BRITISH ROWING

Technical Spotlight: The sculling front end

Questions and Answer Sheet

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT

Questions Unanswered on Webinar

How long would you focus just on one aspect of the stroke such as the catch? A few weeks? A term? A season?

With the catch itself, this would be all the time, but how we go about it would change at different times. Also dependent on the needs of the athlete/crew.

The actual hand movement and timing drills used to develop the catch would be used almost every session, sometimes just in a warm up, and other times as a primary focus, but to ensure a good catch is even possible there would be focused periods of other factors, mostly around preparation and trusting the boat.

Normally though through the September - December period we would have a big focus on the triangle (relationship between head hands and glutes from 1/4 slide to full side - see slide show)). Basically try and eliminate any unnecessary body movements such as dumping into the stern, the killer of all boat speed - the better the athlete gets set and consistent with this position the easier they will find the actual action of putting the blade into water. This is true for squaring the blade correctly, to the right height and position, and at the right point of the recovery, and also have them really understand releasing the boat underneath them, and having the hull turn the wheels to the catch point - if they get this right then all the forces are to the finish line - don't try get forward to the catch as you will create a braking effect in the process - be sympathetic to the boat and allow it to work for you. This will also help the athlete relax.

It is difficult to say we would focus on one aspect and move on though - it is a linked system - if one aspect breaks down, this will be followed by another aspect. The coach needs to monitor this all the time and make decisions - if it were April and body dumping had crept in I would go back to what we had focused on in November for example. Overall the catch and hooking onto the Wall of water is the overall theme and everything links into that, to maximise effective time under the water, and to ensure minimal braking of the boat.

Overall though, a good plan though would be to teach the front end drills, and then spend a month focusing on set up and preparation, and then come back to front end drills - keep doing it - repeat repeat repeat.

Are they using a coaching app got drawing the lines on the crews? What app is it? And are there other ones you could recommend?

Coaches Eye is the one I use - there is free version and a pro version which I use - the pro version is less than £10 and excellent. I believe it is available on Android, as well as IOS.

There are other apps though - if you type sport analysis into the App Store loads come up - I haven't used any others but CoachNow looks good from the reviews.

How do you adapt the clock face coaching to strong tail and head winds in rough water?

For rough water, it's just to make the clock face bigger- rather than wrist watch and wall clock you might say 'Big Ben back end and wall clock front end' (I realise Big Ben is the bell, but athletes will get the idea!)

For tail winds, this is about speed of movement and timing of the movement with the hull and the rest of the linked system - racing a tail wind is like training up stream, and is great for developing skill. As the boat speed goes up the hand movement has to get quicker and the force production on the footboard has to get more direct - basically don't hold back but don't force it - relax and go with it! - timing it well is crucial so practise is really important! Avoid muscling it at all costs.

For head winds, again it is about matching the speed of the boat - this is where thinking about the boat being still and the water going past you will really help – keep the catch and the drive safe, just helping the water continue on its way. With a tail wind, the water is going past you quick! To help it on its way you need to be very accurate, quick and well timed so as not to disrupt it!

So how would you put the blade in? Head wind = water going past you less quick - so this how would you put the blade in.

Are the 'entry' and 'catch' different things?

Good question - For me they are - the blade going in doesn't necessarily mean you have 'caught' the water - for me the catch is when you have hold of it to push off, or if flipped, are helping it on its way - you are connected to it to be able to produce force. If you haven't done this then all you have done is enter the water, and probably slowed the boat more than you should.

Observing a moving boat from the side, should the entry occur when the relative movement between the shell and the spoon is zero?

Good question - if the blade goes in when the relative speed is zero I would suggest this will cause a braking effect - for relative zero the blade would enter vertically with no hook - imagine the effect on the water going past the boat with the boat stationary . The blade must have changed direction - the spoon is fractionally travelling back to the stern of the boat as it enters - it must be moving to get pressure on the correct side of the spoon so as to make the wall of water- so the change of direction may be at relative zero but the entry must be with the boat travelling to the finish line and the blade going to the start line - clearly the skill is to get this very tight to minimise wasted effective length, very well timed between the linked system (especially to minimise hull speed loss), ensure not too much pressure is on the foot board before entry to reduce braking effect of the foot board being pushed to the stern.

The analogy of the clock face works well here, if you put the horizontal line between 3 and 9 above the water line.

This is the skill, and the biggest skill to develop in sculling.

I am realising I will have to build up a library of video. Can you suggest anywhere I can get of video to start a library as I coach juniors?

You tube has an abundance of video, almost dangerously abundant.

It's important to ensure:

1. A consistent model - don't chop and change too much!
2. Ensure there is progression to what you are showing athletes - don't let them try do stuff they are not ready for!
3. If using video for drills ensure they link into what you are looking to achieve.