categories. The different categories are called varsity eight, novice eight, etc., a practice similar to first, second and third-string groups in other sports. For example, the "second novice eight" race refers to the "second string" novices from competing teams racing each other.

**Regatta:** The name of rowing events in which several crews compete.

**Repechage:** A second-chance race for those crews who do not automatically advance to the finals of an event.

**Rigger:** The frame that attaches an oar to the shell.

**Run:** The distance the shell moves during one stroke.

**Sculling:** A type of rowing where each rower has two oars.

**Shell:** The boat used in rowing races, ranging in length from 45 feet for a four to 58 feet for an Eight. The shell seats nine people for an Eight and five for a Four.

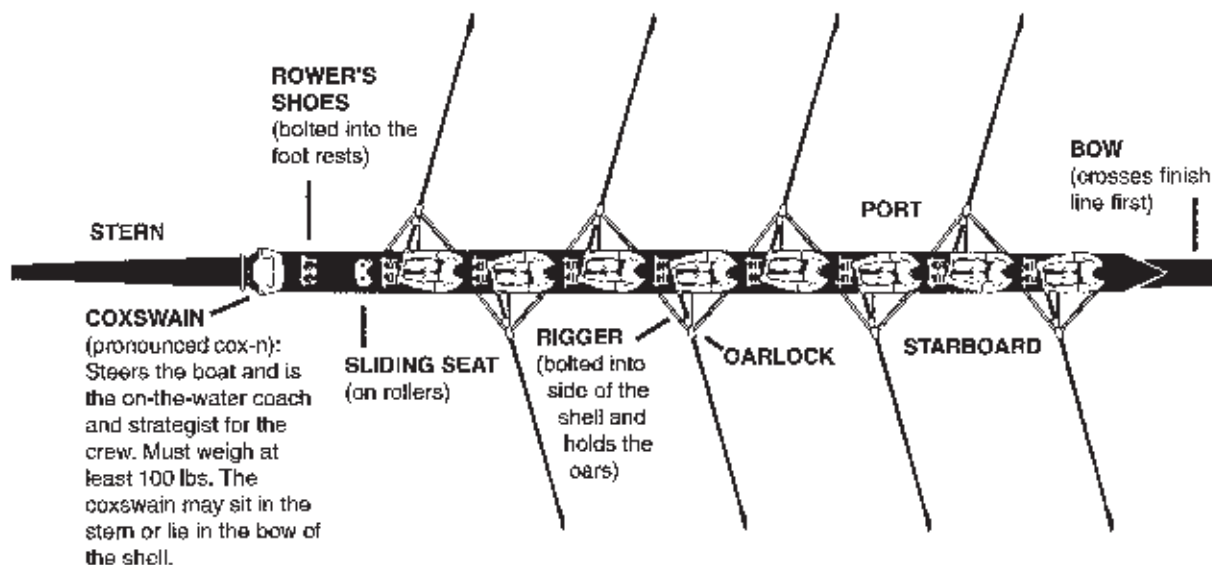
**Sprints:** Used in collegiate competition, this type of race features a course which is 2,000 meters long, usually with four to six unmarked or buoyed lanes and a floating or staked start.

**Stern:** The back of the boat and the end rowers face during competitions.

**Stroke:** A complete cycle of moving the shell through the water. The rower sitting closest to the stern looks directly at the coxswain in a stern coxed boat and sets the rhythm for the rest of the shell.

**Sweeping:** A type of rowing where each rower uses one oar.

**Varsity vs. Novice:** A regatta usually consists of two broad categories of events: varsity and collegiate novice. Varsity events typically showcase a program's best and most experienced rowers. Collegiate novice events are for rowers and coxswains competing in their first year of collegiate rowing.





## HEAD RACES

Head races are the traditional fall regattas, in which boats cross the starting line usually at full speed at roughly 15 second intervals. The course usually involves navigating three miles of river, around bends and under bridges. Whichever team completes the course in the shortest amount of time wins.

## 2,000 METER COMPETITION

National, world and Olympic competitions are 2,000 meters, or approximately 1.25 miles. Most courses are divided into six buoyed lanes, allowing six boats to participate at any one time. This racing utilizes a double-elimination system, which allows each participant at least two opportunities to row.

Heats are held first. Depending on the number of entries, one to three crews will advance to a semifinal. Everybody else goes to a repechage heat. (Repechage is French for 'another chance'.) Those who advance from the heats and the repechages go to the semifinals, then an equal number from the semis proceed to the finals.

In international competition, those who fail to advance all the way to the finals, row in a consolation

race called a petite final, which determines places seven through 12.

## RACE WATCHING

The crew making it look the easiest is most likely the one doing the best job in the race. While you're watching, look for the following:

- **Continuous, fluid motion of the rowers:** The rowing motion should not have a discernible end or beginning.

- **Synchronization:** Rowers strive for perfect synchronization in the boat.

- **Clean catches of the oarblade:** If you see a lot of splash, the oarblades aren't entering the water correctly. The catch should happen at the end of the recovery, when the hands are as far ahead of the rower as possible. Rowers who uncoil before they drop the oarblades are sacrificing speed and not getting a complete drive.

- **Even oarblade feathering:** When the blades are brought out of the water, they should all move horizontally close to the water and at the same height. It's not easy, especially if the water is rough.

- **The most consistent speed:** Shells don't move like a car – they're slowest at the catch,

quickest at the release. The good crews time the catch at just the right moment to maintain the speed of the shell.

- **The number of strokes per minute the crew takes:** The stroke rate varies from boat to boat. An eight can achieve a higher stroke rate than a single; and an extremely tall person may take less strokes per minute than somebody smaller – yet still move faster.

At the start, the stroke rate will be high – maybe 40-44 for an eight, 36-40 for a single. The rate might be 32-36 (8+) or 28-32(1x) during the middle of the race. Coaching strategy determines when the boat will sprint, but finishing-stroke rates of 40-42 for an eight are possible, while 46 is amazing!

- Rowing looks graceful, elegant and sometimes effortless when it's done well. Don't be fooled. Rowers haven't been called the world's most physically-fit athletes for nothing. A 2,000-meter race demands virtually everything a human can physically bring to an athletic competition – aerobic ability, technical talent, exceptional mental discipline, ability to utilize oxygen efficiently and in huge amounts, balance, pain tolerance and the ability to continue to work when the body is demanding that you stop.





A “Power 10” is a call by the coxswain for 10 of the crew’s best, most powerful strokes. Good coxswains read the course to know how many strokes remain for their crew to count down to the finish.

It doesn’t matter whether you win an Olympic medal or don’t make the finals – each crew still carries their boat back to the rack.

Coxswains from first-place boats worldwide are thrown into the water by their crews.

Coxswains don’t now and probably never did yell “stroke! stroke!” Similar to a jockey, their job is to implement the coach’s strategy during the race, in addition to steering and letting the rowers know what they need to do to win.

Remember that everything, especially technique becomes more and more difficult to maintain as the race progresses. Assuming you are watching near the finish, you will have a much easier time separating the excellent from the mediocre, simply because rowers who appear textbook at the start, may look anything but fluid at the finish.

### THINGS TO TAKE TO A REGATTA

- Binoculars
- Lawn Chairs
- Sunscreen
- Blankets
- Sunglasses/Hat
- Windbreaker or jacket
- Vocal chords

### A GOOD STROKE

Good rowing means good technique. The rowing stroke has four parts: the catch, the drive, the release and the recovery.

**The Catch** – The sliding seat should be as close to the stern as possible. Your back should be straight, your arms straight and fully extended, your knees deeply bent, shins perpendicular to the water. You are folded and ready to uncoil.

**The Drive** – Straighten your legs, sliding the seat toward the bow. Pull the bow with your trunk. Your arms (out straight) and hands should follow

your body, remaining at a constant level. Keep your knees between your arms. Complete the drive by leaning back and pulling the oar handles to your upper abdomen.

**The Release** – With the drive finished and your body leading back, lift the oar blades from the water with a slight downward push on the handles. Simultaneously drop your wrists slightly to rotate the oar and feather the blade parallel to the water. This flips the oar blades so they lie flat like pancakes, reducing wind resistance as you push forward, oars above the water, to begin new stroke.

**The Recovery** – Extend your arms forward, and slide slowly and smoothly toward the stern. Try to be as light as possible on the seat - the boat is running underneath you - and pushing down slows its forward movement. As you slide, bring your thighs up to your chest. Position the seat as close to the stern as possible, and you are back at the catch.

