

**Fairbairns is a long race...a very long race.**

**As a cox, your no.1 job is to make it more exciting**

You've got to trick the crew that it's not just 15 minutes of hard rowing, but lots of more exciting little chunks, with new aims, and a different feel to each one.

**The best way to do this is to split up the race, plan what is going to happen at different points, and explain what you expect from the crew.** And not just explain – really drill it into them in the weeks/outings leading up to the race.

Use landmarks, stretches you've been using for practice pieces, kilometer distances – whatever you can think of. Once you've chosen your points, it's time to big them up – make sure everyone knows how important they are, so that they'll be psyched for them in the race.

They'll know they're important if you:

1. **Write up a race plan** and send it to everyone (Dave/Lizzy will help).
2. **Talk them through the plan.** As a minimum - once a week beforehand, once before you get the boat out on the day, once whilst marshalling.
3. **Run them through the plan.** Whilst you're rowing steady state (warm-up to the lock is perfect), talk them through the key points of the race, and what you expect from them. Even better if you can get them to do some of it. Eg, want a big push off the railway bridge? On the approach, remind them that it's an important part of the race. Tell them there's 50 metres to go and they need to start getting ready for it (getting the rock together, sitting up, whatever you think). 'Firm pressure - Bridge in three, in two, in one, go'
4. **In the race – talk it up.** Give lots of warning that there's something good coming up. Tell them there's 100 metres to go. 50 metres to go. 3 strokes, 2 strokes, 1 – go. You can be very calm and matter of fact to start with, getting more and more eager as it gets closer. Any gumph you can think of – 'we've been planning for this bit of the race, and now it's here for real...let's get ready for it now...etc'. Then personally I really like 'in three...wait for it...in two...not yet...in one...GO!' It's a good trick. All the build up not only takes the pressure off you having to come up with lots more things, but also really psyches everyone up for a big move.
5. Of course, you can **follow it up** too – tell them what a great move it was, how it's that sort of commitment that will win the race – whatever you can think of. (In training, talking through the plan, and in the race itself.) Again, it means you won't have to come up with any great genius on the spot, but will get everyone a lot more excited about what is essentially just a very long row.

## **Rhythm**

For such a long race, it's more important than ever that the boat as a whole has got a good rhythm.

Off the start, the 'rhythm', 'settle' or 'stride' call is the most important one in the whole race. Give warning on it:

'We're at rate [36], we're going to rhythm to [32]. Rhythm in 3, rhythm in 2, rhythm in 1, rhythm – GO. Big on the legs – legs, legs, legs.'

The call needs to have a count-down like this so everyone gets there together, and it needs to be followed up with a legs/power/squeeze call straight away as the rate comes down.

If it does not come down to the rate you want, don't be afraid to call the rhythm again – it's really important that you are at the correct rate.

Say something like 'we've not hit rhythm, we're at [34]. We need [32]. Let's rhythm again – in 3, 2, 1 etc'.

I'd recommend that you spend the first bit of the race (at least up to our boathouse, probably all the way up to Chesterton) cementing a strong rhythm. Talk about moving together – particularly at the rock-over.

If you're stuck for things to say, run through a load of reference points together – for 5 strokes ask everyone to check they're sitting back for the hands away, then the next 5 they're rocking together, the next 5 the seats are moving together, 5 sitting up at the front, 5 sharp catch together etc.

This all takes quite a long time, taking the pressure off you having to come up with things, but is also really useful at this point in the race as it's good for the rhythm.

Just one thing on this – do be careful that the power doesn't drop off. Might have to remind everyone...

Later in the race as everyone gets tired, every now and then, remind them to rock together, and to roll the seat out to full length. These 2 things are good for rhythm.

## **More than one race...**

Often people split up Fairbairns into more than one race in their plan.

Eg, Jesus to Chesterton is called 'race 1 – rhythm'

Chesterton to Ditton is called 'race 2 – race track'

Ditton to the finish is called 'race 3 – bumps piece'

Or, Jesus to Railway Bridge 'race 1 – rhythm'

Railway Bridge to finish 'race 2 – 2k race'

Whatever it is, you should really **big up the start of each 'new race'**.

As with landmarks, give lots of warning they're coming up. 'In 100m, in 50 m, in 3,2,1'. Fill in some of the gaps by saying how well you think the last race went, how well you've set up for this new one.

It's then worth having some sort of faux-start routine that's similar in structure to your proper start. Probably won't want winds, and possibly no rhythm...

Eg, Real start: Draw x 3  
Wind x 5  
Lengthen x 5  
Rhythm in 3,2,1  
Legs

new/fake start: Draw x 3  
Spin the hands x 5  
Roll the seat out to full length x 5  
Legs in 3,2,1  
Legs

This will only work if you explain it as part of your plan, and practice it in pieces. But it's worth it I promise!

## Steering

On the bits of river we don't normally race on:

Under the footbridge we cycle over to get to the boathouse – stay right. There's some strange wiggling under the next (road) bridge. Stay right and then aim for the sticky-out corner on the left just before the road bridge – then aim for the corner on the right just after the bridge. This gives the straightest line possible.



So this is not the clearest picture...

Leading up to Chesterton footbridge – stay left. Then aim for the corner on the right.



If anything this one is even worse!

The rest should all be fine!

## **Other things**

It's cold! And there's a long wait marshalling with no chance to get out of the boat. Don't get there excessively early. Try and find the space blankets in the may room and dish them out for the wait.

Don't worry about always having something to say. You needn't (and probably shouldn't!) be talking the whole time. The most important thing is that the structure of the race comes across in what you say, and that everyone is focusing on the same stuff at the same time when it comes to pushes and rhythm. That doesn't mean you've got to say something on every stroke.

If you've got any questions, want ideas for specific calls or anything, feel free to email me at [ejhopkinson@googlemail.com](mailto:ejhopkinson@googlemail.com). I'm around this weekend too if you want to talk things through before the race.