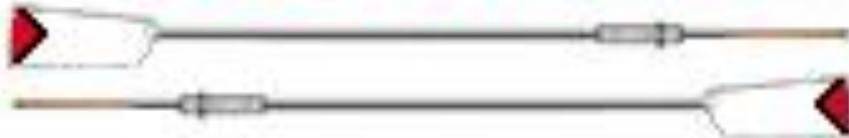


# **OAR**



## **OLYMPIA AREA ROWING**

### **YOUTH PROGRAM**

### **PARENT AND PARTICIPANT HANDBOOK**

Welcome to the wonderful world of rowing, or “crew” as its participants like to call it. Rowing has a long history, and strong roots in the Pacific Northwest and Olympia. Have you read Boys in the Boat? The sport is physically demanding, highly technical, and has been described as the ultimate team sport. It is also the one sport where you exercise sitting down and going backwards.

Olympia Area Rowing Association (OAR) was originally organized in the 1980’s and re-founded in 1998 by five local rowers. Our Junior program was started in 2006. In the early days, OAR members kept their boats outside in what was called “The Compound” in an adjacent parking lot. Establishing a true home for OAR was the manifestation of a dream for many Budd Inlet rowers. The OAR boathouse was completed in 2005, and sits on Port of Olympia land in Swantown Marina (right next to the public slip). The 5,300-square-foot building is home to OAR equipment, Olympia Parks, Arts and Recreation Department water recreation programs.

OAR is a 501(c)3 charitable organization with a stated purpose of promoting competitive and recreational rowing for adults and youth in the local community, fostering sportsmanship, teamwork, athleticism and camaraderie. Today OAR provides recreational and competitive rowing programs and opportunities for over 80 adult members, and a competitive Junior program for more than 60 high school students.

This parent and participant guide is intended to help answer the following questions – ranging from the philosophical to the daily practical.

1. *What is the Junior program all about?*
2. *How do you go about coaching that?*
3. *When in the year do you row?*
4. *What does a typical practice look like?*
5. *Do novices ever row in the same boat with experienced rowers, or girls with boys?*
6. *What is your philosophy on attendance?*
7. *Why do I need to let you know ahead of time if I can’t make practice?*
8. *More philosophically...who is more important, the individual or the team?*
9. *How important is winning?*
10. *How important is “going to Nationals?”*
11. *Do you support an athlete’s desire to row in college after high school?*
12. *So will I, as an athlete, have fun ALL the time?*
13. *What is your philosophy underlying your code of conduct?*
14. *How should I, as a parent, interact with the coaches?*
15. *How can I, as a parent, best support my athlete?*

Note: While coaches always like to talk about the above, their time (particularly at regattas) is often limited and focused on the athletes. As a first line of communication, Heidi Cope (oarteamrep@gmail.com, 360-561-7056), our volunteer parent representative for communication, is always happy to field your questions – either answering them directly or finding out who is the best to get you an answer.

### 1. What is the Junior program all about?

#### **"Row well, go fast, have fun!"**

An enriching environment for all who love rowing and coxing and are willing to work hard at it – a rewarding competitive experience for athletes of all abilities.

We want to get off the water at regattas having rowed as well and as fast as we can, and happy with our effort and results – whatever they may be. We can't control others' boats speeds – sometimes they will be faster than us, sometimes not – but we can control how we prepare for, and execute at, races.

In the process of learning how to row and race, the program teaches youths valuable lessons and behaviors that will help them be happy, successful, confident and productive members of society. These include how to compete, taking personal responsibility, being part of a team/community, finding intrinsic motivation to push yourself, developing lifelong healthy habits, and finding joy in dedicating yourself in a team that shares your passion.

### 2. How do you go about coaching that?

We start with a team of coaches that have rowed themselves at everything from high school to international levels. They bring a passion for sharing the amazing experiences and lessons that rowing gave them. The coaching team is deep in both rowing coaching and youth program experience. We blend top-notch technical rowing expertise with many years of experience in understanding and caring for the development of young athletes. Many of us have taken advanced, formal rowing coaching (and other youth sports) training. With our approach of safety first, we are all First Aid, CPR, boater safety, and US Rowing SafeSport certified.

We strive for the best (lowest) rower to coach ratio that we can. There are some natural constraints here – economic, availability of coaches, and the number of launches available for example.

We stress the value of being one team and the importance of supporting and doing what is best for the team overall. At the same time, we strive to treat each of the athletes as individuals; our approach to individual goal setting – within the context of team goals - is a good example of this.

As we put the young athletes on the water, we like to have consistency in coaching for any given group so that we can build technique and understanding of the individual athletes from day to day, while at the same time we see immense value in "team coaching" – the athletes get to learn from all the coaches, and the coaches can discuss each of the rowers from direct experience.

Finally, within a team coaching approach we like to have "homeroom" coaches - enough structure that we can manage administratively in terms of, for example, primary points of communication with athletes and parents regarding questions or issues, goal setting and tracking with the athletes, line-ups, or regatta organization.

### 3. When in the year do you row?

The opportunity exists to row pretty much all year around for those that want to!

- Many rowers and coxswains start in our four to six week Novice Summer Camps in June and July. Athletes in these camps are introduced to the sport of rowing, teamwork, and the opportunity to race at a regatta in Seattle.
- Our Fall season runs from the week before Labor Day for ten weeks. Athletes focus on technical development and aerobic fitness (as well as having fun of course!). We compete in 3-4 regattas around the region on weekends during the Fall season – generally “head races” where crews set off one after another and are timed over the course.
- Our Winter season starts in mid-November and runs through the end of January. It is primarily land based at a local gym – working on conditioning, functional movement and flexibility, as well as rowing on indoor rowing machines (ergometers).
- Our Spring season starts in mid-February and runs through mid-May, culminating in the three day NW Youth Regional Championships. We race a number of weekends at local scrimmages and larger regattas – sometimes as far away as Eugene, OR, or on Vancouver Island in Canada. These races are mostly side-by-side races against up to 6 other crews at a time – very exciting!
- Completing the cycle, returning, experienced rowers, can also row for up to six weeks in our Experienced Summer Program focusing on smaller boats, technical development, and – of course – having fun!

We are delighted to welcome new athletes (novices) in the Summer, Fall and Winter seasons. We do not have completely new rowers join us in the Spring as the season ramps up quickly and there is generally not enough time to learn the sport before hitting the races.

Some athletes participate in every season, all year around. Others take a season to pursue other sporting interests – something we are fully supportive of.

#### 4. What does a typical practice look like?

For our two main racing seasons, Fall and Spring, official practice time is 3:10pm to 5:40pm, Monday to Friday. However, many kids get to the boathouse earlier straight from school. Before practice starts, they will load up the coaches launches (with gas, life jackets, tool kits and megaphone), check the whiteboard for lineups and begin to prepare specific boats and blades to be used, and generally find ways to make themselves useful. This is all part of the personal/team responsibility aspect that we discussed earlier.

At 3:10pm everyone comes together for any team announcements and then heads off on a team jog to warm up. After the jog, they do dynamic stretching. This is all part of the injury prevention bit.

The crews then begin to boat by group and head out for their “outing.” They will warm up further on the water with specific exercises. After they are warm, they will often do drills to teach a specific technical point. After drills, they will do the workout for the day. In the Fall, this is often longer distance endurance work. This is all part of the rowing well and going fast bit... and usually having fun too!

Following a cooling down paddle after the work, the crews will dock – theoretically in the same order than they launched in. The boats and blades then have to be washed (the salt water we row on is highly corrosive), dried and put away. Again, part of the personal/team responsibility bit.

At the end of practice, there may be team specific exercises, or video review, for a few minutes on land. Post workout nutrition is often consumed here. Then the whole team comes together to stretch out for the last ten minutes or so before practice ends at 5:40pm with the team "cheery thing". This is designed to be a combination of injury prevention, nutrition and being part of one team.

#### 5. Do novices ever row in the same boat with experienced rowers, or girls with boys?

Yes, they do. The degree that we boat mixed crews (experienced/novice or boys/girls) depends a lot on the physical maturity of the rowers, how close to regattas we are, technical and other goals. Generally it is more likely early in the season and less so later.

#### 6. What is your philosophy on attendance?

We'd love it if everyone could make every practice - rowing is a sport that rewards practice, your teammates are working hard, and from a team perspective crews work better when everyone is there! However, we do not want you rowing while sick or injured, and we completely understand that you have family, school and other obligations that can cause you to miss practice. So, the philosophy is that we (and your team mates) expect you at every practice unless there is a good reason to miss. At which point timely notice is key.

#### 7. Why do I need to let you know ahead of time if I can't make practice?

The coaches put a lot of time into planning lineups - thinking ahead over the entire season at a top level and then working on specific lineups up to a couple of weeks into the future.

We do this to provide the best rowing experience for everyone, and to get everyone on the water efficiently and effectively at practice. If you "no show" or are late in letting us know that you can't make it, we have to shuffle lineups at the beginning of practice which can slow things down and sometimes result in crews not being able to boat. Again, we completely get that "things happen", but to the extent that we can minimize the pre-outing lineup shuffle we are all better off. At the end of the day, it's all about your collective rowing experience, being a good team mate, and being respectful of others. Specific communication processes may change from season to season, so please check the current season guide for the most up to date protocol.

#### 8. More philosophically...who is more important, the individual or the team?

The golden rule is that the team comes first. However, no team can reach its potential without every individual making a contribution. Each athlete must be aware of his or her importance to the team.

This means that everyone is working towards the same goals, and they have to put their private agendas aside when they interfere with the teams' goals. The coaches look to get the most out of the team, and will try to get the most out of each athlete. Competitive athletes all want to race as much as possible, be in the fastest boats, get the most attention, but the attitude we are looking for is "what can I do to help the team?"

Many of us are more capable than some of us... but none of us is more capable as all of us!

*Tom Wilson*

Individual commitment to a group effort – that is what makes a team work,  
a company work, a society work, a civilization work.  
*Vince Lombardi*

Only a few athletes can make the top boat(s) at any one time. But those who do not are vital parts of the team's success. They always have the opportunity to show they can help the team improve. They can raise the level of practice, and do their best to improve every boat they are in, and be ready to take advantage when opportunities are presented to them.

When a rower isn't happy with their role on the team the appropriate action is to be sure they understand what they need to do, then work as hard as possible to make it happen. If they are unsure what to do, they are encouraged to speak with their coach.

For the strength of the pack is the Wolf  
And the strength of the Wolf is the Pack  
*Rudyard Kipling*

### 9. How important is winning?

Our guiding philosophy is "Row well, go fast, have fun!" That does not mention winning as being a pre-requisite for feeling good. We want to get off the water having rowed as well and as fast as we can, and happy with our effort and results – whatever they may be. We can't control others' boats speeds – sometimes they will be faster than we will, sometimes not – but we can control how we prepare for, and execute at, races.

Having said that, we absolutely celebrate when our team does produce crews that go over the line first. Striking the balance between recognizing crews that win or place in races, while at the same time acknowledging the success of crews that have "won" by surmounting challenges or just simply racing well and faster than they ever thought they could, is forever an ongoing process that we can all help with.

We believe that our team and individual goals should be process rather than results oriented, and that one should win and lose with equal grace and always participate with joy.

### 10. How important is "going to Nationals?"

In the Spring season, crews that place in a few select varsity events in our end of season Regional regatta are eligible to advance to Nationals where the top crews from around the nation compete.

We do not measure the success of our program in terms of how many crews qualify, or go, to Nationals. We could have a highly successful year without qualifying any boats if each crew and athlete has risen to the challenge of pushing themselves as hard as they could in practice and rowing as well, going as fast, and having as much fun as they could.

However, when we do qualify crews we certainly celebrate that fact! It can be very exciting! As we celebrate, we also recognize that it is a reflection of the effort of the whole team as well as the specific crew. Celebrating this "easy to see" kind of success

while also keeping the balance of celebrating the “harder to measure” success of all of our crews is an ongoing challenge that we can all help with.

For individual athletes we discourage measuring success by the binary, event-driven, goal of whether they go to Nationals or not. For a start, we can only put so many crews into Nationals-qualifying events, and even if coaches select you for one of these crews we cannot control the speed of other boats in those races or a myriad of other factors. Doing what it takes over the year to row as well and go as fast as you can against whatever competition is in your race is a healthier, process-oriented, starting point for developing goals.

### 11. Do you support an athlete’s desire to row in college after high school?

We do not measure the success of our program in terms of how many athletes make it onto college teams and how prestigious those programs are.

However, nothing makes us happier than instilling a love of rowing in a young athlete that makes them want to continue rowing after high school – whether it is in college or not.

To that end, we encourage athletes (and parents) with any interest to explore what rowing in college might look like and what the recruitment process entails. From time to time we will have a parent/coach meeting on this topic, as well as sending out information on local seminars and recruiting fairs. Coaches will support athletes by talking to college coaches and/or writing recommendation letters (for an idea of that process, see <https://readyallrow.wordpress.com/2013/08/07/letters-of-recommendation/>). Please note though that we will not tailor team goals or boat selection to meet individual needs.

### 12. So will I, as an athlete, have fun ALL the time?

Excellent question - the simple answer is probably not every second of every practice! It will be wet and cold. Rowing is a physically and mentally demanding sport. Coaches will be encouraging you to be out of your comfort zone and in the area where you are stretched and learning the fastest. Often you will not know what boat(s) you will end up racing in until close to a regatta as coaches move athletes around to find the fastest combinations and/or achieve team goals. You may not make the fastest boat, or end up rowing in the lineup you most wanted.

What we can say is that, at the end of day, rowing should be fun! We believe that it is fun to go row well and go fast, the fun you experience can be rooted in the deep satisfaction that you have tried your best and given your all, and that it is fun to be part of a team that shares your goals and efforts.

### 13. What is your philosophy underlying your code of conduct?

Firstly, we think that it is an incredibly important part of any youth program. It starts with the need to create a safe place for all. We believe that you need a written code of conduct that has clear rules and consequences for breaking them. We further believe that, while breaking the rules has consequences, it is for many situations as much an opportunity for discussion and learning.

Finally, we believe that the culture and values of the team are primary drivers of how the young athletes conduct themselves. To that end, we spend a considerable amount of time discussing what the values of the team are, and what they mean on a day-to-day basis. A lot of this is woven into the process of day-to-day coaching – there is nothing better than situational learning. However, if your athlete comes home saying that they did not get to row today because of a team meeting, there is an excellent chance that it had something to do either explicitly or implicitly with a discussion of this nature!

#### 14. How should I, as a parent, interact with the coaches?

Both parenting and coaching are extremely difficult. It goes without saying that parents want their kids to be happy, fulfilled and successful, which is challenging at the best of times. Then there is no dollar value that can be attributed to having someone spend their early mornings and late afternoons all through the year, in a boat, in the rain, wind and snow trying to get a group of high school aged kids to do something perfectly.

By establishing an understanding of desires and expectations we can collectively provide a happier and more rewarding experience for the student athletes (as well as have happier parents and happier coaches).

What you can expect from your coaching team:

- Philosophy of the program
- Expectations the coach has for your athlete and others on the team
- Practice times and schedules, also regatta dates and schedule
- Procedures regarding injury to the student-athlete
- Discipline that results in the denial of your student-athlete's participation

What coaches would like you to be aware of:

- *Avoid asking the coach about everything.* Eventually he or she gets overloaded with such inquiries and this contributes to coaching burnout. As a first line of communication, Heidi Cope (oarteamrep@gmail.com, 360-561-7056) is our volunteer parent representative for communication and is always happy to field your questions – either answering them directly or finding out who is the best to get you an answer.
- *Coaches have complete charge of their crews.* The coach has the absolute prerogative to assign seats in the various boats. The coach may assign seats based on strength, endurance, height, weight, skill, experience, or simply to give someone else some more experience. On top of that, different combinations of rowers will cause different results. Coaches also have to balance the overall interests of the team, equipment constraints, and other factors. If your child complains about how he or she is being seated in a boat, listen sympathetically, but encourage him/her to stick with it and to try harder over the next few weeks. Seat selection and boat allocation is a challenging process that requires the coaches to evaluate many variables and cannot be democratic. Rowers and parents are expected to respect the coaches' decision and requests.
- *Coaches prefer to resolve confusion and problems with the athlete directly.* Coaches and athletes are building a relationship. Learning how to communicate with each other is extremely important. This is also a valuable lesson for the student athlete to address his or her own problems. If this does not work then a coach parent discussion should ensue.

- *A regatta is not a time to register complaints or have in depth discussions about anything.* Coaches are preoccupied with race day logistics, rigging changes, the days schedule, today's racing and the repercussions for tomorrow. Coaches want to help and answer your questions, but please respect the fact that regattas are like exam time and require that a coach's full attention must be focused on the task at hand.

At times, of course, discussion with a coach may be appropriate. The following table gives some examples of what is appropriate (or not) to discuss with a coach:

<b>Appropriate concerns to discuss with coaches</b>	<b>Inappropriate concerns to discuss with coaches</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The treatment of your child, mentally and physically</li> <li>○ Ways to help your child improve both athletically and academically</li> <li>○ Concerns about your child's behavior or health</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Seat assignments</li> <li>○ Other rowers</li> <li>○ Race strategy</li> </ul>

Coaches do exercise their judgment throughout the course of a rowing season and their discretion, expertise, and professionalism must be respected regarding rowing matters. Issues surrounding the well-being of your student-athlete are appropriate to raise with a coach.

When you feel a conference with a coach is necessary, please do not interrupt the coach before, during, or after practice. Instead send an email and request a mutually agreeable time to meet in person or via phone.

### 15. How can I, as a parent, best support my athlete?

The list never ends, but it probably starts with feeding and watering them! As we will discuss with the athletes, good nutrition is a key part of going fast. We also run parent/athlete nutrition seminars from time to time – attending these can be very helpful. Each athlete should bring a water bottle to practice, and the bottle should be covered with a sock. Seriously. The sock prevents the water bottle rubbing on the bottom of boat!

It also includes clothing them. What we mean here is avoiding the “death fabric” – cotton – that does not help when it gets wet. Synthetics, long sleeves, leggings, wooly hats when it gets cold, light rain jackets/tops that they can row in.

Listen to your rower's complaints, but be prepared to put them in perspective. Rowing can provide some incredibly rewarding moments in a student athletes life, but it is important to understand that there will also be times when the experiences are difficult and challenging. If you are unsure how best to support your rower in their complaints or concerns then first advise them to speak directly with their coach.