



BRITISHROWING

Confidence: Is it real or is it all in our minds?

Questions and Answer Sheet

TEAMWORK | OPEN TO ALL | COMMITMENT



Questions Unanswered on Webinar

As the subject of confidence is so unique, how would you suggest we start approaching what you have talked about with a squad of rowers?

Start by purchasing Mind Games... on a serious note start by having a conversation on the subject. Get the athletes to share what they think confidence means, and come up with a few definitions. Get them thinking beyond simply the word 'confidence' and come up with definitions that are more specific and achievable. Once you've decided what you think confidence means to you in relation to your circumstances, then try to come up with a pathway to achieve this. It won't happen overnight – you can't tap someone on the head with the confidence stick, as Paul Thompson once told me. It will be a gradual process but stick to your plan and keep working towards whatever your definition of 'confidence' is.

What advice would you give to the rower who is doing it for Mum and Dad so they can start to get to know who they are and build resilience, especially if they do not achieve their goal?

Dr Steve Peters would say that if someone is driven by what he would call 'unhealthy' drivers, they have two options. Either leave the sport, or replace it with healthy drivers. He told me about two athletes that he met through the British Cycling team who were simply unhappy. He encouraged both of them to stop cycling and do something else – one of them got in touch a few years later to thank him and said it was the best thing they did. So there is always that option. But in this case, is being driven by wanting to please parents unhealthy or not? As long as it's positive, and it's united with a love of the sport, then it isn't necessarily bad; but if it leads to poor resilience and a feeling that the love from the parents is linked with rowing success then that's not ideal. So I would say that this person needs greater examination to understand the nature of this motivation. Overall, feeling that happiness or fulfilment depends on achieving success is never healthy.

What would be your top tips for athletes on the cusp of breaking into the team. How can they prepare for becoming a full-time athlete, so they thrive in this environment?

I'm not sure you can really prepare adequately! You learn on the job and I would say it's so important to go in with an open mind, learn from the coaches and athletes around you, expect to feel totally out of your depth at first, but understand that over the months and years you will develop the mental and physical skills that you need. When I was a young athlete I was told that in elite sport, 'the lows will be very low and the highs will be very high' – solid advice that set me up for the rollercoaster ahead.

You've talked about formal and informal roles. Is there an argument that it's worth working towards being an all-rounder who can be versatile and do all/any role well?

Absolutely – and there are many athletes I could name that fit that role and have been very successful. I think the formal/informal roles works when you're trying to build a team – it's a way of understanding your place in the crew, what others need from you and what you need from others. None of these roles should be fixed and inflexible. They should be a way of ensuring all can flourish.