

Augusta Junior Rowing Boating / Athlete Selection and Placement – Why and How?

Occasionally parents will have questions about their son or daughter's boat placement, ie - location in a boat or type of boat. Occasionally these worries are expressed on behalf of another family's rower, but these questions usually reflect anxiety about their own children:

- Is the incredible effort that my child devotes to rowing/coxing going to pay off with a position on the varsity (or JV, or "A") boat, or will she/he be on a less prestigious boat?
- Does a lower boat placement affect her/his chances for getting into Whatever University?

Nearly all rowers, and almost as many of their parents, accept the rough meritocracy that is rowing. We understand that the coach wants the fastest boats, and we realize that they work hard all season to identify the coxswain and rowers who will make their boats go faster.

In the fall conditioning season, coaches use input clues like erg times and their judgments about technique, body type, character, and long-term promise to put their boats together.

In the spring racing season, they add output measures, like the results of seat racing and actual regatta performances, to draw inferences about the best mix. Coaches experiment, moving rowers back and forth between boats, sometimes moving entire lineups, to see what yields the best results. And they always confer among themselves to seek other opinions.

In principle, the system is quite simple: if you make the boat go faster, you stay in the boat. If someone else makes it go faster than you do, you move to a different boat.

Effort counts for a lot. Just going to practice, rowing and going home isn't enough. Is the rower giving just enough to get by, or is she really putting herself out to demonstrate her commitment to being in a particular boat? Improving rowers take their coach's instructions—"fix your technique in this way", or "get your erg time down"—seriously, and work obsessively to win a position. Coaches notice effort to the extent that some less physically gifted rowers get a chance to prove themselves in a boat because they never "take a stroke off." In a close race, that degree of effort can mean several seats.

However necessary, effort is not often a sufficient condition to success in rowing or in life. Your child's teammates also are working—perhaps even harder—to improve their performance as well. Just addressing the coach's directions and putting out what he thinks is enough effort is not a guarantee that he will make the boat. The lesson, as someone once said, is "don't confuse the effort with the results."

Naturally, what we hear from our child represents her or his side, and is not always unbiased. If we dig a bit, and ask the right questions, we usually get a more complete understanding. If she says the coach is being unfair, you might ask, "What's your evidence?" "What does the other rower do better than you?" "What do you do better than they do?" "What is your erg score?" "What technique problems is your coach working with you on?" "How are you going to improve?" "What extra effort are you giving your team to help you stand out as an achiever and not just a follower?" Getting concrete information by asking questions, and getting your child to talk, often resolves the concern.

We all tend to believe that once we achieve a certain level in any endeavor, it becomes our platform for getting to the next level. Not so fast! Being on a middle-of-the-pack "A" boat one year doesn't guarantee a seat in next year's faster boat if a novice hot shot, or a new kid transferring in from out of the area or from Australia, or a late blooming 6'5" aerobic wonder, is faster than you are. It's disappointing to be displaced in this way, but it's a fact of life.

If every time, the displaced rower accepts the coach's decision with great spirit and stays motivated, fit and ready to jump back in when there is an illness or someone falters—that happens, too—they may find themselves stroking the JV to the occasional victory over the varsity. We should be especially proud of these young people, because they will leverage such growing experiences into successful adult lives. Aren't these the kinds of lessons that we want our children to learn, anyway?

Coaches occasionally conclude that a rower or coxswain has potential way beyond what she or he currently demonstrates, and decide that the best long-term approach for the team is to place that individual in the boat now and let them grow in the boat. Often it works (the boat ends the season faster), sometimes it

doesn't, and sometimes the resulting benefit accrues not to the junior program but to that individual's eventual college team.

This is rowing. This is competitive athletics. This is life. But as parents, we want our child to succeed. And when she isn't picked for the boat that we feel is appropriate, some of us speculate that there must be reasons for her boat placement beyond the reasonable judgment of the coaches.

So we cast about for explanations. Boiled down, these usually involve a hypothesis that favoritism is being shown: The coach seats that rower and not mine because she rowed for the coach as a novice. That rower's parent is a club committee chairperson. My rower is not rowing next year, because I heard the coach he'll have this year does not use his style of rowing. The other rower is tall and the coach likes tall rowers even if shorter rowers have faster erg times. Truthfully, these feelings don't come up too often. It's only natural for parents to feel that way once in a while. Don't believe a word of this speculation. It's anxiety colliding with rumors, in place of evidence.

Our coaches absolutely want what's best for the team and the rowers. They reward performance, effort, attitude and promise. Our coaches are as fact-based and fair as they can be, and are accountable to each other and to the entire program whenever there's a question. Does this mean that coaches are perfect? No.

Are rowers in boats other than the Varsity harmed by not competing at the highest level on the club? Of course not. They want standards to be high, or it's not worth the effort. Further, young rowers have diverse motivations, some want to be the best, some to be fit, and some just to be part of a unique team.

College coaches warmly welcome non-varsity rowers who have good coxswain experience or erg scores or technique or physical promise, but not necessarily all of the above, as long as they are coachable and motivated. Many of our members use lessons learned from rowing on their college applications, and they get into great schools because their dedication and teamwork are valued by admissions committees, even if the "rowing as a metaphor for life" essays wear thin by March of each year.

Appreciate your son or daughter's enjoyment of rowing. Praise their wins, and commend their effort and improvement whatever the outcome, in whatever boat they happen to be in. Almost universally, your child understands and accepts the coach's decisions. Value, too, what the coach is giving your child: Expertise, encouragement, life experience, and yes, judgment about performance. Please cut the coach some slack in the exercise of that judgment.

If you have a question or if you have a situation that you need help in addressing, talk to the head coach. That's one reason that we have that role.

The balance between competitiveness and inclusiveness will always be a key factor in making this or any club one of the leading junior rowing programs in America.

- Source Unknown