USRowing’s Coaching Education Program
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Agenda
Social and Psychological Aspects of Coaching Rowing

Introduction and Announcements

Goals/Plan

Scenario I
  brief general discussion

Benefits from participating in competitive athletics

Scenario II
  brief general discussion

Scenario III
  brief general discussion

Scenario IV
  brief general discussion

Issues regarding self-concept
Concluding thoughts
Test information
Scenario #1

You are the coach of a fairly strong crew team. You have varsity 8's and novice 8's with a fair number of available quality substitutes waiting in the wings. Your varsity boat looks well set, but you have spent the season juggling the seats for your primary novice boat. Two days before a regional regatta, a freshman male, on the novice boat, comes to you to ask if he can be excused from the regatta. This young man has been a consistent attender in practice and has worked very hard during the entire season. As it turns out, he is probably the best (strongest & most technically proficient) of the members of his boat; and other members of the boat have come to rely on his abilities and leadership. Everyone knows that the team’s success would be hampered by his absence.

The regatta is on a weekend and your entire team must leave early on Friday morning to safely make it to the site. As you question him, you find that he is an excellent student, and his reason for wanting to be excused is so that he can take a test in his History 201 class. He has an “A” average in the course and his professor has told him that “I hate to give makeup exams; I make it a policy that no one earns above a “C” on one of my makeups.” Your team member has chosen his academic needs over his desire to row; forcing his team in general and his boat in particular to be less competitive. What do you do? Do you excuse him with your blessing or do you give him an ultimatum to participate or jeopardize his role on the team?
Scenario #2

You are a coach of a very fine young lady who has been a member of your team since her freshman year. She is now a junior and an integral part of your varsity 8 boat. You know her very well and have had several occasions to get to know her in settings other than rowing (e.g., athletic department receptions for honor students, as a mentor to other students, through leadership meetings on your team, etc.).

It is now two months into the season and you (and others) have noticed that she seems somewhat more detached than you have ever noticed in previous years. She seems to have lost some weight, she looks tired most of the time, activities that used to excite her seem to be unimportant or trivial now. Other teammates have confided in you that she seems sullen and even tearful on occasion. She is not as effective on the boat as she was during the beginning of the season. What do you do? Are you going to talk with her? If so, how do you address what you are about to say? Or, do you just choose to demote her to another boat to try to provoke her into a better frame of mind? What do you think?
Scenario #3

You are a coach of an elite set of rowers, among the top five collegiate teams in the whole country (try to relate if you can). Coming into the season, you had high hopes of a very successful year. However, it has become painfully obvious to you that something about the team is just not quite right, something has not jelled. You have noticed that your very best and strongest (and most heavily recruited) rower is asserting considerable leadership; freely and eagerly directing other rowers (each of whom is a very fine rower in their own right) regarding technique, strength training, and even scheduling practice routines.

At first, this was a very welcome component of your approach to the team, but now the team is performing poorly (compared to expectations) and there is noticeable unhappiness and even a hint of dissension. The team members are serious rowers, but they seem to be brow beaten by this one rower and a bit unhappy about all of her strong willed personality traits. There is no danger that anyone will quit the team; these kids are in love with rowing and are going to stick with the program despite the problem.
Scenario #4

You are an assistant coach working closely with your head coach (or you have an assistant working under you...come on, work with me here) and his style is quite different than yours. He firmly believes that you get the most out of a rower by pressure and by urging with the use of stern, almost cutting remarks. During practice, while in the chase boat, he yells at his rowers. He may pound his fist, urging with phrases like: “Judas Priest, just once I would like to see you move your butt out there,” “Only an idiot takes as long as you to get this right,” “This is the sorriest excuse for a boat I have ever seen, get out of the water and let the next group go.” You observe a consistent pattern of critical, even personal and sarcastic, remarks. Attempts at humor, “if your grandmother’s bridge group were on the boat next to you, they would be three lengths ahead right now,” are said in a manner that is taken as personally derogatory by the rowers.

Similar comments occur during regattas, either through shouting from the shore line or through specific comments made, about the members of the boat on the water, to team members standing around on shore. You have tried to model a different style of coaching, but his behavior remains unchanged.

While your team is quite accomplished and they win many more matches than they lose, you notice a joylessness about the way they interact with each other and with your coach. How do you feel about this? What might you do if you were in such a situation?...as head coach....as an assistant coach? What are some likely consequences for the students?