

Planning a-head...

Last year, **Ian Shore's** crews won pennants at the Fours Head and the Women's Head of the River – a first time for Wales. Here are his tips for head racing



PHOTO: BIG BLADE



Welsh Pennant winners in the senior 3 coxed fours: Emily Parry, Cat Kay, Bethan Smith, Emma Cockcroft and cox Penny Challans

The Fours Head was part of a winter project to set the girls up for the summer. If you do well as a crew in the winter then you go into the summer with confidence.

My biggest advice is to try to plan as much as you can upfront so when you rock up on the day, you know how you're going to race. We have a really simple philosophy – it's about supporting the athlete so they can just concentrate on their performance.

Pick the right event for you. Last year we looked at events that we were eligible for and could win. We decided to do the Senior 3 coxed fours because you still get the overall result – we finished second overall in the coxed fours and won the pennant too.

Make sure you organise where you are going to boat from prior to putting your entries in. Don't leave it until afterwards because you may end up scrambling to find a club who can take you.

Unless you have very good athletes, **allow the crew time to bed down.** Each coach has to decide themselves, but I normally pick them a month beforehand – it doesn't mean that they row as a four all the time, they could be training as a pair or in a single but they'll still be training together.

Crew selection – is fitness better than technique? Lots of people are going to disagree with this but what I can say is that crews I have coached have won their division in the Fours Head

for several years and four-and-a-quarter miles is a long way if you're not fit enough. Go with the person who is really fit rather than the person whose technique is very good because the danger is that when you put the hammer down, they're going to be a passenger. The race really starts at Hammersmith Bridge – but this is 14 minutes in, so if you're not fit enough, it'll be really difficult.

Decide how you're going to row the race – and don't decide this on the morning! As a crew, you have to decide whether you're going to race on the watch or on the markers. Lots of crews, especially non-Tideway crews, tend to race on the markers, but if they're not familiar with the Tideway they don't always know where the markers are.

When the draw comes out, **decide how you will race around the competition.** Are you likely to be overtaken, or are you likely to be doing the overtaking? And if so, are you going to expect the crew to move out of the way? Most crews don't – even if the rules say they should – so you need to decide what to do.

You also need to decide how to steer the course. On the Tideway the cox can find you 10-15 seconds. When we did the Women's Head we went out of our way to find an experienced Tideway cox. We accepted that although they knew the course intimately, they might not know the crew so well.

Two weeks before the event, we get a map of the course and show the crew Rachel Quarrell's video (see [tideway-head\). Get an idea of how long things will take you. For instance, people often get caught out by the distance from the Black Buoy to the finish line – it's still the best part of two minutes of rowing.](http://www.thames-rrc.org/courses-and-seminars/coxing-a-</p>
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Don't forget to think about the marshal time before starting. If the crew is starting in the 400s then you'll have a wait of about an hour-and-a-half – and if it's raining, you'll need to think about wet kit. In this situation, we bring our crew into an upstream club and get rid of all their wet kit and empty any extra water from the boat just before they start.

It's also very important that **the crew has enough fluid on board so that they race well hydrated.** Empty any excess fluid into the river prior to racing but remember you still need to row back to your boating club after finishing, so you might need some fluid when you have finished. Each athlete needs to think about what they will eat well beforehand – prior to racing, don't try to eat something that you've not eaten before.

Then there's **the question of how you're going to relieve yourself** while you're waiting to start... I say to a crew to decide on how they're going to deal with this beforehand so it doesn't affect their race.

Finally, we remind athletes that the race is measured in a hundredths of a second, so even one complacent stroke will make a difference. **Every stroke counts.** But remember I'm talking from a performance point of view. I always enter to win – I don't enter to make up the numbers. 🏆

Who is Ian Shore?

Ian has been coaching since 1985. From 1995-98 he was head coach at Thames RC, winning several divisions in the Fours Head and Women's Head of the River. In 2000 he became head coach at Oxford University Women's Boat Club (OUWBC) coaching seven winning crews at the Fours Head over his eight year tenure. During that period OUWBC won the University pennant on several occasions at the Women's Head with one crew breaking the course record for universities in 2007. In 2008 OUWBC won the Women's Head outright. He became National Development Coach of Wales in September 2007, coaching the winning Senior 3 coxed four and the winning Senior 1 eight at the 2009 Women's Head.