

Calling the Perfect Race

Four things for your coxswain to commit to heart

1. Know the Language

Coxswains' commands are universal. They're the cornerstones of rowing communication and are the reasons rowers can hop coasts and continents and are still able to perform competently with another club or crew. To abuse that language can be, at the very least, annoying and in worse cases, the cause of an accident.

2. The Power of 10

The power 10 is the most overused call of the inexperienced coxswain. Calling a power 10 by itself is basically telling a rower who is already pulling as hard as they can to pull as hard as they can. Calling out power 10s repeatedly will frustrate and desensitize the crew. We might as well ask for a power 120 and send them off on their own. The idea of a power 10 is to bring clarity and power to an otherwise frenzied setting. A power 10 is an excellent way to bring focus to a certain aspect of the stroke, and that focus concentrates power in that area. That same focus will take the rowers' minds off of pain. Try calling a power 10 for leg drive, which focuses power on the front end of the stroke. Calling a 10 for finishes accelerates the back end of the stroke. The 'swing for 10' is a sneaky way of lengthening out and dropping the rate a bit, instead of just saying settle, which often results in a loss of power.

3. Know the Plan

If there is time, do a mental rehearsal of your race plan with your entire crew sometime before the race, maybe even the day before. At the very least, go over stroke rates and calls with your stroke. Waiting until you are six seats down and shouting "You can do it!" is an insult to your athletes. They know they can do it, it's what they train, eat, sleep, and bleed for. What they expect of you is to have the knowledge and confidence to tell them how. (See tip No. 2)

4. Whisper from a Scream

Maintaining maximum volume, jolt like endless power 10s, will lose its effect over the crew. The almighty whisper can bring newfound focus to the boat. The coxswain is in a position of great power and, with it, great responsibility. Not even the coach is in a position to provide direct leadership to a crew in the heat of battle. Once you have gained their trust and respect, they will push themselves past their own limits as individuals to achieve the goals that you lead them to. As long as you don't steer them into a bridge. But that's another topic.

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Rowing News
10/25/02