

SRC SQUAD TRAINING

Theme Sheet - Balance water

Theoretically if the finish, recovery, catch and drive are correctly executed this theme should be unnecessary. As we live in the real world balance will be the penultimate theme for this series. A stable boat provides a level platform on which to row. Correct balance will provide a comfortable and enjoyable row. In order to balance the boat crew members have to work together to move consistently throughout the stroke. Balance is a function of crew hand heights throughout the stroke but it is more than that. Lack of flexibility or core strength can cause individuals to fail to maintain correct position, or hand heights or to move out of unison with others. Timing (the final theme) is also a contributory factor.

Factors spoiling balance throughout the stroke

Finish

Drawing down, rather than level immediately prior to the finish will cause the blade to pop out of the water early (washing out) and may draw the boat down on the side of the offending crew member. This is not however, a universal effect. Washing out may leave crew members' blades on the opposite side in the water and make it difficult for them to extract their blades. Remember think "draw level, down and away."

Dropping the hands too far at the finish or on the recovery will tend to draw the boat down on the side of the offending crew member. The reverse is also the case. Some inexperienced crew members will try to twist the blade out of the water and fail to drop their hands. This will tend to push the boat down on the opposite side to the offending crew member. Remember think "draw level, down and away and level hands."

Recovery

Assuming that the crew has balanced the boat at the finish the next variable is the recovery/sliding. There is a tendency for people to drop their hands:

- as they get their hands away and rock over (remember to think "reach forward" not "rock over")
- as they square before entry (remember to think "square, level hands")
- if they reach for more length at front-stops (remember to think "length from backstops")

Catch

The main problem here is attempting to square and take the catch in one movement. This inevitably leads to a lost catch and lack of control of blade height. Thinking of "square and in" as two separate movements encourages more stability on the catch and control of hand heights.

Drive

If the catch is executed correctly the drive should take place without hand heights changing before the finish. It is important to think "place, drive, draw level." Experience shows that telling people, particularly novices, to "draw up at the finish," will result in them raising the hands in the middle of the stroke followed by the inevitable draw down to the waist at the finish. It is better to use the term "draw level."

Water Exercises

Balance exercises should be the first part of just about every outing after launch and sorting out feet and stretcher position. Paddling in pairs very light and checking hand heights throughout the stroke makes a good start at imprinting correct heights on "muscle memory." This can be followed by the ergo exercises above at the coxswain's discretion, depending on where in the stroke any problems appear to be occurring.

In addition the coxswain may consider:

- Single strokes pausing at finish, hands away, reach forward, half slide, full slide etc.
- 10 or 20 strokes pausing as above.

Taking account of water conditions

Water conditions, particularly for coastal rowing, can make balance more difficult. It is necessary to compensate for water conditions to maintain balance and boat speed. However, it is important for all crew members to be thinking of compensating together as one person "doing their own thing" will cause mayhem. Compensatory actions and associated calls for coxswains are included in on a separate theme sheet entitled "coping with water conditions"

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It is helpful to think about compensating for conditions under the following headings:

Generally choppy

This has to be the most common conditions at Southsea, a short chop with waves coming from variable directions. Balance is most difficult at the extreme ends of the stroke, at the catch and finish. To compensate for this it is helpful to sit up at the catch, ensuring that the legs are compressed and the core engaged, do not over-reach or reach for more length at the catch. Concentrate on placing the blade and drive only when you feel firm contact with the water. If firm contact is not felt go through the motions of the stroke and finish cleanly without full pressure on the legs. This formula works well entering or exiting Portsmouth Harbour through standing waves.

Coxswains' calls for these conditions should be: "place and drive" or through difficult standing waves: "light pressure, place and controlled drive."

Side wind with waves coming from one side

Also, very common at Southsea. If the waves are pushing on stroke side, bow side should draw a little higher through the stroke and stroke side should help them by drawing a little lower. This will be reversed if the boat turns in the opposite direction. One safety point: when training in a cross wind it is safer to turn the boat into the wind. This avoids being pushed onto the shore as the boat turns.

Coxswains' calls for these conditions should be: "stroke side on conditions, draw up bow side, give them room stroke side," or the reverse for bow side on condition.

Tail wind

Whilst this is not such a balance issue, crews can make the best of a tail wind by holding the knees flat and emphasising the reach forward before sliding. This allows

the boat to run with the wind before sliding begins. In a strong tail wind rolling waves "rollers" may occur and the crew will feel "rollers" when the blades feel light in the water and "troughs" when the blades feel very heavy. In order to pick up and exploit rollers the crew should speed up the stroke and clear the finishes quickly, whilst on a roller, settling down to a normal rate in the trough. Clearly in these conditions communication within the crew is key. Coxswains may not be able to feel a roller so well as crew members so it is useful for a crew member to be delegated the task of calling a "roller" and "settle" once the boat comes off the roller into a trough. Coxswains should be careful to ensure that the boat is not turned by the waves when on a roller and this can lose the advantage gained.

Coxswains' calls for tail wind conditions should be: "hold the knees down" or "make the boat run."

Head wind

From a balance point of view a headwind is probably the easiest condition to cope with. However, it is helpful to compensate for the fact that the boat will slow down between strokes to prevent over exertion and maximise run. This is done by sitting up at the catch, as for "generally choppy" above and matching the leg drive to the speed of the boat, i.e. accelerating the leg drive from the catch and leaning back slightly more at the finish. This effectively picks up a slow boat at the catch and sends it forward at the finish.

Coxswains' calls for these conditions should be: "sit tall and draw the finishes."