



SPECTATOR'S GUIDE TO ROWING

Welcome to our regatta! We're glad that you are here. To enhance your enjoyment of today's races, we have prepared this brief introduction to what you will be see and the best places to watch.

SWEEP ROWING AND SCULLING

One oar or two? Rooster Cogburn famously advised another shootist to, "Fill your hand, you. . ." Well, you know the rest. In rowing, like gun fighting, it's important to watch the hands.

Athletes who pull only one oar are called sweep rowers. They compete in boats with either four oarsmen or eight (the shorthand is 4+ and 8+). These boats also carry a coxswain (pronounced cox-n) whose job is to steer the boat, coach the crew during a race and, in general, to act bossy. The eight is the fastest boat on the water. A world-level men's eight is capable of moving almost 14 miles per hour.

Athletes with two oars – one in each hand – are called scullers. There are three sculling events: the single – (one person and designated as 1X), the double – (two oarsmen, designated 2X), and the quad – (you guessed it, four rowers, 4X).

Oarsmen are identified by their seat in the boat. The athlete in the bow is seat No. 1, and is sometimes called the bowman. Next in the boat is No. 2, then No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8, who is also called the stroke. The stroke's job belongs to a strong rower with excellent technique, because he or she sets the rhythm and number of strokes per minute that the rest of the crew must follow.

THE EQUIPMENT

Oars

Oars move the boat through the water and act as counter balances. Sweep oars are longer than sculling oars and frequently have wooden handles instead of rubber grips. The shaft of the oar is made of extremely lightweight carbon fiber. In a pinch, they also serve as personal floatation devices.

Boats

All rowing boats can be called shells. Rowing boats with used for sculling are more correctly called “sculls”. All sculls are shells but not vice versa. Durn, it’s that Ven Diagram thing again. Originally made of wood, newer boats are now constructed of honeycombed carbon fiber. They are light and appear fragile but are crafted to be strong and stiff in the water. Yes, they are expensive: \$ 25,000 to \$40,000 for a new eight, oars not included.

The smallest boat – the single scull – is approximately 27 feet long and can be as narrow as 10 inches. At 58 feet, the eight is the longest boat on the water.

The oars are attached to the boat with riggers, which provide a fulcrum for the lever action of rowing. Generally, sweep rowers sit in configurations that have the oars alternating from side to side along the boat.

THE RACE

Our races are run on a course that is approximately 1,500 meters (that’s just under one mile if it’s been awhile since you drove in Germany).

The race course is divided into 6 lanes and runs from the head of Lake Whitehurst, past the launch area, to a finish line near the causeway.

The race begins with all boats aligned at the start in lanes they've been assigned. “Stakeboat holders” on floating platforms hold the stern of each boat steady while an official, known as the “aligner”, ensures that each boat is even with the others and squarely facing the course.

Each crew is allowed one false start; two false starts result in disqualification. If there is legitimate equipment breakage within the first 100 meters (for example, an oar that snaps in two), the race will be stopped and restarted with repaired equipment.

THE RACE

Crews pace themselves with something called a “stroke rate”, that is, the number of rowing strokes completed in a minute. Stroke rates are high at the start – maybe 35 to even 40 for an eight; 30 to 35 for a single scull. Then, the crew will settle into the body of the race and reduce its rate – 30 to 32 SPM for an eight; 28-30 for a single. The coxswain determines when the crew will sprint but finishing stroke rates of 36+ in the last 200 meters aren't unheard of. Higher stroke rates are not always indicative of speed. A strong, technically talented crew may be able to cover more water faster than a less-capable crew rowing a high stroke rate.

Boats are allowed to leave their lanes without penalty, as long as they do not interfere with anyone else's opportunity to win. An official follows the crews to ensure safety and fairness.

WHERE TO WATCH THE RACES

Great views are available at the open point just east of the picnic shelter, and along the shoreline between the launch dock and motor launch dock.

One of the best viewing points is from a large wooden platform adjacent to the entrance causeway. Although it is somewhat removed from the rest of the regatta grounds, this platform permits a view of virtually the entire race. If you elect to view the race from this platform, please be respectful of traffic on the causeway.

We also ask that you stay off of the launch and recovery docks, as well as the motor launch dock. These are busy places on regatta day and we need to restrict access to crews and regatta staff.

Wherever you choose to watch the race, have fun, and remember that cheering is allowed.