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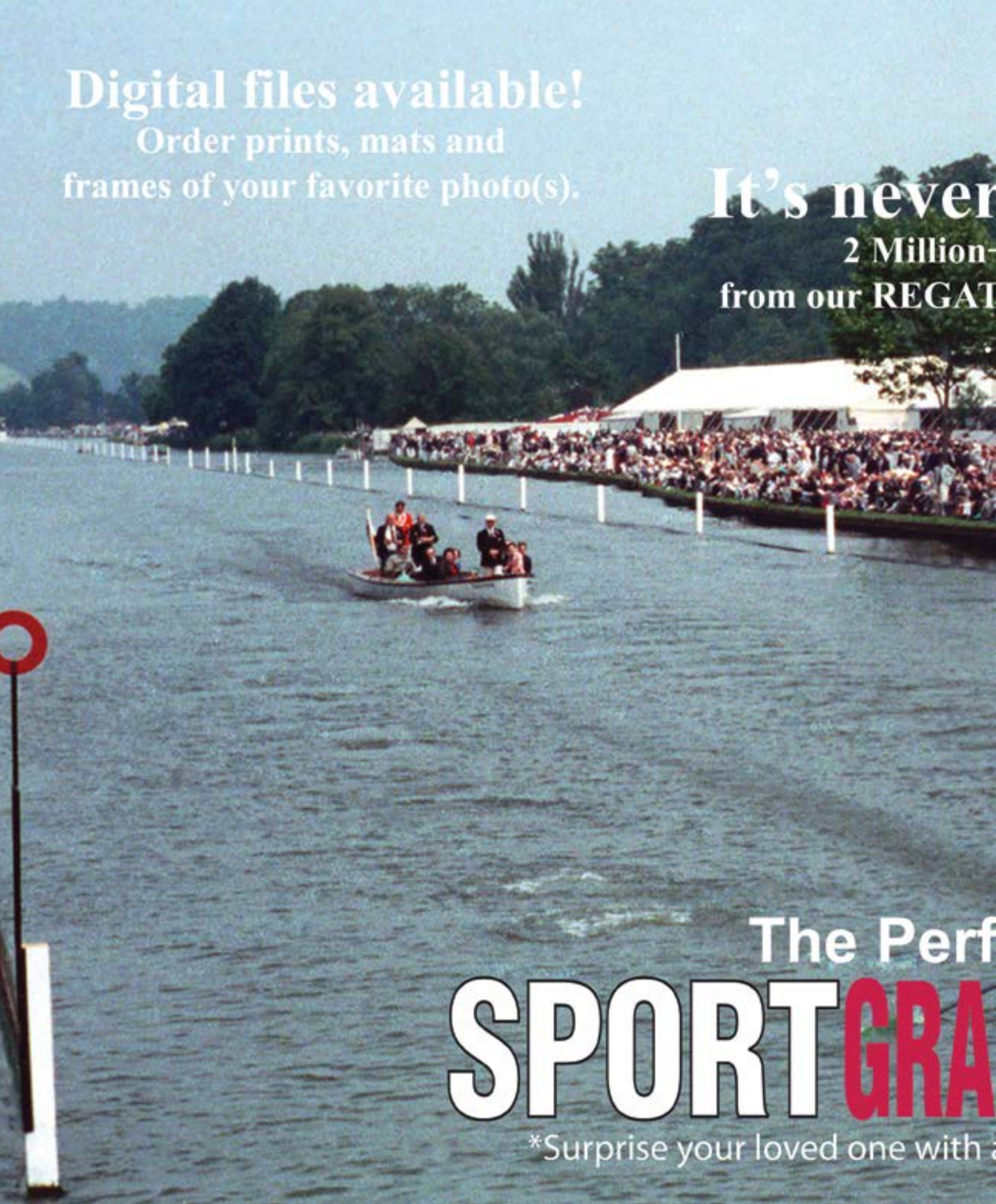
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FEATURES

USRowing's Pathways

Through its Pathways program, USRowing is striving to renew the U.S. tradition of international and Olympic success by improving the ways promising rowers are identified, trained, and selected.

BY MADELINE DAVIS TULLY



Olympic Changes

Like it or not, change—Beach Sprints, 1,500-meter racing, no lightweights at LA2028—is coming. The future of Olympic rowing is at stake.

BY CHIP DAVIS





Matt Smith Interview

The inside scoop on how the IOC's drive for "universality" changed rowing for better and worse.

BY CHIP DAVIS

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PHOTOS: TOP, LISA WORTHY; CENTER AND BOTTOM, PETER SPURRIER.

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ON THE COVER: Kara Kohler at the Tokyo Olympics | Photo: Ed Moran.

CHIP DAVIS

Time Is Running Out

It's no coincidence that Olympic rowing experienced its greatest growth and success during the years from 1992 to 2021 when Matt Smith worked at FISA, the international rowing federation now known as World Rowing.

In 2000, most of Great Britain and much of the world stayed up all night to watch Steve Redgrave win his fifth successive Olympic gold medal, and the imperial IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch himself showed up to present the medal. At the 2012 Games, the Eton Dorney rowing venue sold out every day, and the crowds roared so loudly that rowers in the last 250 meters couldn't hear their own calls.

Behind the scenes, even greater successes for international rowing occurred. During Smith's time (development director, 1992 to 1995; executive director, 1995 to 2021), the number of member nations participating in Olympic qualification went from 44 to 116.

Commercial partners sponsored elite rowing, an African nation won an Olympic gold medal in rowing for the first time ever, and an Olympic-standard rowing venue was built from scratch in America. Before DEI became a catchphrase, our sport, at its highest level, achieved greater actual diversity and inclusion through Smith's work.

An American oarsman who left USRowing and moved to Europe to serve our sport, Smith was present for, and usually directly involved in, all the major developments in Olympic rowing for more than a quarter-century. He shares the real story of how certain situations came to be in an exclusive interview-style feature beginning on page 44.

"I'm happy to give you the full story—which I've read a lot of strange understandings and interpretations of—because I was there at each step of the way," he told me.

Smith's retelling of what actually happened explains the nature of the challenges World Rowing now faces, but it doesn't make them any easier to solve. Even while rowing's most popular events,

such as Henley Royal Regatta and any number of U.S. head races, set new participation records, the World Rowing Cup series languishes, with declining entries, lack of sponsorship, and uninspiring race action that spectators stay away from in droves as the same handful of nations dominate—The Netherlands, Great Britain, and Italy won 15 of 29 events at Worlds—racing in essentially the same style.

By spending tens of millions of dollars and applying scientific methods to the study and development of elite rowing, certain national teams apparently have discovered the most effective approach to 2,000-meter flat-water racing. The most efficient way to do something, however, is often not the most entertaining, and that's what we see when international elite crews line up to race on the nearly identical eight-lane, fully buoyed courses of the exact same dimensions.

Like many rowing organizations, including USRowing, World Rowing faces a more expensive post-Covid reality with fewer resources than they need to excel. On page 30, Madeline Davis Tully explains how USRowing plans to turn talented athletes into future champions through the Pathways program. USRowing is counting on rowers to come forward and enter themselves into this new system—a stark departure from the previous practice of national-team coaches developing relationships with college coaches to identify rowers with elite potential.

Stars with compelling stories and a winning home team are what make Olympic sports popular and generate support. Pathways is a plan that makes sense on paper, but like World Rowing's yet-to-be revealed plan for the future of Olympic rowing, only time will tell what actually works. With LA2028 only four years away, that time is soon. **▣**

While rowing's most popular events set new participation records, the World Rowing Cup series languishes, with declining entries, lack of sponsorship, and uninspiring race action.



PHOTO: LISA WORTHY

Our editorial team can be reached at editor@rowingnews.com

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LETTERS

Letters to the Editor can be sent to editor@rowingnews.com



Forgotten Labor of Love

Doctor Rowing apparently has forgotten Peter Mallory's four-volume History of the Sport of Rowing.

A great labor of love for our sport.

Bill Akins
Macon, Georgia

Vesper by Five Seconds!

The 1956 Yale eight may have been the first crew to win Olympic Gold after advancing through the reps but they were certainly not the last. In 1964, the Vesper eight finished behind Ratzeburg by the tiniest of margins in their qualifier (0.28 seconds, according to Wikipedia). Vesper won their repechage heat easily and then dispatched Ratzeburg by almost five seconds in the final. Incidentally, that was the last Olympic gold for a U.S. men's eight plus until 2004.

Doctor Rowing should be embarrassed for being so sloppy.

Morgan Seeley
Quilcene, Washington

Pan Am Disappointment

I was disappointed in your last issue when there wasn't a follow-up article on the Pan Am rowing competition in Chile. I was thinking surely it would be in the January issue, but there's only an ad from Hudson on pages 1 and 2 displaying the Canadian eight plus gold. Why? (FYI: The USA did well.)

Ann K. Couwenhoven
Monkton, Maryland

ErgZone

The background of the advertisement features a grayscale image of a person rowing on an ergometer. The person's arms and torso are visible, and the ergometer's flywheel and handle are in the foreground. The ErgZone logo, a stylized teal 'Z' inside a circle, is positioned to the left of the brand name.

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Rough Water, Tough Crew

The Ocean Sheroes crew tackles rough seas at the Great Pacific Race. The four women aim to set a new world record in April 2025 by being the fastest all-female crew to row 3,600 miles across the Indian Ocean (see story, page 25).

PHOTO: @GREATPACIFICRACE







In the Weeds

Brian O'Leary (stroke) and Danny Schaffer (bow) return to the dock after racing for Sarasota Crew in last year's Orlando Area Rowing Society Youth Invitational on Turkey Lake, a regatta held annually on the second weekend of March. O'Leary now rows at the U.S. Naval Academy on the heavyweight squad, and Schaffer rows for the Columbia University lightweights.

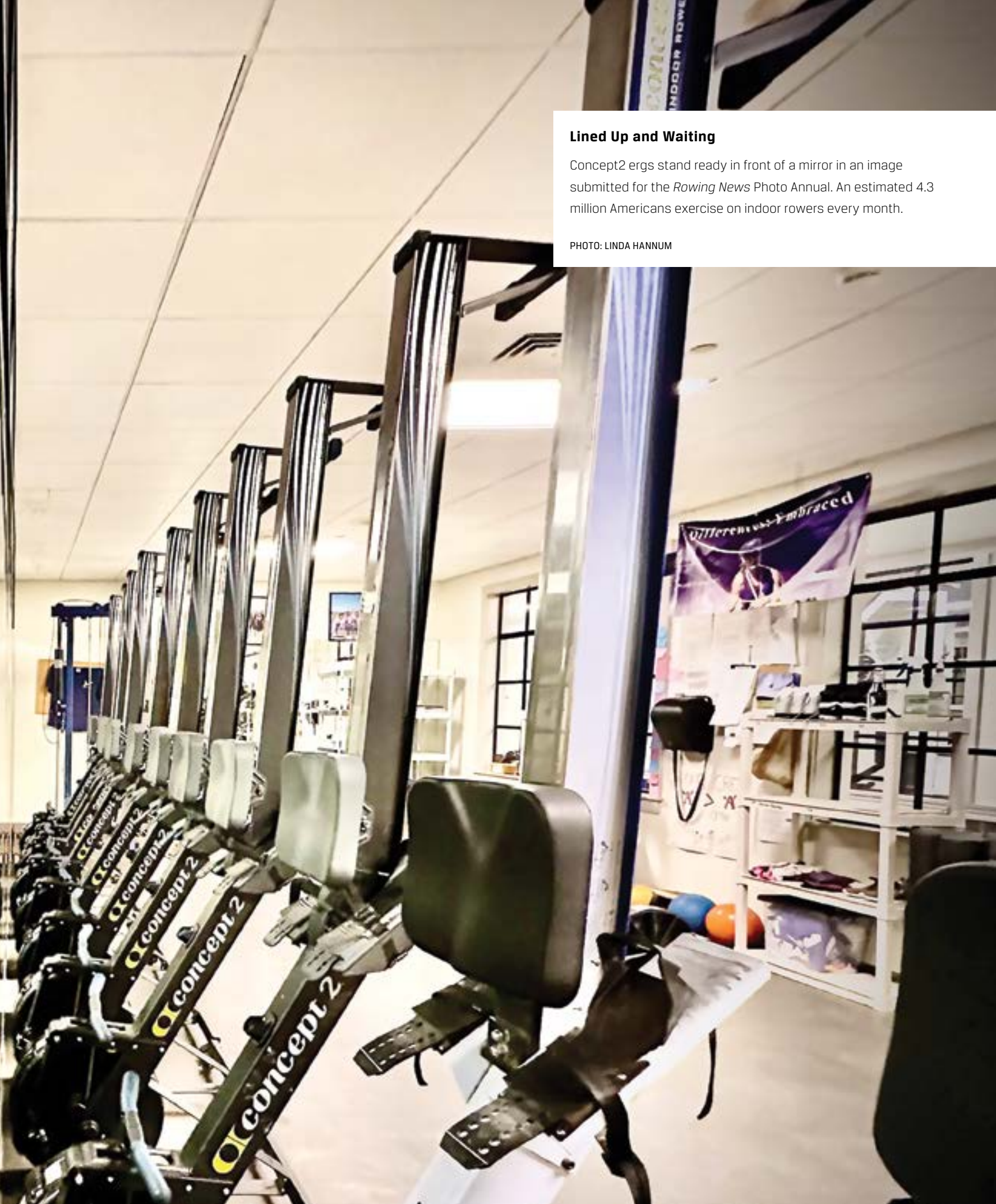
PHOTO: LISA WORTHY



Lined Up and Waiting

Concept2 ergs stand ready in front of a mirror in an image submitted for the *Rowing News* Photo Annual. An estimated 4.3 million Americans exercise on indoor rowers every month.

PHOTO: LINDA HANNUM



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Caption.

BIG NEWS

U.S. PR3 Crews Named for Paris Paralympics

Cooperation from college coaches credited for helping USRowing field a strong PR3 squad.

Line-ups for the U.S. Para crews that will compete at this year's Paralympics in Paris, Aug. 30 to Sept. 1, have been named after a January selection camp in Sarasota.

The PR3 mixed-coxed four and PR3 mixed double are the first U.S. crews—Olympic or Paralympic—named for Paris 2024. Four of the five athletes in the PR3 coxed four return from the crew that won the silver medal at last year's world championships, joined by Gemma Wollenschlaeger, from last year's silver-medal PR3 mixed double.

Coxswain Emelie Elderracher and college rowers Ben Washburne, Alex Flynn, and Skylar Dahl return to represent the U.S. in the event in which they won the

silver medal at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

Todd Vogt, who won silver with Wollenschlaeger in the PR3 mixed double at last year's Worlds, will be in the Paris boat with Saige Harper, who was in last year's PR3 coxed four.

Para rowing features three sport classes, PR1, PR2, and PR3, for athletes with eligible physical or visual impairments. PR1 rowers primarily move the boat with their upper trunk (arms and shoulders) and PR2 rowers use their full trunk in the rowing stroke. PR3 rowers may have either visual or a physical impairment and use standard/typical racing shells with a sliding seat.

"It's really interesting to have a fully returning squad" **CONTINUES ON PAGE 24 >>>**

Boys in the Boat Rows Past Budget

The Boys in the Boat, the inspiring movie about the scrappy University of Washington crew that won gold at the 1936 Berlin Olympics, had grossed \$45 million at the box office a month after its release, putting it past its \$40 million budget. Producer and director George Clooney told *Forbes* that he gave his salary back before the production finished under budget, and his salary was returned. The similarly titled book by Daniel James Brown on which the movie is based was a number-one *New York Times* bestseller when it came out in 2013 and sold over three million copies. Currently, it's in fifth place on the Amazon nonfiction charts. **▣**

PHOTO: LISA WORTHY

QUICK CATCHES



BIG NEWS >>> overall,” said USRowing Director of Para High Performance Ellen Minzner. “There’s a lot of cohesion among this PR3 squad—a lot of unity of purpose—and that’s going to go really far.”

Minzner credited relationships with college coaches for the recent success of U.S. para crews.

are looking out for them.

“Kevin Sauer at Virginia has been amazing; George [Munger] over at Tufts, a big supporter of Alex; and Luke [Wilhelm] at Sacred Heart for Saige. Ben just graduated from Williams, but Mark [Mandel] has been great. Ditto Rebecca Grzybowski at Temple with Gemma, and

Rowing, Inc., MIT, and Harvard’s Newell Boathouse, where heavyweight assistant coach Tom Siddall supplements his Harvard salary by coaching the U.S. Para team.

The U.S. squad will race at World Rowing Cup III in Poznan, Poland, in June as well as trying to qualify PR1 and PR2 boats at the 2024 World Rowing Final Olympic and Paralympic Qualification Regatta in Lucerne, Switzerland, May 19 to 21.

The named PR3 crews qualified for Paris by virtue of their silver-medal performances at the 2023 World Rowing Championships, but USRowing has yet to qualify in the three remaining Para events: PR1 men’s single, PR1 women’s single, and PR2 mixed double.

Those three boats will be selected at the 2024 U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Team Trials—Rowing scheduled for April 2 to 7 in Sarasota. The winners in Sarasota will then race at the 2024 World Rowing Final Olympic & Paralympic Qualification Regatta in May in Lucerne to try to earn a spot for Paris.

“This was a very competitive camp, and I congratulate all the athletes,” said Minzner. “I would like to thank the college coaches for supporting our program by helping their student athletes develop a successful path to the Paralympic team.”

CHIP DAVIS

"We've invested a lot of energy into making sure, as we work with college athletes, that we bring the college coach into the conversation."

—ELLEN MINZNER

“We’ve invested a lot of energy into making sure, as we work with college athletes, that we bring the college coach into the conversation so that they’re well aware of the dual goals of the athlete and feel like they’re part of the conversation about when the athlete will be available for their squad, when the athlete will not be available for their squad. That’s helped us tremendously and also makes the athlete feel like people

Holly [Metcalf] at MIT.

“The coaches have really gotten behind what we’re doing and understand what we’re doing. Their college setting has gotten [the athletes] this far, and we want to work with that system and make sure we keep the athletes long term.”

Plans call for the crews to train on Boston’s Charles River out of various boathouses, including Community

OCEAN ROWING

Ocean Seroes Aim to Break World Record

Four women, 60 days, and 3,600 miles across the Indian Ocean.

Four women calling themselves the Ocean Seroes intend to row 3,600 miles across the Indian Ocean in April 2025. If successful, they will set a world record as the fastest all-female crew to do so. Only 10 women have ever rowed across the Indian Ocean from Australia to Mauritius successfully, and the current women's record is 78 days. Ocean Seroes plan to row two hours on, two hours off, all day every day for 60 days.

Skipper Purusha Gordon said their

mission is “to help inspire others, to connect with each other, and benefit from the power of the great outdoors.” Supported by sponsor DryRobe, the crew is raising money for the Wild + Brave Foundation, which focuses on mental fitness and the health of the planet.

“Brutal!” is how Gordon describes what it’s like to row two hours on, two hours off. “Especially those middle of the night shifts when it is raining and cold and you can hear the big swells of water but you can’t

see them because of cloud cover. Aside from the physical demands of rowing in this shift pattern for weeks on end, it’s the mental strength which is required when every bone in your body screams ‘No!’ but you know you have no choice but to pull yourself out of your cabin and get on to the oars to allow you team-mate their well-deserved rest.”

Gordon says the effects on the body of rowing continuously for such a long time have are similar to flat-water rowing. “The body adapts [CONTINUES ON PAGE 26 >>>](#)



PHOTO: @GREATPACIFICRACE

QUICK CATCHES



incredibly over a period of time to the rhythm of rowing and whilst the hips and back wear and ache, the hands and bum are the most important parts of the body to take care of. As we only manage around 10 steps in a day from cabin to row seat and back to cabin, the muscle wastage in our legs is particularly evident when we try to stand and walk on dry land at the end.”

But ocean rowing differs from flat-water rowing. “Ocean rowing is an endurance challenge designed to test you mentally as well as physically. We row at a much lower stroke rate for longer periods of time. Learning how to surf the waves and navigating the varying ocean conditions are the main difference. Ocean rowers are thrown around more, and keeping a consistent stroke pattern is often impossible.

We also live on the boat for the duration. Eat, sleep, row—repeat!

“When crossing an ocean by our power alone, you are at the mercy of Mother Nature, contending with 40-foot waves, giant swells and often confused sea conditions, depending on the weather. A following wind propels you towards your destination, a headwind stops you in your tracks. Sealife and marine traffic are potential hazards to be aware of in addition to the mental and physical exhaustion we as humans will experience. Being a connected team with shared values on land before you set off is the most important part to staying safe while rowing an ocean.”

Asked if she’d recommend it to regular rowers, Gordon replied with an enthusiastic “Yes!”

“For anyone with a love for oceans, rowing and being in nature, if you have the courage to say yes to a challenge such as this, you will find it a truly life-changing experience. It’s where the journey and experience becomes more important than the time you finish within.”

In July 2021, the Ocean Sheroes set the Guinness world record for the fastest all-female four (open class) by rowing the 2,700-mile mid-Pacific east-west route from San Francisco to Hawaii in 35 days, 14 hours, and 32 minutes. They also became the first all-British four to complete the Great Pacific Race. The mid-Pacific record was broken later by four U.S. women rowing “American Spirit” in the summer of 2022. ▣

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NEWS

Unpaid Bills Sink Serbian Rowing

World Rowing, the international governing body of the sport, has suspended the Serbian Rowing Federation over unpaid bills.

World Rowing already had announced postponement of the 2025 European Rowing Championships in Belgrade, citing a change in Serbia's government and "the risk of a delay in the funding" of World Rowing events.

In December, World Rowing's executive committee voted to suspend the Serbian Rowing Federation effective the first of this year.

The decision was prompted by "significant financial debts" owed World Rowing and event suppliers by the Serbian Rowing Federation and Serbian guarantors of the 2022 World Rowing Cup I and 2023 World Rowing Championships, World Rowing said in a statement.

World Rowing has been in "close communication" with the Serbian Rowing Federation and various Serbian authorities seeking a way to resolve the debts. After payment, the federation could be reinstated quickly. **□**

INDOOR ROWING

Prague Hosts World Indoors

The World Rowing Indoor Championships, the official world championships of indoor rowing since 2018, take place in Prague later this month in conjunction with the 2024 European Rowing Indoor Championship.

Returning for the 2024 event is the Versa Challenge, which debuted in Toronto last year. Versa events are a novel form of indoor racing featuring intervals such as 10 times a minute on, 30 seconds off with scoring based on total meters. **□**



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THROUGH ITS PATHWAYS PROGRAM, USROWING IS STRIVING TO RENEW THE U.S. TRADITION OF INTERNATIONAL AND OLYMPIC SUCCESS BY IMPROVING THE WAYS PROMISING ROWERS ARE IDENTIFIED, TRAINED, AND SELECTED.

STORY BY Madeline Davis Tully

PHOTOS BY Lisa Worthy

The USRowing Pathways program seeks to develop a pipeline of athletes like the 2023 U.S. U23 four of (left to right) Virginia's **ELSA HARTMAN**, Yale's **MADDIE MOORE**, Virginia's **KATHERINE KELLY**, and Cal's **ANGELA SZABO**.





The United States is a country that expects excellence. Ever since George Washington spoke of “the last great experiment for promoting human happiness,” Americans have grown accustomed to being exceptional. That presumption extends to athletics, where American athletes on the international stage compete with the expectation of success. And with good reason.

The American collegiate athletics system is unmatched anywhere else in the world. In most other countries, young athletes must choose usually between a traditional college education and elite athletics. This is why in recent decades many U.S. universities have seen an influx of international athletes on their sports teams, including rowing. Athletes from all over the globe seek to take advantage of the unique opportunity here to get a top-tier education in four years without sacrificing elite training and competition, and vice versa.

American athletic excellence extends to the international stage, where the U.S. is a perennial presence on the Olympic medals stand. The U.S. topped the medal count at the Tokyo Olympics, has the highest total medal count for all summer Olympics, and is second for the winter edition.

All athletes are required to input their data and test results in their member portal on the USRowing website. This, Gorman emphasized, is the most important factor in making Pathways successful.

Such achievements, however, are not a foregone conclusion, and there is always room for more efficient and effective systems. There is nothing inherent about the United States that guarantees that our traditional record of accomplishment will continue forever, as we saw when U.S. rowers failed to bring home a single medal from the Tokyo Olympics. The reality of the U.S. system is that our strengths are often simultaneously our weaknesses.

This is certainly the case for American rowing. Our expansive and populous

country makes athlete identification and tracking unwieldy. Numerous opportunities—athletic, academic, professional—make athlete retention at every level of the sport challenging. If Americans are not only to return to the Olympic podium but also to remain a global rowing power, a better structure is needed.

Enter USRowing’s Pathways program.

Rolled out in October, Pathways aims to create a direct link from junior rowing to the senior U.S. National Team. Through clear communication and expectation-setting, it’s about building an efficient system for identifying and developing athletes of all ages from coast to coast. The ultimate goal: a stronger, more successful senior team.

When Josy Verdonkschot took over as USRowing’s chief high-performance officer in January 2022, he found a pipeline that was “more or less without a vision, philosophy, or structure.”

“We had under-23 camps. We had under-19 camps. But I couldn’t really see a common denominator and I couldn’t see the structure expressing a philosophy of how the different stages connect.”

This, he knew, needed to improve. After leading the Dutch women to three medals at the Tokyo Olympics and, including his time in Italy and Belgium, coaching crews to a total of seven Olympic medals, Verdonkschot knew what constitutes elite success.

Simultaneously, Brett Gorman, a veteran USRowing staffer and former coach at the University of Michigan and the University of Virginia, recognized the need for a more streamlined and efficient system for identifying and developing talent. Gorman, who had served as director of athlete identification and development, was in early 2023 director of learning and development when a position opened to lead the camp system.

At the time, Rich Cacioppo, USRowing’s executive director, came to

her and asked about ways to run the camps better.

“Rich brought it to me and said, ‘I think we need to rethink camps,’” recalled Gorman. “I saw a lot of parallels between the needs on the high-performance side and our camps—our U19 selection camps, our U23 camps, our senior-team camps—as well as how we can have more continuity overall. So I wrote up a job description.”

Before Pathways, various USRowing camps were managed by different parts of the organization. The selection camps for U19, U23, and senior U.S. National Teams fell under the high-performance umbrella because they led directly to the National Team and competition at various world championships.

But other camps—Olympic Development Program (ODP), Youth Development Camps (YDC), Selection Development Camps (SDC)—fell under the domestic side of USRowing.

This is where the breakdown was occurring.

“Even though they live in different parts of USRowing, they have to be linked,” Gorman explained. “You have athletes who are just missing selection camp and now they’re going way over here. There have to be linkages.”

“We have the quantity but we’re not mining or fostering it.”

In other words, athletes were slipping through the cracks.

So Gorman, with no intention of taking the job herself, wrote a job description for what became ultimately the Director of High Performance Pathways.

“It wasn’t specific to me,” Gorman said. “It was what we needed as an organization. It was creating one true pathway up to the National Team.”

Verdonkschot agreed. He had been in the U.S. for well over a year and in that time had come to recognize the need to build linkages among the various camps to achieve success at the elite level.

Gorman and Verdonkschot discussed what that might look like and how best to achieve it.

“Once you start defining what you need at the Olympic and Paralympic level, the next step is looking at the trajectory to get there,” Verdonkschot explained. “Define the steps, and then make it accessible for everybody.”

In the summer of 2023, Verdonkschot, who’d already begun to pull Gorman toward the high-performance side of



The entire senior National Team, including the men's pair of Washington's **EVAN OLSON** (stroke) and Dartmouth's **WILLIAM BENDER** (bow) rowed in college.

the organization, asked her to help with recruiting and organizing the U23 selection camps, something Gorman had done in her previous role in athlete development.

In October, when the Pathways program was announced, so too was the first Director of High Performance Pathways—Gorman. Then began the real work.

The stated mission of the Pathways program is “to provide emerging athletes with a well-defined route and the foundation needed for international achievement. It prioritizes transparency, collaboration, and education, aiming to promote not only athletic success but also personal growth.”

The first step was reorganizing the various U19 and U23 camps. Today, all camps are under the purview of high performance, not just the selection camps. Selection camps have been streamlined to handle fewer athletes. In the past, over 40 athletes might be invited, and once selections were made, coaches didn't have time for those who missed the cut. So they floundered or were sent to train at a club for the last few weeks of the summer season. Now, the selection development camps fill this gap.

The SDC's focus entirely on development. Rowers train exclusively in small boats with almost no line-up selection. They will not compete outside of camp, foregoing club nationals or Canadian Henley in favor of an in-house speed order in singles and pairs. On the junior level,

SDC high performers may be invited to stay on for selection camp (complete with scholarship), which begins July 10, the day after SDC concludes in Chula Vista, Calif.

The program is expanding to include a U19 youth-development camp. These camps are even more fundamental. Designed for the newest athletes in the sport, the YDC's will focus on building foundational skills and fostering a love for the sport over the pressure of competition.

This, says Chris Chase, USRowing's director of sport development, is crucial to building the foundation of international success.

“We don't move boats like, say, the Europeans do. We row bigger boats and we lose some of the feel of the water. We have to get a more cohesive unit of how we train our juniors across the country,” he said when the Pathways program was introduced.

A series of off-season identification (ID) and winter camps for both U19 and U23 athletes is planned for this year and will expand in the future. The aim: to survey this vast country to identify, educate, and encourage future elite competitors.

This is where another focus of Pathways comes into play—creating the infrastructure for long-term success, which is currently lacking. At the most fundamental level, this means accurate and ongoing athlete-data collection from a standardized battery of tests.

All athletes are required to input their data and test results in their member portal on the USRowing website. This, Gorman emphasized, is the most important factor in making Pathways successful. It will allow athletes to apply for all camps and, crucially, allow coaches to track their development.

This approach differs in some fundamental ways from some other countries, which tend to take a more proactive approach in monitoring athletes. Rowing Australia, for example, has regular calls with U.S. college coaches and even periodically visits dozens of programs stateside to check in on Australian athletes they already know about and identify promising ones they don't

“How our athletes improve over time is our biggest marker of success,” Gorman said. “We need to see athletes progressing as they get older, as they go to our various camps on their way to the National Team.”

Unlike in the past, the data will roll over from year to year, creating a centralized repository for all athlete information.

Verdonkschot has reinforced this

message through the testing he's instituted at all levels. Whether at an U19 ID camp, the U23 selection camp, or training with the senior team, all athletes in each age group will complete periodically the same battery of tests: lactate testing to establish appropriate training zones; a movement screen to assess deficiencies and prevent injuries; and "profiling," which is similar to conventional erg tests of 6K, 2K, one minute, and 100 meters. The test data will be analyzed over months and years to track progress and assess the effectiveness of the program on a national scale.

These are not designed to be tests in the traditional sense, Verdonkschot insists.

"The essence of lactate testing, for example, is not so much how you compare to other people. It can be a guidance or a tool to look at your training and to see how your training is working and whether it's effective or not."

To that end, Verdonkschot has developed a comprehensive document titled "USRowing Talent Characteristics." Shared at last year's RowCon and distributed since to interested athletes and coaches, the chart outlines the ideal progress for all rowers, male and female, heavyweight and lightweight, from U19 to elite. For example, it outlines the expected progression for openweight female rowers from 7:18 to 6:35 on their 2K. It specifies also other means and measurements of improvement, such as ideal weekly and yearly training volume, and one-rep maximums for the squat, deadlift, and bench pull.

This standardization of expectations across genders and age groups is unprecedented at the national level and fulfills what both Verdonkschot and Gorman identify as pillars of Pathway—clear communication and transparency.

The next challenge is achieving another key tenet of the program: education through information-sharing and collaboration. Educating athletes and especially their coaches who are not training under the USRowing system throughout the academic year is a work in progress.

EMMA MIRRER won the youth single sculls at the 2021 Head of the Charles and rowed on Princeton's IRA lightweight national- champion squad in 2023 before sculling on the U.S. team at the 2023 World Rowing Under 23 Championships in Plovdiv, Bulgaria.









“We need to educate a lot better on everything from appropriate lifting to appropriate volume,” Chase said in a webinar. “We have to educate a lot more [coaches] to send up athletes who are ready to go, who can move boats, who are going to be healthy, aren’t going to have overuse injuries, aren’t going to have burnout. And we’ve got a lot to do to meet those ends.”

Gorman takes responsibility for educating junior, college, and club coaches so they can support the development of their rowers within Pathways.

“Everybody wants to see their athletes progress,” Gorman said. “If they don’t know how to train an athlete properly, it’s because we’re not providing the resources to teach them.”

Intrinsic to the process is USRowing’s certification levels for coaches, who will be invited also to join webinars specific to their athletes.

“We’ll say, ‘You had an athlete who was invited to this camp, and we did this testing. Come to this webinar where we’re going to tell you what this testing means.’”

Such follow-up will allow athletes, under their coach’s guidance, to work with the information gained from Pathways testing to inform their training zones and address deficiencies.

With a program this extensive, it can be difficult to define success. Of course, Olympic medals are the ultimate and most obvious goal. The medal count is also how the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee allocates funding, making it a strategic necessity. But true success is more complex. Gorman will be taking a nuanced approach to evaluating performances by individual crews and coaches, tracking those able to outperform their expected finish at the world championships based on training paces before competition.

In five years, after the Los Angeles Olympics, Gorman hopes to have all the Pathways systems in place. That means building a method of athlete-data collection (already under way through the member

portal) that athletes update habitually, thus enabling simple and ongoing identification and monitoring. That means creating a timeline of all camps scheduled two years in advance. That means creating coaching cohorts, with coaches cycling in and out of varying levels of involvement and less of an all-in or all-out approach.

For Gorman, ultimate success is that in 10 years “I’m not needed anymore.”

Already, there have been some early structural wins. This is the earliest ever that the selection-camp dates, locations, and coaches have been named, Gorman says. On the U23 level, for example, the 2024 camp information was available online by Nov. 15. For the 2023 camps, the information was announced last March, four months later in the cycle.

Another early win has been the creation of the U19 high-performance winter camps. These two four-day camps in Chula Vista focus on small-boat rowing, education, and physiological testing, the same testing regimen outlined earlier, and represent the first time U19 athletes have participated in the same evaluations as senior-team athletes. This opportunity to connect with, educate, and evaluate athletes during the academic year when they’re training with their home clubs or schools never existed before.

For the Pathway program to be successful long term, U19 and U23 athletes and coaches need to take an active role. The onus is on them to get involved in the system, and USRowing coaches will be conducting limited in-person outreach. Gorman and Verdonkschot implore athletes to log in to their member portals and update their athlete profiles. They invite coaches to participate in webinars, apply for camp coaching positions and other support roles, and reach out directly to them with questions, ideas, or simply to visit and watch a practice. The door is open, and collaboration is invited.

Meanwhile, Gorman is taking the long view.

“The biggest thing is patience. This is going to take time. But every year, we will get better.” □

The U.S. women's eight won the 2023 World Rowing Under 23 Championships by open water. “It was the coolest experience I’ve ever had,” said crew member **MEGAN LEE**, who rowed at Duke University.



PHOTO: PETER SPURRIER | INTERSPORT IMAGES



OLYMPIC WINDS OF CHANGE

LIKE IT OR NOT, CHANGE—BEACH SPRINTS, 1,500-METER RACING, NO LIGHTWEIGHTS AT LA2028—IS COMING. THE FUTURE OF OLYMPIC ROWING IS AT STAKE. WILL WORLD ROWING LEAD OR FOLLOW?

STORY BY Chip Davis

The 2012 Olympic men's eight final at Dorney Lake, Eton Rowing Centre, Great Britain. The London 2012 Games set a TV viewership record and at the time were the most-watched television event in U.S. history.

This summer's Paris Olympic Games will be the last to feature rowing as we know it. Not only will 2024 be the end of lightweight rowing in the Olympics but also the 2,000-meter race distance will be shortened to 1,500 meters for LA2028, and Beach Sprints will be the new Olympic rowing discipline replacing lightweights. You read that right: they're not going to race the full 2K distance in 2028.

The changes are occurring because the sport's international governing body, World Rowing, is following International Olympic Committee fads and depending on IOC grant money rather than selling what is actually working in our sport—head races, lightweight rowing, racing on rivers—to the IOC, sponsors, and the viewing public.

Less startling than the loss of lightweight events and the shortened race distance but perhaps more detrimental to our sport's long-term Olympic health is how a handful of wealthy western European countries dominate international competition in boring, homogeneous style, while the diversity and inclusion provided by lightweight rowing wither with its removal from the Olympics.

It doesn't have to be this way, and for many years our sport's leaders at FISA, the precursor to World Rowing, the international governing body, worked

run the sport on the elite level, putting on the World Rowing Cup, World Rowing Championships, and Olympic regattas.

Viewers continue to move from free over-the-air broadcast to paid cable and streaming services. Live sports attract viewers like nothing else, and broadcasters compete to pay huge and increasing sums for broadcast rights. In the U.S., that means football. *Forbes* recently reported that more Americans watched NFL games on TV in 2023 than any other programming, accounting for 93 of the 100 highest-rated shows.

In 2014, NBC agreed to pay almost \$8 billion (yes, *billion*) for the American media rights to the Olympics through 2032.

"This remains, arguably, Thomas Bach's most significant contribution to the movement's health and well-being since arriving in the president's seat in 2013," wrote David Owen for *InsideTheGames.biz*.

But Owen went on to warn that the days of the big-money deals are numbered, as viewership declined while the Games were held in Asia (the 2022 Winter Games in Beijing, the 2020 Summer Games in Tokyo in 2021).

"The myriad members of the Olympic food chain would be well advised to plan accordingly," concluded Owens.

World Rowing is a hungry member

to drawing five percent of the global TV audience of over three billion.

The IOC puts rowing in Group C of its A-through-F popularity rankings, based heavily on TV viewership and internet traffic. Athletics (track and field) and aquatics are in Group A, with canoe and kayak down in Group D. Sports new to the Olympic program begin in Group F and are added primarily because the IOC expects them to be popular (case in point: flag football, backed by the NFL, which runs ads for the sport during game broadcasts; each ad is seen by more people than see an entire year of rowing).

Without compelling story lines like Steve Redgrave winning his fifth Olympic gold medal in Sydney 2000 or the thrilling racing of London 2012, when the home team won nine medals (four gold), rowing's risk of being downgraded, and the corresponding loss of IOC grant money, is real.

The current leadership of World Rowing is well aware of the problem.

"World Rowing needs to become less dependent on the Olympic revenue," wrote Treasurer Gerritjan Eggenkamp in his 2023 report. "The current cost base to deliver on what is expected by all stakeholders from World Rowing is above the revenues World Rowing generates. Secondly, costs are rapidly increasing."

"We have the third-highest athlete quota at the Olympic Games, and if we're ranking 24th or 25th in attendance and television audiences, the math of that doesn't work long term."

Caught between the rock of a ban on new venues and the hard place of the prohibitive cost of renovating Long Beach to 2,000 meters, World Rowing settled on the 1,500-meter solution for LA2028 (see the *Rowing News* interview with Matt Smith following this story). But it's only for LA2028. World Rowing Championships and all other World Rowing elite events will be raced over 2,000 meters before and after the 2028 Olympic regatta, including the qualifying events.

The IOC was also behind World Rowing's cutting of lightweight events, something current World Rowing Executive Director Vincent Gaillard assured *Rowing News* won't mean the end of lightweight events in the rest of elite rowing. World Rowing issued a similar statement in October 2023: "Lightweight events will not disappear from the World Rowing events program in the foreseeable future. As is the case today with non-Olympic events, they will still be offered at the World Rowing Cups and World Rowing Championships."

But without lightweight events in

hard to nurture and grow rowing so that it wouldn't end up like this.

But it's been 10 years since Samsung's sponsorship of World Rowing ceased. It's been even longer since interest in and, importantly, broadcast viewership of rowing peaked with the 2012 London Olympics, where the stands were sold out every day, TV broadcasts attracted significant global audiences, and an African nation won gold in rowing for the first time ever.

Those broadcast audiences are what TV rights-holders, like NBC in the U.S., pay the IOC billions of dollars for, and that revenue—especially in lieu of having major sponsorship—pays for World Rowing to

of that food chain, receiving most of its annual revenue (65 to 70 percent) as an IOC grant derived from Games' broadcast rights, according to Colin Smith, a former world-champion oarsman and past president of Rowing Australia who now works in the media-rights industry and founded the Global Media & Sports consultancy.

"We have the third-highest athlete quota at the Olympic Games, and if we're ranking 24th or 25th in attendance and television audiences, the math of that doesn't work long term," reported Smith.

Of the 10,500 athletes at the Paris Games, 502—or about five percent—will be rowers, but rowing won't come close



PHOTO: LISA WORTHY

World Rowing President **JEAN-CHRISTOPHE ROLLAND**, who won an Olympic gold medal for France in the men's pair at the 2000 Sydney Games.

the Olympics, national governing bodies will stop supporting lightweights. Entries at world championships will fall below the numbers World Rowing requires for inclusion in future regattas, and lightweight events will be dropped. That's exactly what's happened to the women's lightweight four and men's lightweight eight. The men's lightweight quad and women's lightweight pair are next.

Gaillard has high hopes and expectations for Beach Sprints and indoor rowing. Both have produced modest numbers for World Rowing thus far, including only 2,200 entries in this month's

World Rowing Indoor Championships in Prague (domestic head races such as the Head of the Schuylkill and the Head of the Hooch attract more than twice as many). Significant growth and popularity have yet to be seen and measured in any of World Rowing's new disciplines.

"They're super overworked and busy," said former Executive Director Matt Smith of the World Rowing crew. "I don't know if they're running out of time to do everything they're trying to do."

The World Rowing staff is overseen now by Executive Director Vincent Gaillard, a Swiss executive from outside rowing who was appointed to succeed Smith after he had held the post for a quarter-century.

World Rowing is led by President Jean-Christophe Rolland, who was elected at the 2013 FISA Ordinary Congress to succeed

Denis Oswald, who had done the job for 24 years.

An oarsman from the age of 13, Rolland, now 55, won Olympic gold in the men's pair at the 2000 Sydney Games. He joined the FISA athletes' commission in 1994, became its chair in 2002, and joined the overall executive committee in 2004. He is not new at this, and brings the same dedication and effort he used to set a French national erg record of 5:46 as an athlete.

"He works his ass off," said Martin Cross, the British Olympic champion (1984 coxed four) and prominent rowing broadcast commentator, on his YouTube show, *Crossy's Corner*.

Rolland is also a member of the International Olympic Committee, which gives him inside leverage representing the sport of rowing and preserving its place in the Olympic Games.

Rolland missed the window to comment for this story because he was traveling to Korea for the Youth Winter Olympic Games but in the past he has said: "We cannot continue with a world championship with 29 events. We cannot continue with the status quo of classic rowing. Some changes are required. The credibility of our sport is at stake."

World Rowing is working with Deloitte, the huge international consulting, auditing, and advisory firm (which uses rowing imagery on its website) on a "Strategic Commercial Partnership/Investment Project." World Rowing also has launched a "Strategic Event & Calendar Reassessment" to "future-proof" the sport, according to documents from the 2023 World Rowing Congress.

"We are undergoing now a complete event and calendar review, across the board, across all events, to look at everything—what needs to be improved, what needs to be changed, created, whatever," said Gaillard. "That work is ongoing, and we'll finish at the end of 2024. That will lead, we hope, to a new calendar for the future that will be post-LA in effect."

"It's a big deal for us. It's really defining our future calendars and the future formats of events, and anything can come out of it. The outcome of that will be at the end of 2024 and will be approved at our congress in 2025 and rolled out after. It could be a pretty significant change."

Promising developments include an upcoming announcement in the late winter or early spring of a commercial sponsor partnering with World Rowing.



PHOTO: LISA WORTHY.

Gaillard also mentioned the continuing work to develop a Beach Sprint league with franchises, like professional sports teams, comprised of athletes from around the world. But that's years away.

"For the near term, for the next four years before the Olympics in LA, we have already made changes, but we have committed to have three World [Rowing] Cups still."

Gaillard is not worried that elite rowing's relatively low popularity will lead to its getting cut from the Olympic Games.

"No concern whatsoever. The world could not understand why lightweight rowing makes sense, but the position of classic rowing in the Olympics is not at all threatened."

Global Media & Sport's Colin Smith believes World Rowing has recognized the challenge and is focused correctly on protecting rowing's place in the Olympic Games. But he questions its current strategy for attracting attention, earning general popularity, and gaining viewership. On *Crossy's Corner*, Smith said of Beach Sprints: "As currently configured, I don't think it's a compelling broadcast."

Keeping and growing the more than three billion people who watch the Olympics require appealing to a more global audience than just the 330 million people in the U.S. and 750 million in Europe. Lightweight events provided rowing opportunities for countries beyond Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand, as Matt Smith states in the *Rowing News* interview following this feature.

"As development director starting in 1992," recalled Smith, about the days before lightweight-rowing events were added to the Olympics, "I would meet with Asian sports ministers and national Olympic committee presidents who would say, 'Rowing! Are you crazy? We have no chance against those huge Russians, Germans and Americans! We are not investing in rowing!'"

The only Olympic rowing gold medal ever won by an African nation came from the South African lightweight straight four in London 2012, but in their efforts to keep in step with the IOC, World Rowing cut the

German world champion and Olympic favorite **OLI ZEIDLER** is the closest thing to a star in international rowing but is hardly a household name.

event.

"What can I say? It was a decision out of our hands," said Smith. "That's life in the Olympic bubble."

It's a bad move, says Colin Smith.

"I'm disappointed. It did give us the universality connection to the world. Brazil, Chile, and South Africa were all first-time winners through lightweight rowing."

Consulting giant LEK, where Smith worked for 20 years before founding his firm, produced a review for FISA in 2004, 10 years and three Olympics after lightweight rowing had been added to the program. It found that lightweight events were a positive improvement, said Smith.

Beach Sprints is a contrived spectacle, whereas lightweight rowing, whose 72 Olympic spots it's taking, "wasn't an invented competition," Smith continued. "At its roots, it's not dying."

Racing on rivers, as opposed to the man-made rowing courses that host most World Rowing and Olympic regattas, is also not dying. In fact, the three most popular, attractive, and watched rowing events in the world—the Head of the Charles, Henley Royal Regatta, and The Boat Race—are all raced on rivers.

The opening ceremonies for this summer's Olympic Games will be held on the River Seine as it winds through the heart of Paris. Brisbane, host for the 2032 Summer Olympics, features the Brisbane River running right through the center of the city. The proper Olympic race distance of 2,000 meters is based on the length of the longest straight stretch of the River Thames, the 2,112-meters of the Henley course, used in the 1948 London Summer Olympics.

Boosted by being awarded the 2024 Summer Games, Paris has invested \$1.5 billion in cleaning up the River Seine. A massive underground rainwater-storage tank has been constructed to help keep the sewers from overflowing, and a water-treatment system cleans runoff before it enters the river. For the first time in a century, it will be safe to swim in the Seine, and certainly safe to row on. Imagine the crowds sprint match racing or mass-start distance races could entertain in the middle of an Olympic city during the Summer Games, while also showcasing rowing.

Local organizers in Brisbane have talked informally with the IOC's programming committee about holding a head race on the Brisbane River in the

second week of the Games after the classic rowing events have concluded. The idea, said Colin Smith, was received enthusiastically by the IOC people but since it didn't come from World Rowing, it might not get any further than that.

Holding Olympic rowing of any kind on the Seine or Brisbane rivers hasn't even been considered, said World Rowing's Gaillard.

"I don't think it's ever been discussed seriously. The discussion has been about 'How do we include coastal?' and 'How do we include indoor rowing?'"

The latter won't happen in the summer or winter Games, Gaillard said, but in future Olympic eSports games, which have been announced already.

Changing the Olympic program to allow or even encourage athletes to race in multiple events is another opportunity for rowing to develop the kind of stars who bring attention and support to Olympic sports. If the size of Olympic medals were proportional to the degree of difficulty in winning multiples, Redgrave's would be dinner plates and Michael Phelps's would be poker chips.

Holding small-boat races in the first half of the week of the Olympic regatta and team-boat races in the second half is one way to create multiple-medal opportunities. Romanian rowers succeeded in qualifying more boats for the Olympics at last year's Worlds by doubling up some top athletes. But qualifying is a far cry from winning at the Olympics, so the world's best rowers almost always stick to a single event in the current Olympic program.

Change is possible.

"No decision yet," Gaillard said, "but in consideration."

World Rowing's continued devotion to six-across, buoyed-lane racing, in what are essentially massive and expensive swimming pools, and a Europe-based, three-regatta World Rowing Cup series that has seen dwindling participation (mostly finals only at World Rowing Cup I in 2023) shows what happens when administrators adhere slavishly to past practices rather than embrace innovations that are succeeding outside the elite echelons of rowing. The slow pace of change and lack of creativity at World Rowing leave our sport, at the top level at least, chasing the times and suffering the consequences of lagging behind. □

On the record with **ROWING**
NEWS

MATT SMITH DELIVERS THE INSIDE SCOOP

HOW THE IOC'S DRIVE FOR "UNIVERSALITY" CHANGED ROWING
FOR BETTER AND WORSE.

PHOTOS BY Peter Spurrier | Intersport Images

MATT SMITH, executive director of FISA and World Rowing from 1995 to 2021, with **ANITA DEFRANTZ**, an Olympic medalist and former IOC vice president recently honored with the 2024 NCAA President's Gerald R. Ford Award, at Lake Lanier, Georgia for the 1996 Olympic Games.





Perhaps no one knows the inside story of the evolution of international rowing and the politics of world and Olympic rowing than Matt Smith, who was development director of FISA (Fédération Internationale des Sociétés d’Aviron, predecessor of World Rowing) from 1992 to 1995 and executive director from 1995 to 2021.

Smith coached and assisted Thor Nilsen in Piediluco, Italy, from 1986 to 1989 and was USRowing’s program director from 1989 to 1992. Now retired and working on consulting projects, he lives in Rome.

Rowing News spoke with Smith about lightweight rowing, the global growth of rowing, coastal and indoor rowing, and the controversial shorter course at the LA Games.

Rowing News: *Tell us the backstory of adding lightweight events to the Olympic program. Why and how did it happen? What were the drawbacks and successes?*

“To track the backstory—the why and how it fit into our overall strategy—we need to travel back to 1980 when Juan Antonio Samaranch was elected IOC president during the troubled boycott period of the Montreal and Moscow Games. Samaranch was elected based on his call for unity and “universality” of the Olympic movement.

"A major stumbling block to the development strategy was the nature of Olympic rowing events at the time; they were all heavyweight."

Universality was a new word heard around the Olympic movement that, up to then, was a mainly European affair. The number of countries participating at the Games was growing, and they demanded attention, which Samaranch promised. In 1981, Samaranch created the Olympic Solidarity Commission and in 1984 formed a budget from which national Olympic committees could request funding for coaching courses to help develop sports in their countries.

FISA realized quickly that this was an additional resource for developing rowing and following the “universality” path. Thor Nilsen was elected chair of the FISA Competitive Rowing Commission in 1985 and was tasked with creating what became the FISA Coaching Development Program.

Thor hosted a major conference that year with the world’s leading coaches and, from the guidance provided by this event, he and our team in Piediluco, Italy, where I coached and worked from 1986 to 1988, created the coaching-development manuals, levels 1 and 2. Riccardo Ibarra of Argentina was also part of the team as the first coaching consultant for Latin America.

Thor used the Paolo D’Aloja Memorial Training Camp and Regatta in April 1986 to invite many developing countries to Piediluco and run coaching courses and provide advice on the water. Over the years, many rowers and coaches from all over the world have benefited from this training camp and regatta, which is still offering the training camp 38 years later.

Denis Oswald became FISA president in 1989 upon the death of Thomi Keller and charted an IOC-friendly strategy after the rather conflictual relationship that Keller had with Samaranch. Oswald realized quickly that Olympic relevance was now measured by a sport’s “universality,” which had become a major factor in evaluating a sport’s Olympic status as well as dividing up growing television revenue.

A major stumbling block to the development strategy was the nature of Olympic rowing events at the time; they were all heavyweight. As

development director beginning in 1992, I would meet with Asian sports ministers and national Olympic committee presidents who would say, “Rowing! Are you crazy? We have no chance against those huge Russians, Germans, and Americans! We are not investing in rowing!”

Given such feedback, it was obvious that for rowing to be more “universal” (i.e., to get more countries to fund their rowing programs), we had to demonstrate that there were events that offered a level playing field.

Oswald then undertook the huge challenge of proposing a change to the Olympic program to include lightweight rowing.

This went against the existing powers that be, and FISA found itself with a big family feud on its hands. The proposal, which would cut the men’s coxed pair and coxed four as well as the women’s four to include the three lightweight events (men’s and women’s doubles and men’s four) had to be passed with a two-thirds majority of the national federations at the 1993 FISA Extraordinary Congress in Budapest. After heated debate, it passed by just one vote. It was a very difficult time inside FISA, since even the FISA Council voted not to support Oswald’s proposal.

After this vote and change, we now could convince Asian, African, and Latin American countries that rowing had listened and made changes to the sport that would create opportunities for them. There was never a promise that developing countries would suddenly be on the podium, but now there was a chance.

What couldn’t be overcome easily was the huge advantage of tradition, expertise, talent, and money. The lightweights in developed rowing countries jumped on this with experienced coaches, Olympic funding for training, specially designed boats, and talent. Just fostering coaches around the world was a huge undertaking, especially with FISA’s limited budget.

Gradually, the word *universality* was no longer heard in the halls of the IOC, and our special category was increasingly attacked by other sports that also wanted a special category and were using the same argument about the potential development impact.

The only other sports with separate categories were those in which an athlete’s safety was at stake, such as combat sports where weight is a determining factor. Olympic President Jacques Rogge allowed our special category to continue during his reign even as the antagonistic voices grew louder. Eventually, however, fighting the opponents of rowing’s special category became untenable, and it became apparent that our special category was doomed.

That’s when World Rowing President Jean-Christophe Rolland and I formed a strategy group that included a Price Waterhouse expert and came up with the idea that shifting these precious 72 Olympic quota spots to coastal rowing was a way forward. These 72 slots were 72 rowers around the world, every four years, who



MATT SMITH and **DENIS OSWALD**, president of FISA and World Rowing from 1989 to 2013, at the River and Rowing Museum, Henley-on-Thames, England in 2011.

could become Olympians. We did not want to lose these slots for the rowers of the future.”

Rowing News: Tell us about the growth in World Rowing member countries. How was that accomplished? And where do we go from here?

“Because FISA had to grow its “universality” on a limited budget, it began staging coaching courses around the world.

But for an Olympic Solidarity coaching course to get funded, it had to have the approval of the national Olympic committee of the hosting country, and each NOC was allocated only one or two per year, which meant a fight among all the sports in a country to get those precious courses. So we did the best we could with phone calls and faxes.

A big step forward was taken in 1992 when FISA decided to allocate funding

to create the full-time position of development director and I was hired and moved to Switzerland. I began by traveling to all 14 of the former Soviet Union “new” countries where rowing existed but where they had to form their own national federations and try to help their clubs survive without heavy state funding. I had the good fortune of making this trip with the former sports minister of the Soviet Union and his deputy, who was a rowing man. Rowing was basically a professional sport in the Soviet Union with clubs open only to Olympic-level athletes on state salaries. All coaches had to do was coach, so recruiting and fundraising were foreign skills.

In 1993, we focused on Asia, and I visited many countries to promote rowing and help establish national federations, recruit and educate rowers, coaches, and federation leaders, and get them boats. We collected old boats from developed countries and sent them in containers. This was during the time of the economic growth of East, Southeast and Central Asia, when the idea of taking part in sports alongside work or studies began to take form. Good progress was made all over Asia in these early days.

In 1994, Africa was next, and I visited as many countries as possible. I was even kidnapped in Nigeria but managed to get released unharmed—but without my money. We all recall the re-entry of South Africa at the 1992 Olympics, and this country served as a base for development in southern Africa. Cameroon served as a base for development in western Africa, and Kenya was the base in eastern Africa. Egypt and Tunisia were the bases for northern Africa. Great progress took place here. Rowing was growing nicely in Latin America, too.

How did we do? At the beginning of 1992, FISA had 64 member national federations; in 2021, the total stood at 156. Participation in qualifying for rowing in the Games went from 44 in 1992 to a peak of 116 in 2016 (despite reductions in the overall quota). The remaining countries on the potential list were either desert countries and islands without lakes or rivers or very poor countries where all sports struggled to get a hold.”

Rowing News: How did World Rowing get into indoor and coastal rowing?

“For coastal rowing, we have to credit the French Rowing Federation and its

president in the 1990s, Denis Masegla, who later became president of the French national Olympic committee.

Masegla came from Marseilles, where they rowed on the sea, and flat-water rowing was dying. He allocated resources and commissioned research to create the self-bailing coastal rowing boats that are now standard equipment. It was quickly adopted by clubs all along the Mediterranean in France, Spain, and Italy and became a FISA championship in 2007.

The problem, though, was that they were using the sailing model of a triangular race out at sea. No one could follow it from land or film it, so no one could understand what was going on.

A breakthrough took place when Guin Batten took over as chair of the Recreational Rowing Commission. Guin and I discussed the fact that an event did not exist if people could not see it from land or on television. The format had to change.

So the 2010 championships in Bari, Italy, were modified so the finish line was near the quai, a big screen near the finish provided television coverage, and spectators could follow the racing. GPS units were also tested by Swiss Timing.

In October 2010, the organizer in Bari, Pasquale Triggiani, Guin and I used the extra day Sunday to test beach starts and finishes in Bari. It was implemented successfully and called Beach Sprints by Pasquale at the 2011 Mediterranean Beach Games in Pescara, Italy.

Since then, Beach Sprints have been on the program of many regional and world events and have become the answer for sports development in countries on the sea or ocean. This is now the major avenue for growing the number of member countries. Our strategy team in Lausanne came up with this as a proactive alternative for the IOC to avoid losing the 72 lightweight quota places. This strategy has proved successful, as coastal rowing has been included for the 2028 Los Angeles Olympic Games.

Indoor rowing has been on my radar for a very long time as executive director. Indoor rowing was developed successfully by Concept2, which was staging popular events and growing this discipline of the sport. We at FISA tried many times to see where we could add value to what was already being done so well by Concept2, but we did not have the resources, human

or financial, at the time to be of any help.

There were big thinkers at Concept2 who envisioned a higher status for indoor rowing—even in the Games—and this was where World Rowing could be of assistance. Big steps forward were made in 2019 when Concept2 and World Rowing agreed to stage the World Rowing Indoor Championships, beginning in February 2020 with Concept2 as the presenting sponsor.

We were successful in getting indoor rowing included in the first World Urban Games in Budapest and many other world events. A breakthrough was the Covid-induced first virtual world indoor championships in February 2021, presented with the help of our television and technology partners. The chance to compete virtually on global-streaming television was a huge step forward and opened many new doors for promoting the sport. Indoor rowing is currently a path for many promotional and commercial opportunities for World Rowing.”

Rowing News: Why will the LA2028 regatta be 1,500 meters instead of the standard 2,000? Why not have the LA2028 events in Sarasota-Bradenton?

“Paris will have surfing in French Polynesia, and there are reports Oklahoma City will host the 2028 whitewater events.

The bidding process for the 2024 Olympic Games involved not just Los Angeles but also Paris, Budapest, and Rome. This meant that all the bids had to conform to the technical standards required by the international Olympic sport federations, and for us, it is 2,000 meters with eight lanes.

In 2016, our Olympic bid team and I visited all four cities that were bidding at the time. Paris had an existing venue at Vaires-sur-Marne that had just been renovated. We staged a World Cup there in 1997 and we knew it well.

Budapest was proposing a fantastic course that situated the starting bridge at their proposed Olympic village. Their proposed course involved widening an existing canal near the city center.

Rome wanted to build a new course between the city and the airport along the airport motorway, but by this point new venues were no longer allowed by the IOC, so the Rome venue would have been in either Sabaudia or Piediluco.

For Los Angeles, we first considered Lake Casitas, the site of the 1984 Olympic

regatta, but that was rejected because consistent water level and volume could no longer be guaranteed after the recent droughts. Next, a complete analysis of all possible bodies of water in and around LA was undertaken, as well as a review of all existing regatta courses in California, including Lake Natoma in Sacramento, the Olympic training center in Chula Vista, and Lexington Reservoir near San Francisco.

The Long Beach Marine Stadium was considered also, since it was the site of the 1932 Olympic regatta, but the Seventh Street Bridge at 500 meters lowered its attractiveness. There was no chance for a new rowing venue because of the IOC's ban on new construction, and since the LA Games were going to be financed privately, there was no budget for large projects.

The LA bid committee had decided that all events should be in or very near LA, not in other places around California and the nation. Given this limitation, the closest option was Lake Perris, which is outside of LA near Riverside. It is at least a two-hour trip from the Olympic Village and would require a satellite Olympic village at a local university, with all the extra catering, transport, and security. The logistics of such a remote location are highly problematic.

Eventually, Budapest and Rome withdrew, leaving a two-city contest between Paris and LA. Then, in 2017, the IOC awarded two editions of the Games at the same time: Paris in 2024, LA in 2028. It was now decided.

Next, the IOC told the sport federations that if they wanted to stay in the Games, they would have to be more flexible with their rules and venue requirements so competition could take place near the center of the Games. The clear message to us was that a venue far outside the center of the Olympics was not positive for the future of rowing.

In addition, there was a strong feeling in Lausanne that rowing had become too rigid with our requirements after recent Olympic regattas where there were very early races and many delays and several competition days were canceled because of wind and weather.

So we then focused on Long Beach. A group of FISA leaders and technical staffers traveled there the day after the 2017 world championships in Sarasota-Bradenton so we could inspect all aspects

of this option. All the issues of this site were presented, including the challenge of closing a large portion of the harbor for hundreds of motorboats, yachts, and sailboats for the whole summer, except for limited times, for logistical, construction, and security purposes.

A floating television road will have to be installed, like the one in Sarasota, which will require sinking pylons. And the Paralympic Games follow in August, and then a few months to dismantle everything—not easy decisions for the local politicians, and a very expensive undertaking for LA2028.

Several follow-up visits took place, and many options were analyzed by World Rowing's architect and local architects. We measured all possible alternatives and we just could not get the start line out past the Seventh Street Bridge.

We measured down to the centimeter all possible options but simply could not make it work for the lanes. The only way to make it happen was to place the starting bridge on the "finish-line side

of the Seventh Street Bridge pylons, with warming up taking place on the other side of the bridge.

Long Beach offers many positives: it's in the center of the Games; rowers can sleep in the Olympic Village at UCLA with the other athletes; the number of spectators will be huge and will leave a massive legacy for rowing in this densely populated area of Los Angeles County. The promotional benefits for the sport will be tremendous, similar to London and Rio.

The drawbacks are also there: a shortened course, seawater and tide. The timing of the races will vary with the tide tables to find the best slack-tide moments. FISA has decided that the sport should not change for one event; therefore, all rowing qualification events will stay at 2,000 meters.

Returning to your questions, there is no whitewater-kayak course in Southern California, and a new venue cannot be constructed, so this event will have to take place elsewhere, which means our canoe-

kayak friends will have to compete away from the center of the Games. Whitewater courses are very expensive to build and maintain, and very few demonstrate a solid post-Games financial model.

You also mentioned surfing taking place in French Polynesia. Well, any real surfer will tell you that the Atlantic Ocean is a mill pond in July. No serious surfing takes place in Biarritz or along the Atlantic coast of France then. In fact, the inclusion of surfing in the Paris program was a surprise for hard-core surfers. Since French Polynesia is officially part of France, the surfing competition is taking place on French soil—and in a dream location for the athletes.

Staging the event so far away raised the eyebrows of the sustainability and carbon-footprint people. We inquired


"This went against the existing powers that be, and FISA found itself with a big family feud on its hands."

whether coastal rowing could take place there also to take advantage of the temporary infrastructure and television equipment. This was when the inclusion of coastal rowing in Paris 2024 was still under consideration. The answer was a very clear no, as they wanted to minimize the number of people traveling so far.

In terms of finances, we did ask whether Long Beach was chosen to save money, and the organizing committee told us that the cost of maintaining security for the whole summer and shutting down many businesses during the lockdown for construction is sizable. It's clear that the Long Beach option is not cheaper but more complex and expensive.

I totally support this decision." □

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If Kristi Wagner (bow) and Sophia Vitas (stroke) continue to LA2028, they'll be racing 1,500 meters.

SPORT SCIENCE

Going the New Distance

At the 2028 LA Olympics, rowers will race 1,500 meters—a change that will require different equipment, training, and strategy.

This year's Paris Games will be the last for Olympic rowing as we know it. Lightweight rowing will be removed from the Olympic program, and coastal sprints will debut in 2028.

Because of local limitations in Los Angeles, the traditional Olympic race distance will be shortened to 1,500 meters. This change will be welcomed probably by some sports politicians and will serve as a test for how the rowing community and television viewers accept the break with tradition.

It's reasonable to question the value of building a rowing facility with a 2,000-meter course when a 1,500-meter or even 1,000-meter course might do. But then, if it's all about money, why not build

cheaper 25-meter swimming pools and 75-meter running tracks?

In the early days of the Olympic movement, rowing competitions were held over different distances depending on local circumstances, but by and large, the traditional rowing race has been 2,000 meters, a distance that has been standardized for women and juniors (or U19 athletes, as they're called now).

World Rowing (formerly FISA) sent experts around the world to promote the construction of 2,000-meter courses, and excellent 2K rowing facilities exist in every member country, where local, national, and international regattas are held successfully.

Shortening races to 1,500 meters will have a significant impact on training

and how it's conducted, since current physiological research is based on the traditional race duration. In ideal racing conditions, the fastest boat, the men's eight, will complete the new Olympic distance in about four minutes. The slowest boat, the women's single, will clock in at about 5:30. The proportion of anaerobic energy supply in 2K races is only about 10 to 20 percent; I suspect that it will increase probably by 10 percent in races that are 500 meters shorter. Training must reflect this change.

Race strategy must change also. While we currently see a U-shaped progression of power and boat speed, athletes will have to adopt a more "fly and die" approach, which means the start and first 500 meters will become even more crucial. Rowers will

TRAINING

have to be very powerful and fine-tuned technically to achieve speeds in top races necessary for victory.

Training will need to become even more polarized. High-intensity training will be maximized, while low-intensity long-distance training will need to be planned carefully to build an aerobic base and support recovery. Overall training volume may not change much, but we will see longer rest periods with minimal effort between high-intensity sessions.

Strength training also will need to reflect the new emphasis on the start and early sprint. Fast movements with relatively high loads will take center stage. Boats and oars will need to be as stiff as possible to transfer high forces efficiently, and riggers will need to be reinforced.

Athletes and coaches need time to prepare for these changes and the opportunity to experiment, learn, and adapt, ideally by competing over the new Olympic distance. The qualifying races for the 2028 Olympic Games, of course, should be held on 1,500-meter courses, and it makes sense to stage international races over the same distance in the 2026 season, at the latest. *[Editor's note: World Rowing has stated that all events will remain 2,000 meters.]*

Obviously, adapting to these changes applies only to the few rowers with Olympic ambitions, but there are many more rowers who want to compete for a place on their country's national team. Again, the national qualification regattas should be over the shorter race distance. Otherwise, national teams could select the wrong rowers for their Olympic teams. This could cause headaches for university and club rowers preparing for national regattas, which are likely to continue at 2K.

World Rowing should be very cautious about what happens to race lengths after the 2028 Olympics. Already, rowing's governing body has dealt a fatal blow to lightweight rowing, at least internationally, and it remains to be seen how this will affect rowing in general and club and college rowing in particular. ▣ VOLKER NOLTE



COXING

Winter Skill Set

When not working on your calls, you should be sharpening your technical eye. On land, you have the opportunity to look at rowers in a way you rarely get—from the side.

The winter months are a great time for coxswains to work on two main skills: spotting and diagnosing technical proficiencies/deficiencies, and polishing your calls. If you're not doing this already (college coxswains probably are; high-school coxswains, maybe not), talk to your coaches and ask them to let you run a practice (or multiple practices) under their supervision. As thrilling as

taking the rowers through a body circuit is, doing that for three plus months is not going to make you a better coxswain.

One year, our coaches overheard a friend and me whining about taking our respective crews through circuits ("This is so stupid," "I'm so bored," etc.), so the next practice he had us alternate between taking the team through warmups and different drills on the ergs. It was good for us, because after a year of experience we

knew how things should be called; we just needed to fine-tune it.

When it comes to working on your technical calls, you should limit this to warmups/drills and group workouts where everyone is rowing at the same pace (rate pyramids are ideal). Basically, any time all the rowers are doing the same thing, go for it; otherwise, be a silent observer. At times like this, you're not focusing on the individual, so rowers who don't like being coxed on the erg won't have much grist for complaint. This is more for you than it is for them.

A skill that merits attention is how you call the transitions between rates, pressure, starts, and settles. Just because you're not on the water doesn't mean you can begin monologuing your calls. Everything should still be simple and concise. Take out unnecessary words so that only those essential to conveying your message remain. This is also a good opportunity to practice the difference between "over" and "on" to signal when to do something (yes, there's a difference).

If the workout has a technical focus, especially if you're in the tanks, confer with your coaches about what that focus is ahead of time (catches, finishes, sequencing, etc.) so you can create a "word bank" comprised of 10 to 12 calls that you can incorporate into your vocabulary while coxing.

The more you practice your calls off the water, the more natural they'll sound on the water (and the less effort you'll have to expend coming up with something to say). If you're an experienced coxswain, don't fall back on the same general calls. Get creative and devise some new ones by listening to recordings and talking with the rowers. This is your time to figure out what works and what doesn't before you get on the water.

When incorporating these technical filler calls, make sure your tone matches the intensity of the piece. The goal in coxing these pieces on land is to mimic how you would do it on the water during practice or on race day. (Practicing race-day warm-ups, starts, and settles is effective on ergs, especially if you give yourself a window of time similar to what you'd have to get to the starting line.) If the rowers are doing low-rate steady-state pieces with a focus on controlled and in-

sync leg drives, don't cox them like they're bow ball to bow ball with Northeastern and Syracuse in the finals at IRAs and you're trying to nose your boat out in front with a five for legs.

When not working on your calls, you should be sharpening your technical eye. On land, you have the opportunity to look at the rowers in a way you rarely get—from the side. This should be your go-to thing when you don't have anything else to do. Personally, I don't like calling drills while trying to observe rowers, because my focus is split. If I'm not losing track of what stroke we're on or how much time is left, I wind up looking at the rowers without really seeing anything. When I have time on land to concentrate on one thing, I lean into it.

When observing rowers, you should have a picture in your head of ideal form. I pick the most proficient rower on our team and compare everyone's form to that model (after confirming it with the coach). The details aren't important; look at the building blocks—leg drive, transitions through the body sequence (legs, back, arms, reverse), posture.

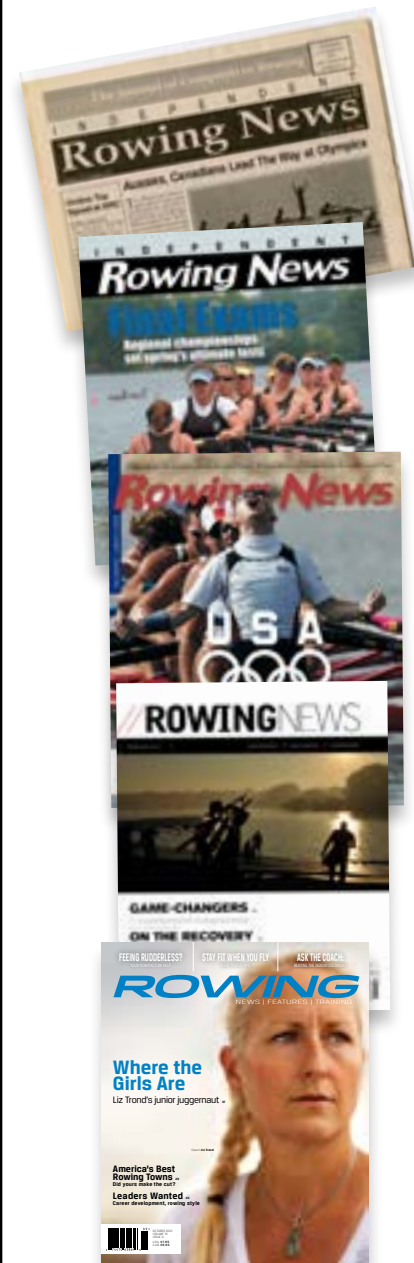
You can correct the rower directly or jot a reminder in your notebook to address the flaw at another time. I recommend recording the issue and how it was corrected so you can refer to it later. If something looks off but you aren't sure what the problem is specifically, ask another coxswain or your coach to take a look and explain what they're seeing, what correction is needed and why, and what a good on-the-water call would be.

When I'm observing rowers on the ergs, I do a lot of walking. Very rarely do I stand in the same place for more than a minute or two. I like to stand in front of individual rowers for three to five strokes and look at them as I would in the boat. From there, I try to figure out what's good or bad about their form and envision what they might look like with an oar in their hands.

It involves a lot of educated guesswork, but it's a great way to teach yourself technique and form. And if you learn the tendencies of the rowers and what calls to make to address them while you're still on land, you'll be one step ahead of the game once you get out on the water. ▣

KAYLEIGH DURM

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BEST PRACTICES

Talking Points

The location of a conversation communicates as much as the words. Rowing-specific conversations can and should occur at the boathouse.

Conversations with athletes are at the heart of coaching. How well coaches speak with and to athletes, and also listen to and hear athletes, often determines their overall coaching success and effectiveness. Much has been written about how to communicate better, and some of it is worth reviewing. For now, here are some pointers for rowing coaches who want to improve their coaching conversations.

Timing. It's not just what is said but when it is said. Discussions immediately before practice should relate only to practice. Anything else distracts from the central purpose of practice. Save the information-sharing for later, after practice. Athletes also need time to process what coaches tell them. A new detailed race plan given on the dock before shoving is disturbing and confusing. One articulated early in the week, rehearsed, and reiterated before "hands on" is empowering. Similarly, some athletes may need a speech to fire them up, but not at 9 p.m. the night before their race. This only excites them and makes falling asleep difficult.

Problems go away on their own rarely, so do not procrastinate difficult conversations. They are part of any meaningful coach-athlete relationship. Be the adult, accept the discomfort as an opportunity for growth, and initiate the difficult conversation. If the topic is important and uncomfortable, document the conversation and include a second coach as a witness.


Location. The location of a conversation communicates as much as the words. Rowing-specific conversations can and should occur at the boathouse. Larger topics are better addressed away from the boathouse. By removing the conversation from the rowing venue, coaches show they're concerned about athletes beyond their rowing. Sharing a snack in a public place reduces awkwardness and makes conversation easier. Similarly, deliver praise in public whenever justified.

The same compliment paid in front of the team provides greater positive reinforcement. If individual criticism is required, do so in private, away from teammates. Chewing out athletes in front of their peers is a quick way to lose them.

Frequency. Short and regular check-ins take the athlete's emotional pulse. Use open-ended questions to break the ice: "How you doing?" Begin with non-rowing topics: "How are classes going?" If you sense a problem, make time for a deeper conversation. This is a sound approach even when a coach wants to discuss a specific issue. Establish connection before initiating significant conversation. Regular, more formal scheduled meetings ensure that the coach reaches every athlete individually, creates specific opportunities for an athlete to address the coach, and facilitates conversation because both parties come prepared to talk.

Engagement. Coaches show they care for athletes by giving them their full attention—i.e., putting their phone aside, shutting down their computer, looking the athlete in the eye, and listening actively. Demonstrating concern this way reinforces what is said verbally.

Occasionally, it's better to minimize engaging with athletes. When athletes make excuses, complain, or criticize others, consider ignoring their pleas by being visibly distracted. Feigning indifference to their complaints signals that the topic is not worth discussing. This purposeful neglect is especially useful when athletes have concerns a coach considers trivial. It shows the concern is "no big deal" and nothing to worry about.

When requesting an individual meeting, let athletes know what you want to discuss. If they don't know the topic, some will worry and assume the worst. That's the opposite of good communication.  **BILL MANNING**

FUEL

Iron Rules

Iron deficiency contributes to anemia, a major symptom of which is fatigue—whether rowing or climbing a flight of stairs.

"My teammate eats ice chips like crazy. Isn't that a sign of being anemic?"

"Something must be wrong with me. I get out of breath just walking up a flight of stairs."

"Should I eat lots of spinach to boost my iron intake, given that I've stopped eating red meat?"

Many of today's rowers are eating little or no red meat (such as beef, lamb), which is one of the best sources of dietary iron. These athletes—in particular lightweight rowers who eat less food overall—are consuming simultaneously less iron.

Iron is a mineral found in the hemoglobin molecule inside red blood cells. It helps transport oxygen from your lungs to your muscles. Iron deficiency contributes to anemia, a major symptom of which is fatigue—whether rowing or climbing a flight of stairs.

Rowers with anemia may complain about lightheadedness, weakness, subpar performance, and yes, a desire to chew on ice. While fatigue can be caused also by lack of sleep, depression, stress, and calorie restriction, fatigue from an iron-deficient diet is common.

Iron-deficiency anemia is more prevalent among athletes than among the general population. That's because athletes lose iron through heavy sweating, blood loss in urine and the intestinal tract, and damage to red blood cells caused by foot strikes while running. Female athletes lose blood through monthly menstruation; hence, women are more prone to anemia than men.

In a survey of 277 runners who participated in the *Detroit Free Press* marathon and half marathon (about 60 percent female; average age 40), about half



the women and a sixth of the men had clinical iron deficiency. Fifteen percent of the women and three percent of the men had severe iron deficiency. Just think how much faster these athletes could have run! While rowers are not runners, anemia is prevalent among all endurance athletes.

What to do

If you think you might be anemic, get your blood tested to rule out anemia (and remeasure it in six to eight weeks after treatment). The diagnostic criteria are:

- hemoglobin (the iron-containing molecule within the red blood cell) is less than 120 (female) or 130 (male) grams per liter.

- ferritin (a marker of iron stores) is less than 12 nanograms per milliliter (ferritin should be more than 30 to 40 nanograms per milliliter, if not higher).

- transferrin saturation (transferrin binds iron in the blood) is less than 16 percent.

Preventing and resolving anemia

If you limit your intake of iron-rich beef and lamb, be sure to consume alternate sources of iron, such as dark-meat chicken or turkey (legs, thighs), tuna, or salmon. About 40 percent of the heme-iron in animal protein is absorbed, compared to only five percent of the non-heme iron in plants.

Don't count on plant sources of iron such as almonds, spinach, lentils, beans, and grains to satisfy your iron needs. Only about two percent of the iron in spinach might get absorbed. Despite Popeye's claim that spinach made him strong to the finish, spinach is a poor source of absorbable iron. Combining heme-iron in animal protein with non-heme (plant) iron optimizes absorption. So add some tuna to your spinach salad, turkey to lentil soup, beef to chili.

If you're a rower who "eats clean" and minimizes your intake of "white foods" (such as white bread, pasta and rice), take note: refined grains are enriched or fortified generally with iron. So eliminating enriched white bread and other refined grains reduces your intake of iron (as well as other added nutrients).

Enriched breakfast cereals such as Cheerios, Grape Nuts, and Kellogg's Raisin Bran are good sources of iron. (By comparison, "all natural" cereals like granola or Puffins have no additives, which means they have no added iron.) To enhance the absorption of the iron in enriched cereals, include a source of vitamin C with the meal, such as an orange or orange juice, a clementine, or some strawberries.

Research indicates that iron tends to be absorbed better in the morning than in the evening, owing in part to the daily

fluctuation of the hormone hepcidin. Hepcidin hinders iron absorption from the intestinal tract and is a key regulator of iron absorption. Hepcidin increases after exercise and is triggered by exercise's inflammatory response.

Thus, to optimize your iron absorption, pay attention to when you eat iron-rich foods or take an iron supplement. A good time to consume iron or iron supplements is with an iron-rich breakfast either before or shortly after a workout, but not three to six hours afterward, when hepcidin peaks. This timing will optimize iron absorption as well as tolerance, since your body will tolerate iron supplements better when taken with food.

Iron supplements

If you're anemic, you want to boost your dietary iron intake. You will need also to take supplemental iron to correct the deficiency. Do not self-prescribe high doses of iron supplements. Your doctor should recommend the dose best for your body. Taking too much iron puts some athletes at risk of iron overload, which can be dangerous.

Supplements come in two forms: ferrous iron (gluconate, sulphate, fumarate) and ferric iron (citrate, sulphate). Ferrous iron is better absorbed by the gut, but ferric iron settles better in the gut. Some rowers find that iron supplements contribute to nausea and constipation. If such is the case for you, experiment with different brands to find the supplement your body tolerates best. Slow-release ferrous sulphate and ferrous bisglycinate are popular choices. Taking an iron supplement every other day is as effective as taking it daily.

The bottom line

To iron out performance problems such as needless fatigue, be sure your diet supports your athletic goals. A registered dietitian who is a certified specialist in sports dietetics can teach you how to consume an optimal diet that helps you be strong to the finish—with or without spinach! ▣

Sports nutritionist **NANCY CLARK, M.S., R.D.**, counsels both casual and competitive athletes in the Boston area (Newton; 617-795-1875). Her best-selling *Nancy Clark's Sports Nutrition Guidebook* can help you eat to win. For more information, visit NancyClarkRD.com.

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TRAINING



TRAINING

Improving Yourself

Self-teaching methods can advance your learning as you try to change something based on your coach's recommendation or your own goals.

Winston Churchill said “to improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often.” Striving for continuous improvement in your rowing technique will help you develop skill and power. Training under the watchful eye of a coach gives immediate feedback to which you can respond to make a correction.

There are times, however, when you need to go solo and practice a particular movement quietly to work out a new pattern. In both cases, self-teaching methods can advance your learning as you attempt to change an element based on what your coach recommended or your own goals.

During an introduction to a sculling camp, Ric Ricci, head men's rowing coach at Connecticut College and associate director of the sculling program at the Craftsbury Sculling Center in Craftsbury Common, Vt., offered these tips for getting the most out of the experience:

- The slower you go, the faster you learn; take the time to experience change.
- If it doesn't feel different, it's not different.
- Keep a journal and make notes before you go to sleep.
- Remember how it felt.
- Try to give yourself a way to reinterpret your experience.
- Start and stop; allow yourself to reset so that you maintain high-quality movements.
- Attend to rhythm versus ratio; increase efficiency through rhythm.

There are many nuances to the stroke cycle and how to move boats effectively, many of which are counterintuitive, but raising your awareness and refining your way of practicing will help you grow consistently as an athlete and competitor. ▣

MARLENE ROYLE is the author of *Tip of the Blade: Notes on Rowing*. She specializes in training for masters rowers. Her coaching service, Royle Row Performance Training Programs, provides the program and support you need to improve your competitive edge. For information, email Marlene at roylerow@aol.com or visit www.roylerow.com.

PHOTOS: LISA WORTHY



COACH DEVELOPMENT

Enter Here

Volunteer coaching is an excellent way to get a foot in the door and try out coaching without the commitment of a full-time position.

There are as many ways to get into coaching as there are coaches. Some get into the profession right after college graduation, becoming a low-level assistant in a collegiate program or even the head coach of a high-school team, as I did. (That, by the way, is a jump I wouldn't recommend. Time and experience are crucial to developing your coaching ability and philosophy, something that doesn't happen when trying to lead a program at age 23.)

Other coaches take a more meandering route. I know of some who've spent years working in related and unrelated fields, such as teaching and finance, before feeling the pull to pick up the megaphone. Whatever your background, one entry point to coaching remains a popular and informative one—volunteering.

Volunteer coaching favors the privileged; it takes a certain amount of financial and social security to commit up to 20 hours and more a week to an unpaid job. But volunteer coaching also enables programs with more limited resources

(they may have only a couple of full-time coaches for 40 or more athletes) to get an additional coach to provide more oversight and attention.

Recent NCAA rule changes have created uncertainty about the position for some collegiate programs, since volunteer coaches now count against the total number of coaches permitted on a staff. Viewed more optimistically, that same rule change may pave the way for more part-time paid coaching positions, thus creating a more stable and financially viable entry into the profession.

For someone looking to get started, volunteer coaching is an excellent way to get a foot in the door and try out coaching without the commitment of a full-time position. Here are some suggestions for getting the most out of volunteering, at any level and whatever your goal:

- **Be bold.** If there's a coach or program you want to work with, reach out and ask. The worst they can say is no. If you don't hear back, follow up. Coaches are busy and sometimes disorganized, so don't hesitate

to bump up your email in their inbox—politely, of course.

- **Get involved.** Get experience with as many parts of the program as possible—coaching, yes, but also athlete meetings, logistics, recruiting, fundraising. Your time will be limited, so use it wisely. Try to get a complete idea of what it's like to be a full-time coach. Be a sponge. You want to leave the experience with an informed view of all that's involved and whether it's for you.

- **Build your network.** As you travel with the team for races, you'll have opportunities to meet coaches from other teams. Do it. You can learn from them and, if you choose to stay in the profession, they'll be hiring someday or know someone who is.

- **Be diligent.** Treat your responsibilities with the team seriously. Be on time. Be organized. Be involved. You have so much to learn. Again, it's the coaches you work with there who will help you get your next job, so be sure to put your best foot forward.



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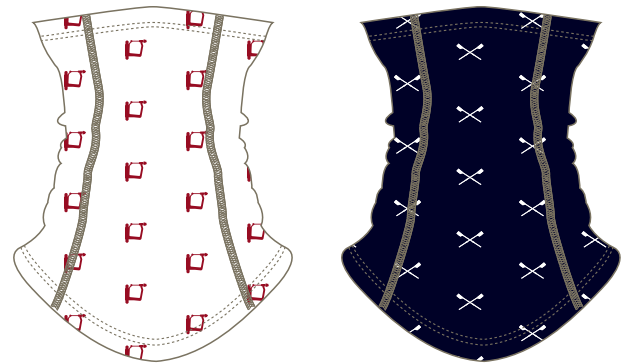


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DOCTOR ROWING CON'T FROM PAGE 66 >>>

“We engaged two women, professional screenwriters. But they weren’t athletes and they wanted to change the story, to make the two golfers become friends, to share recipes, to work together. But that’s not what sports are about. This was competition. Like any real athletes, they were intense; they weren’t baking cookies together.”

The professionals were fired.

Along the way, he met someone who would help produce it, and he engaged a woman director. They auditioned actors and got lucky.

“We had a hard time finding an Ann character—acting and golf! I found Andia Winslow, the woman who would play Ann Gregory, on Instagram and DM’d her. Andia had been the first Black woman to play Ivy League golf, at Yale. And one day early on she said, ‘You know my family is good friends with the Gregorys. I could introduce you.’”

Because Ann Gregory had died in 1990 at the age of 77, this was Jordan’s chance to find out more about her.

“The family was great; they contributed a lot. But still, this movie had lived in my head for so long that I knew I was writing a story that was imagined. It’s not my mother; it’s not exactly Ann Gregory, either.”

The two actors, Andia Winslow and Julia Rae, contributed their own take on how these competitors would have spoken to each other, how they would have acted in public and in private.

“We rewrote so much of the film because of their great input,” said Jordan.

I asked Curtis if he saw any connection between having been a rowing coach and a filmmaker.

“Just this: I’m pugnacious. I’m a ditchdigger. I didn’t have brilliant new insights into what makes boats go fast. I just worked and worked at it. And that’s the essence of rowing. Nose to the grindstone. Keep working.”

“We had a lot of setbacks—budget and finding places to show it. But when we began to take it to film festivals, we got a lot of acclaim. It won the best-film award at the Martha’s Vineyard African American Film Festival. Awards in Vienna, Austria, South Africa, Indianapolis, Cleveland, Chicago, and Naples, Florida, followed. A highlight was showing it at Howard University,

coinciding with a Black golfers’ tournament. About 25 Gregory relatives attended and they were very supportive.

“The work ethic that you develop in rowing—the idea that you don’t stop, just keep pouring on the energy and good things will come. That, and a strong production team that was just as passionate about making the film, kept me going.”

The movie is made beautifully, the story inspiring. It has helped bring Ann Gregory out of the shadows of golf history. She is being celebrated by the LPGA and the UBGA, the United Black Golfers Association.

With the film festival run over, Jordan for the past year has been working to upgrade the music, the color, the sound quality, and little imperfections that were not visible when I saw it. But in order to find a platform where it can be shown, it must be flawless.

Beginning Feb. 1, *Playing Through* will be available on Amazon Prime. Do yourself a favor and keep your eyes open for it. It’s a superb movie, and knowing that it comes from a rowing coach who didn’t have millions of dollars in financing behind him, who rolled up his sleeves and kept digging, makes it even more inspiring.

The movie ends with a photographic coda of the real-life Ann Gregory, who says, “Sometimes in life, all a person needs is a chance to prove themselves.”

Not long after this match took place, Ann Gregory walked into the clubhouse of Gary’s Whites-only public golf course. She paid her greens fee to a startled clerk and said, “My tax dollars take care of this course. You can send the police out to get me. I’ll be on the first tee.”

The police never came. Ann Gregory went on to win over 300 golf tournaments around the world. □

Watch the trailer or the film:



A Rower Hits a Hole in One

Playing Through, a movie by Curtis Jordan, celebrates Ann Gregory, the first great African-American female golfer. Check it out on Amazon Prime.

Doctor Rowing received a phone call from our bowman, the captain of my 1973 college crew. “I understand all the excitement about *The Boys in the Boat*, but how come you haven’t reviewed Curtis’s movie? It’s great.”

Ric was right. Our five-man, Curtis Jordan, wrote a screenplay and co-produced the film *Playing Through*. I saw it at a film festival during the summer of 2022. So why haven’t I celebrated it?

It’s about golf.

There are any number of jokes that can be made about golf—i.e., “a good walk spoiled.” But there’s a great story here, and it deserves to be heard. Jordan retired in 2009 from a long career coaching both the women and heavyweight men at Princeton. He coached U.S. crews at the ’88, ’92, ’96, and 2000 Olympics before heading to Australia, where he coached a boat for the 2012 Olympic Games. He returned to the States and served as USRowing’s high-performance director through 2016. When he decided it was time to retire from rowing, he decided it was time to try his hand at writing a screenplay. No, he wasn’t one of those guys who had been planning to write the Great American Novel.

“I wasn’t a writer. The idea that I might write a book never occurred to me. I had enough trouble getting through high school and college with term papers. But I was at the women’s sprints in 1991 when someone came up to me and said, ‘Did your mother ever play golf?’ I said, ‘She did. Why?’ He said, ‘It’s in *Sports Illustrated*. She played a big match against Ann Gregory, the first great African-American woman golfer.’ And that got me thinking. There’s a good story here.”

Curtis’s mother, Josephine Knowlton “Dadie” Jordan, the Georgia state champion, had played in the finals of the U.S. Women’s Amateur Championships against Ann Gregory, a Black woman from Gary, Ind., in 1959 at Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Md. Upper-class white woman from the South versus middle-class Black woman from a Midwestern steel town. Privilege versus disadvantage.

Curtis thought, “Maybe I could write a screenplay. Short sentences. Dialogue. Movements. I Googled ‘How to write a screenplay.’” Curtis has always been a good storyteller; ask anyone who rowed with or for him.

But there was a problem: his mother would never talk about the match. In fact, shortly thereafter she had left her golf career behind. If the subject came up, she would say she didn’t remember much about it. But that didn’t deter Jordan.

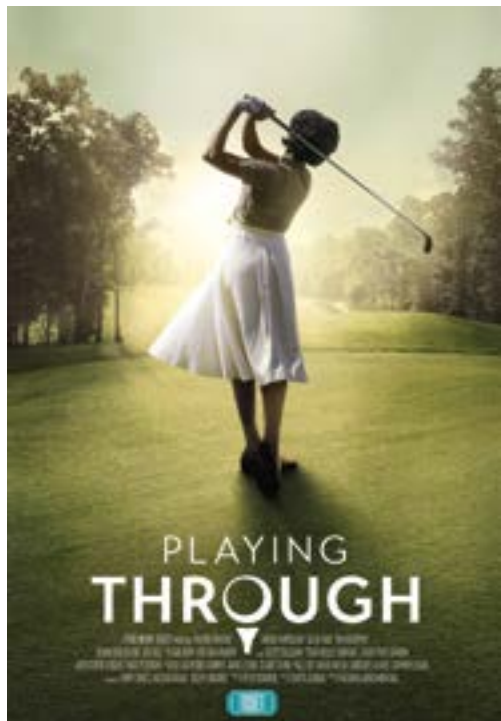
“I realized that this couldn’t be a story about my mother; maybe she inspired it, but this was going to be creative nonfiction.” So, over the years, he imagined what that match might have been like and what challenges each of the two women golfers would have faced.

The other challenge was that it was difficult to find out much about Ann Gregory. There wasn’t a lot of coverage of women golfers in the ’50s, especially Black women. But without rowing, Jordan needed something new on which to focus his attention. After thinking about this for almost 30 years, he began to write in 2017.

It came together slowly. Because he had coached women for eight years, he wanted the script to have a female perspective.

CONTINUES ON PAGE 65 <<<

Curtis has always been a good storyteller; ask anyone who rowed with or for him.



VESPOLI

A photograph of four women rowing a Vespoli VHP41+ boat on a body of water. The women are wearing black athletic gear and sunglasses. The boat is black with yellow accents on the oars. The water is dark blue with some ripples. The background is a clear blue sky.

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