

## 4.4 CREW SELECTION *by: Mike Purcer*

Rowing, other than the single sculling event, is a team sport and requires athletes to come together in crews to compete. Crew selection can be challenging for coaches and athletes because of their emotional ties with others in the program. Athletes are highly stressed and may feel disconnected due to competing against their friends for a seat in the boat. Coaches can be apprehensive about preconceived feelings and expected outcomes of the selection process. Coaches and athletes will often have intuitive feelings on who should be selected or deselected based on their knowledge and experience within the athlete group. The athletes must feel the selection process is fair and will result in a crew makeup that reflects the best athletes and will result in the fastest crew.

Selecting a team or a specific crew from within the group must be completed with a process that provides a fair opportunity for all athletes. Coaches and selectors must be unbiased, and crew selection must be objective with quantifiable evaluation results. Crews selected without a process or by the coach's subjective feelings may leave deselected athletes feeling that they have not been treated fairly. Additionally, there is no evidence that the fastest crew has been selected, and athletes may not be attracted to the program in the future because of the perceived coach bias.

Athletes often have a sense of who they believe the top athletes are within the group, and coaches may have their feelings. At times, an individual's perception of the best athletes may conflict with selection event results. For this reason, evaluation methods, procedures and results must be transparent. The selected team should leave all athletes confident that they have had a fair opportunity to succeed and the coaches satisfied that the best team is selected.

Coaches have sometimes struggled with leaving a top athlete on the dock due to poor performance during selection events. The saying, "the eight best does not always make the best eight," is not lost on coaches searching for the crew rhythm and the intrinsic value of a crew coming together. The team selected may not have the confidence of all, but the process is a critical step to moving forward.

The timing of the crew selection process must be early in the season to allow crews to come together once selected and develop timing and speed. Ultimately, the selection process is an opportunity to bring the team together. A well-run process will be open and show respect for athletes and the coach's unbiased goal to put the best team together. The athletes should feel the best people have been selected for the crew. Athletes who are deselected or kept on the team as spares should feel they have had a fair opportunity as they may be the program's future.

A comprehensive plan for crew selection that includes all related details is known as the Selection Document. This document outlines all parts of the selection process, including dates, requirements and athlete evaluation events. Communicating the plan to athletes and coaches well before the process begins is vital to show transparency and fairness in the selection process. More extensive rowing programs should have a selection policy outlining the development and publication dates for the Selection Document, which will change with annual updates.

#### **4.4.1 Selection Document**

The selection document provides information on how athletes will be evaluated for selection to teams and crews. The document must also contain information on how

athletes can register for the program and any prerequisites required.

The selection document may include the following section headings:

1. Objectives
2. Athlete Eligibility
  - a) prerequisites
  - b) minimum standards of performance
  - c) registration/fees
3. Schedule
4. Athlete's Commitment if Selected
5. Athlete Rights
6. Selectors
  - a) conflict of Interest
7. Evaluation Events
  - a) description, format, assessment outcomes
  - b) objective values recorded
  - c) subjective criteria (objective notes recorded)
  - d) athlete compatibility
8. Coach Input
9. Methodology
  - a) ranking and rating
  - b) successive elimination events
  - c) aggregate score evaluation
10. Sickness/Injury
11. Communicating Results
12. Appeal Process
13. Unforeseen Circumstances
14. Ongoing Performance
15. Glossary of Terms
16. References

The selection document should be published months before the selection process begins and must be available to all possible participants.

**Objectives.** The objectives section of the selection document should outline the goals of the program, including the major regatta(s) in the upcoming competition phase. It also outlines the specific objectives of the selection process, which may include the size of the team or specific crews to be identified.

**Athlete Eligibility.** The athletes selected must be eligible to compete in the scheduled regattas. For example, racing in regattas on school teams may require the athletes to be full-time students. Club membership may be required at club regattas, or national citizenship at international regattas. Other examples are physical requirements, such as in PARA rowing classifications or weight-restricted events. The selection document must include any eligibility requirements, and the process must ensure the requirements are checked and met before the selection.

The program may have performance requirements before athletes can participate in the selection process, such as a minimum erg score submission or results at selected events such as qualifying regatta. If there are prerequisites for athletes to attend the selection process, they must be included in the published Selection Document, Athlete Eligibility and in the schedule. Prerequisites published well in advance are the first step for athletes to compete in the selection process. These requirements will exclude athletes who are not at the required level of the team.

**Schedule.** This document will outline the dates and location(s) for the athlete evaluation events. Some selection event dates may be set, while others, such as on-water racing, might be tentative as they are weather-dependent. Some events may be provisional or as required based on the results of previous athlete scores. The

ongoing selection process is often challenging, but every effort should be made to adhere to the schedule.

Keeping all athletes informed about team options during the process demonstrates respect for athletes and will reduce stress and apprehension.

**Athlete Commitment if Selected.** Before the selection process begins, athletes must be informed about their responsibilities if they are chosen for the team. The commitments may include time for training and travel, living relocation, costs, team expectations and rules. The selection document will provide a written record of the athlete's requirements.

**Athlete Rights.** The selection process is stressful for athletes, and many may be overwhelmed and feel intimidated about asking questions. The document should outline the opportunity for athletes to access a representative and remain anonymous when asking for information. The athletes should choose a representative who will act as a confidential resource. Athletes not wishing to ask coaches questions directly can contact the representative. The athlete representative may also be requested to attend team or individual meetings.

Athletes' Rights
1. To know and understand the selection process.
2. To have a fair opportunity to participate in the process.
3. To see the results.
4. To ask questions personally or through a confidential representative.
5. To be able to express concerns to coaches or the selection committee.
6. To make written appeals on selection decisions (based on data and explaining the reasons for the appeal) and receive written explanations in a timely manner.

Athletes and selector/coach communication is critical throughout the selection process. Athletes may sometimes have strong feelings or aversion toward competing in a specific boat class and have their own personal goals. Athletes should not be compelled to race against their will, and any athlete conflicts must be addressed, as team unity is paramount to success.

**Selectors.** A brief section on selectors in the document will give athletes a clear view of the process personnel. Depending on the program's size, people analyzing the results and making decisions on the athletes that move forward or are deselected may range from the coach alone to a coaching staff or a combination of a coach and a group of selectors. Sometimes, the coach may not be involved in the selection process, allowing a clean slate startup with the crew when the team or crew is chosen.

Developing a selection committee to lead the process and analyze the results is sometimes preferable and allows the coach(s) to appear neutral. All selectors must identify any conflict of interest, including personal or professional ties to the athletes involved in the group. Coaches who have coached athletes will be biased based on their past experience with the athlete. New athletes to the program may perceive a bias between the coach and their past team athletes. Advanced-level programs may have selectors sign a declaration of independence attesting to their impartial status with all athletes involved.

**Evaluation Events.** The selection process may include several athlete evaluation events, including on-water speed in time trials and seat racing, aerobic and anaerobic testing on the ergometer (6k, 2k, Max Watts), lab tests like MaxVO<sub>2</sub>, and various strength evaluations. Coaches have also used running or bike ergometer tests to evaluate aerobic fitness. Other assessments, such as rowing technique, are subjective, while still others may be years of

experience or age, allowing future involvement and development within the program.

The selection document will list events that will be used to evaluate athletes. The events should be relative to rowing performance, provide objective, quantifiable results, be reliable/repeatable and be economical to organize. The selection document should describe the events as well as the scoring system that will rank or rate the results. Athlete evaluations in selection events must provide scores and values for ranking and comparison. A list of typical events can be found in Section 4.4.2 Selection Events.

**Coach Input.** The need to bring athletes together in crews requires that they are compatible with similar stroke lengths (reach) and power capacities. When selecting a specific crew, a coach's input may be informative to the ongoing blending of the athletes' rowing technique. Although the coach's input is subjective, it is very valuable for ongoing crew development.

**Sickness/Injury.** The selection document should clearly outline the process for athletes who are sick or injured during the selection process. Athletes who cannot participate in a selection event may be required to submit documentation related to their condition. Athletes should not be able to move forward on the previous years' results.

**Publication of Results.** The selection document will outline how results will be shared with athletes. This is a critical time and results are published only within the team. Result scores or published times should include raw data such as start and finish times. Upon meeting with individual athletes, the coach can share that person's score and maintain the anonymity of the others. This will prevent speculation as coaches meet with athletes individually.

Results from event evaluations should be made available to the team at the completion of the individual

meetings. Typically, individual results are shared with the athlete first if the athlete is deselected.

**Appeal Process.** The selection committee must outline an appeal process. During the selection process, athletes may, at an appropriate time, ask questions if they need clarification about the setup of the event. Questions about how the event results will be used are not appropriate.

Athletes may choose to ask questions or express concerns through a pointed representative to maintain anonymity. Once the results are shared or published, and the next steps are shared, athletes can appeal the decision typically within a limited time 24 to 72 hours. The appeal must be in writing, and the reason for the appeal must be explained. The coach/selection group must respond in writing. If the athlete's appeal is rejected, they may want to take it to the next level. There should be a level above the coach/selection committee that will hear the appeal and make the final decision.

**Unforeseen Circumstances.** The selection document outlines the process, events and timelines; however, in the event of unforeseen circumstances that require changes in the process, the selection document should outline how changes will be made. If needed, the selectors and the administration must thoroughly review the options. Athletes should be informed of any changes as soon as possible and given the opportunity to provide feedback.

**Ongoing Performance.** Athletes must be committed to ongoing crew development and improved performance. Crews failing to improve based on time trials and performance at regattas may be reviewed. Injuries within the team may require coaches to re-evaluate the boatings. Coaches will monitor crew and individual athlete development.



**Glossary of Terms.** If needed, there should be a glossary of terms, including descriptions. For example, the Gold Medal Standards (GMS) should be identified and explained.

**References.** The selection document may contain references to other documents, such as the organization's policies or associated rules. The related documents' titles, publication dates, and locations should be listed in the selection document and made available to athletes.

#### 4.4.2 Evaluation Events

There are many ways to evaluate athlete performance. All evaluation events have inherent advantages and disadvantages. The events should be relative to rowing performance, provide objective, quantifiable results, be reliable/repeatable and be economical to organize

Typical rowing-related events may include:

- rowing on water time trials
- seat racing
- ergometer testing (2k, 6k, and max watts)
- rowing specific force/power curves

Less specific events may be aerobic or strength testing that may be used for programs with limited resources.

- Max strength
- Strength endurance
- Aerobic testing
- Anthropometric (body) measurements
  - Weight
  - Height
  - Stroke length
- Lab tests

There may be subjective criteria related to athlete evaluations.

- Rowing technique

- Coachability
- Athlete compatibility

All evaluation events must be identified in the selection document.

**Ergometer testing** may be the best test of an athlete's strength and endurance in the rowing motion. However, it does not reflect the athlete's on-water rowing technique or bladework. Additionally, lighter athletes are disadvantaged by having less muscle mass. The lighter athlete would be faster in the boat (all else being equal) due to less resistance on the hull. It is important to consider body weight with ergometer scores.

**Seat Racing** is a term used to describe a series of intrasquad races with athletes changing crews to compare their boat-moving ability. This form of evaluation reflects the athletes' ability to perform in racing and provides objective results by comparing race times. Seat racing is possibly the most common form of comparing athletes in the final part of the crew selection process. Athletes and coaches highly accept seat racing as part of the selection process. Section 4.5 Seat Racing fully describes the process.

Although a highly accepted form of evaluation, seat racing results (like racing) are not consistent. Athletes are inconsistent day to day and race to race. Therefore, seat race results should be fully analyzed. Another challenge is that seat racing results can be boat class specific. An athlete who performs well in pairs may not do as well in fours within the same evaluation group. However, like race days, seat racing requires athletes to perform at a given time, and everyone has the same opportunity.

**Subjective evaluations** will be difficult to defend if challenged and may result in appeals. Subjective assessment must be subject to a scoring system criteria. The criteria should be included in the selection document

or be made clear to the athletes prior to the evaluation. Ranking the athletes in these events should be fully documented, including details of their score value for the performance. The selection document that includes subjective evaluations such as effective rowing technique or coachability should require a scoring method, including a description and minimum and maximum ranking values. The selection process aims to evaluate athletes on criteria that produce consistent and repeatable results. As athletes often perform inconsistently.

#### **4.4.3 Coach Input**

Coaches constantly monitor athlete strength and endurance to adjust their training programs or subsidize individual athletes' training.

There is a need to evaluate **athlete compatibility** to ensure selected athletes can develop together. Their individual rowing technique (biomechanical movements) affects their power application and body movements in the boat, which affect hull speed. Compatibility is often overlooked or evaluated as part of team events such as seat racing. Boating athletes with large physical differences may result in limiting opportunities for improvement. For this reason, specifying priority boats may handicap the selection, as all athletes will want to be in the priority boat. During the selection process, coaches try to find the top athletes in all the selection events, but at times, coaches do an injustice by not looking at compatibility to select top crews.

#### **4.4.4 Events Methodology**

Coaches and selectors should hold pre-briefs to explain the event's setup before all selection events. This should happen on the days leading up to the event. The pre-brief will allow athletes to ask questions regarding the event

setup and its details. A second pre-brief just prior to the event will allow a quick review of the process. However, evaluators should avoid discussing post-event plans based on results.

Immediately following the event, there should be a debrief with athletes for review and to provide an opportunity for athlete feedback. This is not the time to share results as the data must be checked, and speculation on the next steps may be premature if the results affect the next steps.

**Recording Data** during the event is critical, along with maintaining original records. Times for racing must include backed-up timers. Records should include a full description of the event and notes taken during the process. These could include weather and water conditions, start times, and boats used. This information will be critical if appeals are received and a great reference for the future.

Coaches must record descriptive notes to support their evaluation scores. Evaluating athletes with subjective criteria may leave the evaluators open to questions and criticism.

Start and finish times must be recorded, and calculations should be checked. Data that is transcribed to a different format, such as watch times to paper, must be checked. The quality of the selection process depends on the quality of the records and notes taken.

Details of the events must be recorded, including date, time, location, equipment, selection process and personnel. If the event is held outside, weather info should be recorded.

Results must be checked, and recorded scores and raw data should be kept for the record. Legibility is critical, and a picture of recorded times may be a good backup. A video of the watch times being checked can serve as a permanent record.

### 4.4.5 Events Results and Analysis

Results of selection events can be by time or numbered score values. Each set of event results must be fully analyzed to identify any anomalies in the data. Scores can be evaluated by ranking them in order or by comparing them to a standard value. Standard values such as Gold Medal Standards (GMS) can be used to rate the athlete's score as a percentage for comparison. Score values can also be compared to the top score in the group, which is rated as a percent. Rating scores as a percent of a standard provide a comparison that may show significant or insignificant performance differences.

A hundredths of a second can determine the difference between the gold and silver medals at a regatta. However, it is almost impossible to repeat the exact same results. During selection events, athletes know that they must perform, and team selection is on the line. Small differences in selection event scores may not be significant for making decisions because results are affected by others. Significant or insignificant value differences should be considered before the event begins. For example, is two-tenths of a second on a two-kilometre ergometer test significant enough to determine which athlete should be moved forward in the selection process?

The coach or selection committee should consider the data that will be collected. Seat racing, in a matrix format, for example, provides times for each crew in each race. The results can include.

- a) The athlete's total overall time from all races if they have rowed equally with all other athletes they are being compared against.
- b) The largest time difference between two crews in a seat race.
- c) The fastest time achieved during all races (this may not consider fatigue or environmental conditions).

**Ranking** athletes based on their score in an event provides an organized list based on performance. Athletes are ranked first, second, third, fourth and so on for the entire group that completed the event. Ranking athletes in order allows selectors an objective basis to move forward in the process. However, ranking scores in order does not fully consider their comparative value.

**Rating** score values compare the results and allow a deeper analysis. Score values measured against a standard provide a value or percentage difference. Comparing athletes' score values may show significant or insignificant differences. Rating based on a percentage of a standard or percentage of the top score should be done whenever possible.

Figure 4.4.5a Ranked and Rated Scores shows five athlete scores on a 2k ergometer event. The athletes' 2k times are shown in the Rank column with the finish order. A more in-depth evaluation involves calculating the scores with a comparator or standard to determine a percentage value. The difference (Diff) column calculated the erg finish time from the fastest time to show a comparative value difference. Further analysis shows the erg times compared to the 2k erg standard of 6:32.0 to calculate a percentage of the standard value.

Analysis of the Percent of Standard values shows that although there is a difference between athletes ranked second and third, their scores are very close.

Figure 4.4.5a Ranked and Rated Scores

Name	2k time	Rank	Diff. *	% Standard Rating **
Carol	6:38.9	1	0.0	98.27%
Jessica	6:47.2	2	8.3	96.27%
Natasha	6:48.3	3	9.4	96.01%
Wendy	6:59.8	4	20.9	93.38%
Cathy	7:04.5	5	25.6	92.34%

\* Note: Diff is calculated from the fastest time

\*\* Note: 2k erg standard is 6:32.0

On-water time trials are often evaluated as a percentage of the Gold Medal Standard (GMS).

The event result values must be fully analyzed before athletes are selected or deselected. Score values with minimal differences should not separate athletes into different groups.

### **Selection by Elimination Events or Aggerate Scores**

The selection process often includes multiple event evaluations, such as ergometer scores and seat-racings, sometimes in different boat classes. Athletes progressing through the selection process may score high and be moved to the next evaluation, or their results may exclude them from further selection events. This process of elimination allows athletes with top scores to progress forward while others with lower scores are deselected or assigned to secondary crews.

Progression through an elimination process is shown in Figure 4.4.5b twelve athletes erg test with the top eight progress to racing in a singles time trial. The top four fastest times from the singles trials progress into a seat racing doubles matrix to determine the fastest double.

Figure 4.4.5b Progression Summary

	2K Score	2k Erg Weight Adjusted			1x Trial		Doubles Matrix	
Name	2k Erg	body weight (kg)	2k erg adjusted	Rk	TOTAL TIME	RANK	2k Erg	Rk
Scott	6:15.2	72.0	05:33.5	1	7:25.65	3	18:12.56	2
Ben	6:45.0	55.0	05:39.1	2	7:29.35	5		
Tom	6:20.0	74.0	05:39.8	3	7:20.26	1	18:09.15	1
Tim	6:26.0	71.0	05:42.0	4	7:27.52	4	18:18.25	4
Jordan	6:34.5	68.0	05:46.2	5	7:22.52	2	18:14.58	3
Frank	6:29.9	72.0	05:46.5	6	7:35.65	6		
Corey	6:32.0	72.0	05:48.4	7	7:40.56	7		
Jordan	6:56.0	62.0	05:57.7	8	7:49.47	8		
Alex	6:53.4	66.0	06:00.4	9				
Jacob	6:42.0	75.0	06:00.5	10				
Bobby	6:49.7	74.0	06:06.4	11				
Mike	6:58.3	73.0	06:12.9	12				

Selection by elimination events offers a direct process to select identified boats. However, deselected athletes early limit the boating options and do not allow athletes a chance to demonstrate their abilities in all events.

Selection by aggregate score involves all athletes being evaluated through multiple events. The results of multiple evaluations can be aggregated, and a total score can be calculated based on points assigned to each event. All athletes have the opportunity to participate in all events, and the final selection is based on the aggregate score.



Figure 4.4.5c Aggregate Scores Summary

	2K Erg Score				SEAT RACING				Results	
	05:50.0	Standard			21:13.6	Standard			SCORE	
	40	point value			60	point value				
Name	2k Erg	RANK	percent of standard	earned points	TOTAL TIME	RANK	percent score	earned points	Total Points	RANK
Scott	06:15.2	1	93.3%	37.31	21:15.35	2	99.9%	59.92	97.23	1
Tom	06:20.0	2	92.1%	36.84	21:20.95	3	99.4%	59.65	96.50	2
Tim	06:26.0	3	90.7%	36.27	21:13.58	1	100.0%	60.00	96.27	3
Frank	06:29.9	4	89.8%	35.91	21:34.25	5	98.4%	59.04	94.95	5
Corey	06:32.0	5	89.3%	35.71	21:43.25	8	97.7%	58.63	94.35	6
Jordan	06:34.5	6	88.7%	35.49	21:23.65	4	99.2%	59.53	95.02	4
Jacob	06:42.0	7	87.1%	34.83	21:38.25	6	98.1%	58.86	93.69	7
Ben	06:45.0	8	86.4%	34.57	21:46.58	9	97.5%	58.48	93.05	8
Bobby	06:49.7	9	85.4%	34.17	21:46.95	10	97.4%	58.47	92.64	9
Alex	06:53.4	10	84.7%	33.87	21:40.85	7	97.9%	58.74	92.61	10
Jordan	06:56.0	11	84.1%	33.65	21:56.29	12	96.8%	58.05	91.71	12
Mike	06:58.3	12	83.7%	33.47	21:49.85	11	97.2%	58.34	91.81	11

#### 4.4.6 Communicating Results

Following evaluation events, once the results are checked, they should be communicated to the athletes as soon as possible. Individual athlete debriefs will provide a private opportunity to review their results and discuss future opportunities.

Where athletes are selected for the next round of event evaluations, individual meetings provide an opportunity for feedback and input. Individual debriefs should be planned to a) ask for athlete feedback, b) share results, c) share analysis, d) share athlete development suggestions, and e) determine future goals and the rowing program for deselected athletes.

Each athlete being deselected from the group must receive an individual debrief. The meeting should include reviewing the athlete's future goals, making recommendations for their development, and determining where they should continue their rowing development. If requested by the athlete, this meeting could include an athlete representative, and it should always include two coaches/selectors.

At times, debriefing deselected athletes before the team is announced may be needed. The data posted prior to debriefing athletes may be scores listed with reference letters but without names. Athletes can see the scores but do not know their own scores until the debrief. This allows athletes to be debriefed with no preconceived ranking.

#### **4.4.7 Selection Complete**

Once the team or crew is selected, all event information should be filed in case of objections or future appeals. When the team or crew is selected, the coach should focus on training and developing speed.