get a grip on ROWING

Coxswain - Steers the boat and is the on-the-water coach for the crew.

Stroke - A.k.a. 5 Seat. Sets the oar and needs to be strong and technically exceptional rower.

Stern - Crosses the finish line last.

The Engine Room - Seats 3 through 6. Typically the strongest athletes sit here.

Rigger - Metal or carbon fiber apparatus that holds the oars to the boat.

Bow Seat - #1 seat.

Bow Ball - White ball that projects theeryl and provides an easy way to see who is ahead.

Oarlock -

Port -

Starboard -
1. Rowing is a TOTAL BODY WORKOUT. Rowing only looks like an upper body sport. Although upper body strength is important, the strength of the rowing stroke comes from the legs. Rowing is one of the few athletic activities that involves all of the body’s major muscle groups. It is a great aerobic workout, in the same vein as cross-country skiing, and a low-impact sport on the joints.

2. Rowers are probably the BEST ATHLETES. Rowing looks graceful, elegant and sometimes effortless when it is done well. Don’t be fooled; rowers haven’t been called the world’s most physically fit athletes for nothing. The sport demands endurance, strength, balance, mental discipline, and an ability to continue when your body is demanding that you stop.

3. SWEEP (like a broom) and SCULLING (with a “c”). There are two basic types of rowing: sweeping rowing and sculling. In sweeping rowing, athletes hold one oar with both hands. In sculling, the athletes have two oars, one in each hand.

4. The BOAT. Although spectators will see hundreds of different races at a rowing event, there are only six main boat configurations. Sweep boats are mostly pairs (2x), fours (4x), and eights (8x). Single sculls (1x), doubles (2x) and quads (4x). Scull rowers may not or may carry a coxswain (c), the person who steers the boat and serves as the on-the-water coach. All eights have coxswains, but pairs and fours may or may not. In all sculling boats and sweep boats without coxswain, a coxswain steers the boat by using a rudder moved with the feet.

5. The EQUIPMENT. Today’s rowing boats are called shells, and they’re made of lightweight carbon fiber. The smallest boat on the water is the single scull, which is only 27-30 feet long, a foot wide, and approximately 50 pounds. Lights are the largest boats at 60 feet and a little over 200 pounds. Rowers use oars to project their shells. Sweep sculls are longer than sculling sculls, typically with carbon fiber handles and rubber grips (although some sweepers still prefer wooden handles). Sculling sculls are almost never wood.

6. The CREW. Athletes are identified by their position in the boat physically facing the bow, the part of the boat that crosses the finish line first, or the bow seat or #1 seat. The person in front of the bow is #2, then #3 and so on. The person closest to the stem that crosses the finish line is known as the stroke. The stroke of the boat must be a strong rower with excellent technique, as the stroke is the person who sets the rhythm of the boat for the rest of the rowers.

7. Strokes per minute (SPM). Rowers speak in terms of strokes per minute (SPM), literally the number of strokes the boat completes in a minute’s time. The stroke rate at the start is high; 38-40. As the boat bears down on the course, the rowers slow the stroke rate to 34-36. Strokes per minute (SPM) is a race cadence typically in the 30s. Crews sprint to the finish, the time rate up once again. Coaches may call for a “Power 10” during the race—a demand for the crew’s most intense 10 strokes.

8. The CATEGORIES. Rowers are categorized by sex, age, and weight. Events are offered for men and women, as well as for mixed crews containing an equal number of men and women. There are also events for rowers who spent the previous year in high school, and there are masters events for rowers 21 and older. There are two weight categories: lightweight and open weight.

9. RACE WATCHING. The crew that’s making it look easy is most likely the one doing the best job. When watching a race, look for a continuous, fluid motion from the rowers, synchronization in the boat, clean breaths, i.e., rowers entering the water with little splash, and the boat with the most consistent speed.

10. TEAMWORK is number one. Rowing isn’t a great sport for athletes looking for MVP status. It is, however, teamwood’s best teacher. The athlete trying to stand out in an eight will only make the boat slower. The crew made up of individuals willing to sacrifice their personal goals for the team will be on the medal stand tomorrow. Teamwork successfully matches their desire, talent and hard work with one another.

11. The ULTIMATE WALK ON SPORT. It’s easier to get started than you think! USRowing is a membership organization that serves rowers of every age and ability from the beginner to the experienced rower to the national team. So, there’s definitely a place for you!

USRowing provides the answers you need to all your rowing questions. Our rowing rooms are back to 1872, making us the oldest national governing body in sports. We offer a wide variety of benefits to our members: an award-winning website packed with rowing resources and content; a monthly newsletter, access to rowing club contacts nationwide, USRowing trained referees to maintain fair and safe racing conditions, and certified coaching education programs. Join our crew and expand your opportunities in the sport of rowing!