50 ways to Stay Psyched About Winter Training

By Susan Farewell

Ever notice how many rowers spend the first several months of the spring and early summer trying to get back in shape? All too often, once the single gets wrapped up and put away or the ice starts to form on the river, rowers go into hibernation mode. Oh sure, many will work out in the gym a couple days a week or spend weekends skiing, patting themselves on the back just for not gaining weight (even over the holidays). But in order to row well, winter is not a time to rest on your laurels. It's time to really pull out all the stops and work hard.

Following, you'll find 50 tips culled from rowers and various experts from around the country, designed to keep you training no matter how snowed in you may get.

1. Take the time to stretch correctly. Stretching before and after a workout or on its own is an essential part of the training process. An illustrated chart of specific stretches for rowing is available on an 8½" x 11" laminated sheet ($2.00) or wall chart ($4.00 for paper, $8.95 for laminated). Add $1.75 for shipping. The illustrated charts were created by Robert and Jean Anderson, the author and illustrator of Stretching. To order, call 800-333-1397.

2. Do the C.R.A.S.H.-B's and other indoor races. Whether you're the erg king or queen of your club, or you feel the same way about erging as most people feel about taxes, competing on an erg over the winter months is the best thing you can do to improve your rowing if you don't have access to rowing tanks. By doing the indoor racing circuit, you'll force yourself to train. This year's C.R.A.S.H.-B Sprints World Indoor Rowing Championships will be Sunday, February 16 at the Reggie Lewis Track & Athletic Center at Roxbury Community College in Boston. For more information, write: C.R.A.S.H.-B., PO Box 381972, Cambridge, MA 02238 or call 617-431-2306.

(For information all Concept II indoor races, call 800-245-5676 or e-mail: rowing@concept2.com. See also the Concept II web site: http://www.concept2.com and the C.R.A.S.H.-B. web site: http://world.std.com/~gsk/crash-b.html.)

3. Watch instructional videos. There are several good rowing videos on the market. Between Comprehensive Sculling Technique and Advanced Sculling Technique by John Marden, you can learn everything from how to get in a boat to how to rig. The Coursin's Video and The Coursin's Video II were both created by Joe Keeley, author of The Coursin's Manual. These are available through Potomac Rowing (800-477-0440) and The Rower's Bookshelf (800-477-1507). Basic Rowing Technique and How to Improve Rowing Technique is available through USRowing Merchandise (800-769-6382).

4. Don't lose heart. OK, so the season ended on a bad note. You caught a crab and wound up coming in last in the biggest race of the season. We all have our setbacks in rowing. If we didn't, we'd probably get bored very easily. Rather than plunge yourself into despair over losses and letdowns, try to learn from them. With just about every setback comes new information you need. Look at setbacks as opportunities to increase your awareness of what you need to work on. If you have any problem with this, just think of all the Olympic athletes who had to overcome seemingly insurmountable odds to achieve their goals.

5. Join a gym. If your club doesn't have a winter training facility, consider joining one that you can use throughout the winter. Though many have annual memberships, some do offer monthly or seasonal passes. When shopping around for a gym, look for the following:

- See if they have decent ergs and more than just one.
- Make sure the gym's hours coincide with your schedule.
- Check to see that there's adequate parking, day care if necessary, and classes if you're interested.
- Find out if there are saunas, steam rooms and showers (especially if you'll be going straight to the office from your workouts).

Finally, visit the gym at the time you would normally work out so you can see just how busy it is and whether or not you'll spend half your time waiting in line.
Get into winter sports that make you work hard.

- Cross-Country Skiing. If you’ve ever tried the NordicTrack at your gym, you know the aerobic benefits of cross-country skiing. But just as an erg cannot truly simulate the experience of sculling on the water, these machines don’t come close to the real thing. Nothing can match the feeling of gliding over sparkling snow, the cool air on your face, fragrant pines all around. On top of that, it works many of the same muscles you use while rowing and provides as good a workout. Once you master the basics of cross-country, there’s telemarketing, which is like ballroom dancing on the snow, characterized by graceful dips and turns.

There are more than 160 Nordic centers in the United States, plus hundreds of golf courses, parks and recreation areas. To see if you like the sport, consider renting a pair of skis, boots and poles from a local ski shop and then invest in a pair of your own. Generally you can get a package for about $200.


- Snowshoeing. Mention snowshoes and many people automatically picture a dust-covered pair hanging over a big stone fireplace. They’re often thought of as antiques, an old-fashioned mode of transportation through deep snow in the remote northern woods.

Though the classic wood-frame beaver-tail snowshoes held out unchanged for 6,000 years, today, snowshoes are lighter, smaller and tailored for hiking, running and technical climbing. Use them with a pair of poles and work your way up from flat terrain to hilly.

New snowshoes generally start at about $150-200. For information on snowshoe areas, see http://www.xcskiworld.com.

- Ice Skating. Whether you have access to a private lake or pond or you’re joining the masses at Wollman Rink in New York City’s Central Park, this sport is sure to get your heart and legs working hard. Start off with maybe half an hour and increase your time as you feel fit enough.

- Downhill Skiing. We’ve all seen Olympic skiers zooming down hills as if human rockets, seemingly flying over jumps and swerving around hairpin turns. Fortunately, one need not be an Olympic-level skier to experience the excitement that accompanies downhill (also known as alpine) skiing. Even a beginner can learn to glide down a bunny slope, accessing that feeling of freedom and all-out glee that accompanies a good run.

- Snowboarding. Considered the fastest-growing sport on snow, snowboarding is no longer reserved for teenage boys wearing baggy pants. At ski areas all over the country, there are snowboard parks with jumps and handrails to slide down. At many, there are snowboard lessons for all levels. There are also competitions and racing programs. With two edges instead of four to mind, snowboarding is actually easier to learn than skiing.

Have fun on the erg.

A new game published by Concept II is a great winter motivator. Called Voyage to Terra Vlata, it’s a full-color poster featuring a map of some unrowed region in the South Pacific. As a player, you are to make your way from island to island, dealing with all sorts of obstacles including dangerous reefs and tempting treasures. Each segment on the map is equivalent to 5,000 meters. When you reach Terra Vlata, you are awarded a free T-shirt.

The package, which costs $20 for home users (there is a club version for $150) includes the poster, map markers, log sheets, and the promise of a T-shirt for those who complete the trip. For more information, call 800-245-5576.

Put on your walking shoes. Walking is something you can do year-round in all types of weather. To make sure you’re getting a good workout, keep the following in mind:

- Walk briskly, making sure it’s an effort.
- Take quick steps rather than long strides.
- Keep your chin parallel to the ground and let your arms swing at your sides.
- Carry water when walking long distances.

Consider doing some of the organized group walks. Come April (18-22), the March for Parks 1997 will consist of more than 1,000 walks around the country. For details, call the National Parks and Conservation Association at 800-NAT-PARK, ext. 225.

Get your own erg.

If you don’t have access to an erg or you have trouble getting out because of the weather or family obligations, consider investing in one of your own. The latest model (Model C) runs $725 plus shipping (which ranges from $25 to $36). It’s easy to assemble and can be stored in a closet. Once you have an erg at home, you have no excuses.

Get coaching all winter long. Many rowers have regular coaching sessions on the water but find themselves on their own during the cold-weather months. Do yourself a huge favor. If you have a coach, set up sessions where he or she can work with you on the erg and weight circuit. You might also have your coach videotape a couple of your erging sessions and then play them back, pointing out areas you may need to work on.

Monitor your heart rate. You’re puffing and puffing, but are you training in no man’s land? Though you can take your pulse manually, a heart rate monitor automatically does it for you, giving you instant information. How do you use the information to your advantage? For complete heart-rate monitoring guidance, get a copy of The Heart Rate Monitor Book by Sally Edwards.

Creative Health Products offers a free heart rate monitor guide which describes all user-worn monitors, 800-512-4478. For a list of Polar heart rate monitor retailers, call 800-227-1314.
Practice with teammates. If during the on-water season, your crewmates were regularly rowing on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays at 7:30 a.m., plan on keeping those times throughout the winter. Try doing a test erg piece each week together to monitor your progress.

Take an active vacation. Gone are the days when sitting on a beach was the ideal winter vacation. Now, training for an athletic vacation has become somewhat of a trend. You can take your pick of trips including dog-sledding excursions, hut-to-hut cross-country ski treks, and hiking trips (just to name a few). There are hundreds of multisport travel adventure companies including Backroads (800-GO-ACTIVE), Overseas Adventure Travel (800-221-0814), and Outward Bound (800-243-8520). For other companies, see your travel agent.

Rewind the tape. If you taped the rowing events of the summer Olympics in Atlanta, the winter months are a good time to settle in and watch them again. This time, since you know who won, focus on watching techniques. Also consider having a group of rowing friends come over and watch with you, sharing your various observations. (If you forgot to set your VCR last summer, a comprehensive educational video featuring all 14 Olympic finals plus semifinal action and slow-motion analysis of the winning crews and key moments of the races, is available from RegattaSport, 800-567-CREW.)

USRowing merchandise has world championship and Olympic footage as well, 800-760-6382.

Look at yourself naked in the mirror. Chances are, if you cringe when you look at yourself in the mirror, you're not in the shape you should be to win races. If this doesn't appeal, at least get in the habit of weighing yourself daily.

Make sure your steering ability doesn't get rusty. If you're a single sculler or the bow person of a double, it's important to keep your neck flexible throughout the winter. "But it's more than just the neck," explains Ric Ricci, head coach of men's rowing at Connecticut College and assistant director at Craftsby Sculling Center in Craftsbury Common, Vermont. Ric recommends that scullers do the spinal twist. That is the stretch where you sit with one leg straight and bend your other one, crossing it over the straight one. With one hand on the floor and the other over your crossed knee, you gradually turn your head to look over the shoulder (of the same side as the bended leg), rotating your upper body and holding it when you're gone as far as you can. Hold it for at least 15 seconds and then switch to the other leg and side.

"Though a very common stretch," explains Ricci, "when rowers do this, it's very important that they concentrate on sitting on their sit bones and not shift their weight. If you adjust where you put your weight in your boat, that's when you throw off the balance. Think about turning your head from your hips. It's important to have awareness of that spinal connection."

Do your taxes. Have you ever found yourself held hostage in your own home trying to finish your taxes while everybody else is already out on the water? Do yourself a huge favor. Get a jump-start on taxes. You know they are due in April. You should have all the information you need by the end of January. So why wait 'til the weather's nice?

Go south. One sure way to beat the winter doldrums is to flee from winter. Consider signing up for a three-, four-, or seven-day session at the Florida Rowing Center on Lake Wellington. The price (which, unlike everything else in this world, has not gone up since last year) is $275 for the three-day weekend session, $325 for the four-day mid-week session, and $550 for the seven-day program. It includes top-of-the-line coaching (on and off the water), extensive videoaping and playback sessions, and big, bountiful, I-can't-believe-I'm-eating-this-much breakfasts. Rowers are responsible for their own transportation to the area (it's a short drive from Palm Beach), lunch and dinners, and accommodations. The season runs through May 18th. For information, write: Florida Rowing Centers, Inc., 11-40 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10028 or call 212-906-1166.

Keep a log. This is something you should start if you haven't already. Each day, record your workout time, distance, heart rate, comments, and any other information you care to make a note of. Once on the water, you can record weather conditions as well.

Though a good old-fashioned notebook by your bedside is a perfectly easy and convenient way to keep records, I have become a real fan of my electronic log. For more information on available programs, see the March/April issue of American Rowing (Electronic Training Logs, p. 30). Article reprints are free to USRowing members. Call 800-314-4769.
22 Analyze your past workouts. If you’ve been keeping a log, take time to go over past seasons and study your progress. Try to see if there are any patterns in your behavior. For example, do you routinely shut down for the holiday season? Do you start off the summer enthusiastically and then slack off?

23 Make sure you get the essential nutrients you need. Theresa Dale, president of the Wellness Center in Brentwood, Calif., urges rowers to make sure they get enough nutrients in the form of nutritional drinks or vitamins. These include L-Arginine, Choline, Chromium, Glycine, and Taurine, which are all water soluble and are not drugs. “These are very important for building muscles,” she explains.

24 Set goals. Write down your goals, both short-term and long-term, so that you’re working toward something. Plan which indoor races you’ll do and which sprints and head races you’ll do later in the year. Do you want to go for the masters nationals this year? If so, set monthly goals for yourself. Keep in mind that it’s a 1,000-meter distance so your training should be geared for that.

25 Plan your monthly workouts. In the best of all worlds, you should sit down once a month either by yourself, with your coach, or teammates, and write out your monthly workouts. When it comes to erging, be sure to vary your workouts. You might do a long, steady piece (maybe an hour) one day a week, 10 racing starts followed by 10 strokes each another day, and a fast 1,000- or 2,000-meter piece another. Regarding strength training, do your circuits on days that are lighter erg days.

26 Work on strength endurance. “Unlike discus throwers, rowers don’t need to lift and throw an enormous amount of weight in a few seconds,” explains Nicoleta Mantescu, who coached the Romanian single sculler gold medalist in the 1994 world championships. “In a 2,000-meter race, you need to be able to keep up your strength for seven, maybe up to eight minutes.” Mantescu urges rowers to lift less weight and keep track by minutes instead of reps. “The goal should be to be able to lift for seven to eight minutes without stopping.” She recommends lifting at the same cadence you would row. For example, in a single, you’d need to keep a cadence of 30. So when lifting, count 30 strokes per minute. She adds that you should lift weights three times a week.

27 Sleep well. Establishing or maintaining good sleeping habits over the winter can help keep you feeling fit. Try to establish a regular wake-up time each morning, even if the previous night’s sleep wasn’t enough. This time should be kept on weekends. It strengthens circadian cycling and improves sleep.

28 Do everything in moderation. You hear it over and over again. If you do things in moderation, they won’t hurt you. This applies to eating, drinking, and... working out. Take care not to overtrain. Though you may be tempted to work hard, it’s very easy to cross the line and overdo it.

29 Give yourself credit. Doesn’t it seem that the more you work out, the more you think you should? I started rowing weekends only and then added two days during the work week and eventually got up to five days. Before long, it became an everyday thing, and then I began rowing twice a day. Problem was, I still never felt I was doing all I could. It’s so easy to be hard on ourselves when we really should be giving ourselves a good pat on the back. By training through the winter, you’re doing great. Take time out to acknowledge this.

30 Get involved in a club activity. Chances are, there are plenty of things you can do to help out with your rowing club. Over the winter is a good time to get involved. Contact one of your board members or officers and find out about volunteering to help with the annual commodore’s ball, or to write the winter newsletter, or perhaps help with regatta planning.

31 Work on mental strength. One of the nice things about working on mental strength is that you can do it in bed. Two books I feel have really helped with my mental attitude toward my rowing are The New Toughness Training For Sports by James E. Loehr and Preparation for Success: A Boxer’s Guide to Mental Training by Sandra L. Stroope.

32 Don’t take yourself too seriously. Remember the early days when you figured out how to move a boat and before long considered yourself quite the hot shot. You muscled up the river feeling as if you were better than all the other rowers who had been training for years. Ahh, ignorance is bliss. The more you learned, however, and the more races you held up the rear in, the more sober you became. The more serious you got, the less you started to get before races. Though this tension can be good and quite motivating, it can also do you in. Try to lighten up and enjoy rowing and keep in mind that what you do is not who you are. A great book to help you through this is Mike Davenport’s Finding Happiness Sitting on Your Butt Going Backwards.
33 Make a schedule. Get in the habit of figuring out when you're going to work out each day and stick to it. If you work out whenever you get around to it, you may wind up blowing it off altogether. Many rowers maintain that if they work out first thing in the morning, everything else seems to fall into place and they're more inclined to keep up their program.

34 Don't blame others.
"The baby sitter didn't come."
"My boss wanted me to hand a report in."
"I had company for dinner."
It's so easy to blame others for what we don't do. If you make working out a priority, you won't let yourself blame others. You'll take responsibility for it. For the occasions when the baby sitter doesn't come or you do have a strict deadline, try to improvise. Do some stretching at home or take the baby for a walk. Shoot all argyles before admitting defeat.

35 Train with someone slightly better than you.
Though you may always want to be the best, you may not be. By training alongside someone better than you, you can be inspired to improve.

36 Think back. David Johnson, a three-time silver medalist at the 1996 masters nationals has this handy tip: "When you feel like blowing off a day's training, remember how it feels to finish below where you know you could have been at your best."

37 Avoid the nasty habit of negative self talk. If you find yourself accumulating time not spent working out, the negative thinking can have a snowball effect and ultimately really hurt you. Sometimes we go through periods where working out is just out of the question. It may be because we're sick or somebody close to us is sick or we may just be burnt out. Whatever, if this happens to you, don't beat yourself up. Just get back on track as soon as you can.

38 Celebrate! If you're not doing the indoor rowing races, the winter months can be one long wonderful break from races. That's your decision, so enjoy it. You know that when the race season starts up again in the spring, you'll be focused completely. This is not to say you shouldn't train, just enjoy the lack of total regimentation you may have during the season.

39 Strategize on buying a boat. It may be something that's not going to happen for a long time, but you can certainly dream about it. If you have even the slightest interest in owning your own single or double, start doing some research. Ask fellow rowers about their boats; check the ads in the back of American Rowing and on the internet. If it's a matter of saving a certain amount each month to get a boat a year from now, why not work it all out on paper and start putting the money away?

40 Challenge yourself. Sometimes all we have time for is our normal routine. As the winter progresses, however, get in the habit of challenging yourself physically. If you're cross-country skiing three miles a day, add a mile. If you're power walking three miles an hour, try to get up to four.

41 Keep your wrists strong. Dr. Russell Windsor, an orthopedic surgeon and avid rower at the New York Athletic Club, stresses the importance of keeping your wrists strong and flexible over the winter months. He recommends doing wrist curls with weights, three sets of 50 several times a week. Start with your palm up and then do them with your palm down. "This helps keep the wrists strong for feathering."

42 Always be ready to work out. After each workout, repack your workout bag with fresh workouts clothes and towels or whatever else you need and keep it by the front door, ready to go. You might also refill your water bottle and put it in the refrigerator when you come home. That way, you'll have no delays in getting out for your next workout.

43 Plan a triathlon within your club. Kim Lester, a former Trinity College rower, offers a tip she picked up while at school. "Plan a triathlon within your club. It can consist of three miles of cross-country skiing, 10,000 meters of erging, and running one mile uphill."

44 Use your hands when walking. Though walking on its own is a great form of exercise, you can get more mileage out of the time by squeezing putty or some other supple item in your palms. The Eggsercizer is my favorite. The size of a real egg, it strengthens your hands, wrists and forearms. To get an egg of your own, call 800-858-EGGS.

45 Work on your boat. If you have your own single, take the time to spruce it up. At the very least, you should take off the rigging (store in a dry place) and clean out areas where salt or debris may have settled and give it a good overall washing. Replace any nuts and bolts that may have rusted or corroded. Check the shoes and bowball to see if they need to be replaced.

If you have scratches on the hull, you can touch them up with paint that most boat builders will provide. If you have any damage (holes or tears) you're better off fixing them now while your boat is completely dry rather than waiting until you're on the water. Keep in mind, however, that you need a warm environment to work with the epoxy and paint.
keeps your body more limber, not as stiff. "This enhances the performance of muscles," she adds, "Massage therapy is also a release, a letting go. It's relaxing."

**46 Take up another sport.** It the winter sports don't do it for you, try swimming, playing tennis, indoor volleyball, or even fencing. You may find yourself loving your winter sport as much as rowing.

**47 Get periodic massages.** OK, so it's a splurge. But, "the benefits of sports massages are manifold," explains Christina van Duijn, a massage therapist at East West Therapeutic Center in Westport, Conn. "Massage therapy helps circulation, which in turn, helps reduce soreness from training. It also

**48 Do lots of crunches.** Simply put, the more often you do them and the more you do of them, the stronger your abs will be. But there's more to keep in mind. The slower you perform crunches, the more controlled, isolated and effective they will be. It's very important also to lift from the abdominals, being careful not to strain your neck or back.

Chances are, you probably have a favorite crunch, but consider adding a reverse crunch to your routine. Instead of lifting your head and shoulders, you lift your buttocks up towards your chest. Lie on your back with your legs together; lift them up and fold them 90 degrees at the knee. Keeping your arms to your sides and your palms face down, lift only your butt off the floor. Pause and repeat being careful not to push off with your hands or use momentum to pull your legs forward.

**49 Eat healthy fats.** Arnel Lindgren, a nutritionist at the Paradigm Health Institute in Santa Monica, Calif. stresses the need for athletes to re-educate themselves as to what fats are good for you. "Americans look at a bottle of olive oil and see 22% fat, not realizing that less than 1/2 of it is saturated fat, but the rest are polyunsaturated and monounsaturated fats which are very essential for athletes. There are good fats and bad fats."

The bad fatty acids (saturated ones) tend to raise blood cholesterol, thus increasing the risk of heart disease or stroke. The unsaturated ones, especially the monounsaturated fats, such as olive, peanut and canola oils can have a cholesterol-lowering effect. Omega-3 fatty acids, which are considered "good fats" are found in many foods including olive oil, walnuts, canola oil and green leafy vegetables. Omega-6 fatty acids, which are also "good fats" are

**50 Go for it!** Dave Chapman, a member of Brown University's crew, offers this enthusiastic tip: "See just how big you can get. Pump iron until your knuckles bleed. Be an animal! Even if you are a lightweight and put on 15 extra pounds, you will lose it within two/three months of hard training on the water. All that bulk will transform into pure speed."

Susan Farewell, a journalist and author, is a member of the Saugatuck Rowing Association in Westport, Conn.

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