

Your ability to win races will partly depend upon the quality of your equipment. A team with equipment that is old and frequently breaks will be at a major disadvantage on race day when a key part breaks. Spare parts are very expensive and coaches do not appreciate coxswains who find new rocks or drag fins across the dock. So pay attention to what you are doing and where you are going.

The Shell

Keep an eye on the hull to spot problems before they appear - such as a slowly growing crack in a rigger, and notify the coach when a problem arises so that it can be fixed before something breaks. The most common type of shell that you will cox will be an eight oarsmen/ one coxswain boat called an eight and a four oarsmen/ one coxswain boat called a four with or just a four. These boats are sweep boats since each oarsman has only one oar (also called a sweep). Sculling boats are those in which each oarsman has two oars (also called sculls) that are smaller than sweep blades. Sculling boats do not have coxswains except for an occasional training boat. The following is a list of the versions of shells that are raced and their corresponding names:

Oarsmen	Sweep w/o cox	Sweep w/cox	Scull (never a cox)
1	N/M	N/M	1X / Single
2	2- Pair w/o	2+ / Pair with	2X / Double
4	4- Four w/o	4+ / Four with	4X / Quad(ruple)
8	N/M	8+ / Eight	8x / Octople (Octoped)

N/M = not manufactured, + = with, - or w/o = without
 Octopeds are **very** rare and are used mainly for training.

Oars

In the early 1980's fiberglass oars began to replace the older, wooden blades that simultaneously reduced the weight and increased the durability. Some newer blades also include carbon fiber in their construction to further reduce the weight and increase the stiffness. These types of blades are called ultralights. Fortunately for coxswains, oars need very little maintenance. Oars are relatively impervious to damage. An oar may break occasionally due to a factory defect, but coxswains are more likely to break them by hitting something. Damage generally results in little likelihood of repair.

Barges

Larger teams will often use a barge for several weeks at the beginning of the season to teach novices. Barges are designed to provide a slow, stable platform on which oarsmen can learn to row without worrying about the set. Barges are not designed to provide steering training for coxswains. While on a barge, coxswains should pay attention to the proper course they will steer in the future. Coxswains should use this time to learn the basic commands and rowing style that your coach prefers. You may feel bored on a barge since your coach will be doing most of the talking, but this is a good time to learn the rowing style without much pressure. If there is an extra seat in the barge and you are not needed to steer, learn to row.

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Tanks

A few of the largest rowing programs have indoor rowing tanks that attempt to duplicate the motions of rowing. Tanks allow coaches to train novices and experienced oarsmen just like on a barge, but without having to worry about the weather. If your program has a tank, use the time spent training on them as time to observe what your coaching is looking for in rowing style and how he or she likes to communicate this.

Ergometers

Ergometers are machines that attempt to simulate the motions of rowing. The most popular ergometer in the United States is made by Concept II in Morrisville, VT. Concept II also manufactures the popular Dreissigacker oars. Occasional maintenance on these models is limited to lubrication of the moving parts, a cleaning of the silver rail, cleaning any dirt off the magnetic sensor near the wheel, replacement of dead batteries, and tightening of loose parts. Do not allow any oarsman to let go of the oar handle at the finish since it may whip into the flywheel and break the machine.

Strokewatches

Strokewatches measure the strokerate, the number strokes per minute. The precision is usually to 1/2 stroke (per minute). On analog watches, a needle will turn around a dial until stopped. That spot will mark a certain strokerate. On digital models, the strokerate is displayed electronically. Some strokewatches require the stroke button to be depressed every stroke. When using a strokewatch on the water, tie it around your neck for safekeeping. If you use it in cold weather, use gloves rather than mittens so you can push the buttons.

Plastic Megaphones

All coxswains should have at least a plastic megaphone if they do not have an electronic sound amplification system. A sound amplifier is the most useful piece of equipment a coxswain can have. A megaphone will prevent you from constantly having a hoarse, scratchy voice and will allow everyone in the boat to hear from you, particularly in an eight. If you do not have anything to amplify your voice, louder coxswains will drown out your words during races. You will also become a big fan of ice cream to soothe your constant sore throat. Most megaphones have straps that hold it on your head against your lips. Some coxswains prefer to hold the megaphone in their hands, rather than deal with the straps. This choice is up to you since it does not affect sound quality, though there is always the chance that you might drop it. Holding a megaphone can also tie up your hands when you need to steer or do other things. If your megaphone has a metal mouthpiece, wrap white tape around it so that your lips will not stick to it in cold weather.

Care of Equipment

A primary responsibility of coxswains, at least in coaches' eyes, is the basic care of the equipment in the boathouse. Since you are personally responsible for everything that happens to your shell, whether it be your fault or not, immediately attend to any problem in the boat. Never neglect routine care such as an occasional washing of the boat and blades (daily if you row in salty or brackish water), recharging of the electronic equipment, and the airing out of each compartment. Do not neglect less routine maintenance such as washing the tracks with a lubricant, an application of a lubricant to rubber plugs on the electronic equipment (to prolong their flexibility), and a once over with your eyes to spot any cracks or splits developing on the boat, riggers, or oars. The proper time to spot problems with a boat is before something breaks.

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