

Deciphering Rowing Technology

At regattas, you'll see boats listed on the program with the following numbers and math signs: +, - and x. They're not really math signs, of course; they're symbols that mean something in rowing, and here is what they mean:

+ means the boat has a coxswain

- means there is no cox

x means there are two oars per person (sculling, not sweep rowing)

1x = a "single" (1 rower, sculling, no cox)

2- = a "pair" (2 rowers, sweep, no cox)

2+ = a "coxed pair" (2 rowers, sweep, cox)

2x = a "double" (2 rowers, sculling)

4- = a "straight four" (4 rowers, sweep, no cox)

4+ = a "four" (4 rowers, sweep, cox)

4x = a "quad" (4 rowers, sculling, no cox)

4x+ = a "coxed quad" (4 rowers, sculling, cox)

8+ = an "eight" (8 rowers, sweep, cox)

Here's some terminology that's good to know:

Bow The front of the boat. Also the term used for the person rowing in "1 seat."

Bow ball A rubber ball used to protect the boat in case of a collision.

Bow coxed boat A shell in which the cox lays feet first in the bow of the boat. This position helps to reduce wind resistance.

Button/Collar A wide ring on the oar that keeps it from slipping through the oarlock.

Catch The entry of the blade into the water at the beginning of the stroke; the point at which the oar is placed in the water.

Cox box An amplification system with a headset, microphone, and speakers that allows the cox to convey instructions to the rowers.

Coxswain/Cox'n/Cox The coxswain commands the crew, steers the boat, and is responsible for the safety of the crew and the boat. During a regatta, the coxswain is responsible for carrying out the race plan established by the coach. The coxswain is the only one other than the coach who can tell the rowers what to do.

Crab Being unable to take your blade out of the water at the release. This action destroys the rhythm, set, run, and momentum of the boat and is often referred to as "catching a crab."

Drive Power portion of the stroke. When the blades are in the water, the boat is in the 'drive' phase of the stroke cycle.

Ergometer/Erg A rowing machine

Feathering the blade Rotating the blade so that it parallels the water on the recovery, minimizing resistance to air and water.

Finish/release End of the drive during which the blade comes out of the water in preparation for the recovery.

Gunwale [guh-n-l] The sides of the boat, the edge of the shell's cockpit. When rowers carry a shell to the dock, the gunwales rest on the rowers' shoulders.

Hold Down/Hold Water/Hold Squaring the blade in the water to stop the forward motion of the shell.

Inside hand The hand closest to the oarlock (right for ports, left for starboards).

Lightweight A term referring to the rowers, not the boats. There is a maximum weight for each rower in a lightweight event as well as a boat average.

Masters Rowers over the age of 27 (21 at some regattas)

Novices Beginning rowers. In the junior program, the more experienced rowers are varsity rowers.

Oar (sweep) These are used in pairs, fours, and eights. Each rower uses only one oar. Just over 12 feet in length, oars may be made of wood or carbon fiber. They are generally painted with the team's colors.

Oarlock A device that holds the oar. The lock includes the pin and the gate. The gate is held closed by a threaded nut that is loosened to allow the rower to open the gate and insert an oar into the oarlock. The gate is then closed, and the nut is hand tightened.

Port Right-hand side of the boat, when you're sitting in the boat.

Power 10 A call for rowers to do ten of their best, most powerful strokes; used as a strategy to pull ahead of a competitor or to focus the rowers' attention.

Puddle The disturbance left in the water by the blade as it is removed from the water. Puddles are visible during the recovery and help to gauge the run of a boat.

Recovery The time between the release of one stroke to the catch of the next stroke; the time the blade is out of the water. During the recovery, the rower moves his or her body and seat into position to prepare for the next catch.

Rigger A triangular-shaped metal device bolted on the side of the boat that holds the oars.

Rudder About the size of a credit card, the rudder is part of the skeg that swivels to steer the boat. Sometimes, the rudder is separate from the skeg.

Run The glide that occurs during the recovery, or the distance the shell moves during one stroke.

Sculls The oars used in singles, doubles, and quads. Sculls are 9½ feet long and may be made of wood or carbon fiber. Sculls have a smaller handle than a sweep oar, but the parts are the same as a sweep oar.

Sculling One of the two disciplines of rowing. Each person rows with two oars.

Set The stability of the boat – its ability to ride level without leaning to the starboard or port. A boat is "set" by the rowers when they are balanced in the scull (not leaning left or right).

Shell Another word for 'boat' in rowing terminology.

Single A shell with one rower (a sculler) who uses two oars to propel the boat.

Skeg A fin attached to the bottom of the boat near the stern that helps keep the boat on course and balanced.

Slide The set of runners for the wheels of each seat in the boat.

Slide Ratio The ratio of time spent during the drive versus the recovery. The goal is to spend more time on the recovery than on the drive. This maximizes the run of the boat as well as the amount of rest the rowers get during the recovery phase of the stroke.

Starboard The left side of the boat when you are sitting in the boat.

Stern The rear of the boat; the direction the rowers are facing when sitting in the boat.

Straight Refers to a shell without a coxswain i.e. a straight four or straight pair.

Stretcher/Foot Stretcher Where the rowers' feet go. Shoes may be permanently attached to the boat or adjustable straps hold rowers' own shoes to the footboard. Footstretchers adjust to accommodate rowers' height/leg length.

Stroke The cycle of the oar during rowing. One stroke consists of the catch, drive, finish, and recovery.

Stroke Seat/Stroke The rower who sits closest to the stern. The stroke sets the stroke rate and rhythm for the boat.

Stroke Rate The cadence of strokes per minute.

Sweep Rowing One of the two disciplines of rowing; rowers use only one oar each, alternating on either side of the boat (port oars or starboard oars).

Swing The elusive feeling when near-perfect synchronization of motion occurs in the shell, enhancing the performance and speed.

USRA United States Rowing Association, the governing body for rowing in the U.S.

<http://www.usrowing.org>

Weigh Enough A command given by coaches and coxswains to make the rowers stop an action.