

Rigging for the Individual

Rigging for the individual is best explained when it is split into two sections: one focused on the comfort and efficient positioning of the individual; and the second, on rigging an individual to conform to the majority of the crew. Sometimes of course both problems affect individual crew members.

With school programs we are often faced with athletes who cover a broad range of size, shape and strength and whilst it can be seen as a problem by some, I think it's this fresh challenge each year that keeps us motivated and determined to do the best we can with what we have. This in itself provides great experience and a good base for many coaches who start out in the school system and move on to National and International positions. As a starting point we can assume that most schools now own boats that are suitably sized for the crews that row them, as many problems can be seen with crews using equipment that is not suitable. However we still have situations where boats are passed down the line and certain changes may need to be made to help the new users. {mospagebreak title=Heel Heights} We also know that with the size difference we often have to work with, a uniform set up is not going to suit all the crew. Boat builders aim to produce a product that suits most users but it is unusual to have fittings that are perfect for everyone. We should always aim to set out with a rig of our choice and deviate as little as possible from it to aid our desire to produce uniformity of movement within the crew. The first most obvious problem is heel heights as incorrect settings can cause a number of technical problems in the stroke and personal discomfort to the rower. Combined with setting the correct stretcher angle, this is one of the most satisfying adjustments a coach can make for the athlete. As adjustment is not always easy out on the water for the coach to control, notes or video should be made and corrections made back at the boat shed. As a general rule girls' heel heights range from 14 to 17 cm below the seat, but cases of 12 and 20cm can occur. Stretcher angle would normally be between 38 to 42 degrees for girls. For boys heel heights of 17 to 20 are usual and stretcher angle of 40 to 42 degrees. Sometimes adjustments need to be made that go outside of the working range of the standard adjustments if we want to be more exacting, but this brings with it some associated problems. {mospagebreak title=Seat Height} We also often encounter rowers with very long or short bodies where the normal rig height set for the crew does not suit them. Whilst raising or lowering the height washers can take care of this to some degree, we are then moving away from our norm and a simple removal or addition of a seat packer has a far better effect on the uniform movement of the crew. Once we have the individuals set up comfortably and in an efficient position we can then look to position the rowers to have the crew moving through the same arc or "in phase" to maximise the peak power impulse at the same point of the stroke. Firstly we look to see if poor technique is the reason for different stroke lengths as much bigger changes can generally be made to the rower than with changes to the rigging. Small changes can be made with an alteration to the inboard of the oar and larger changes made with a combination of span and inboard and overall oar length. With the introduction of adjustable length oars the job of achieving uniform arcs and loading for your crews is much easier than in the past. Trial and error and use of a video camera, particularly from an overhead position will soon show the changes you have made. Getting your crews rowing well together obviously has a positive effect on boat speed but not to be underestimated is the pride and positive mental effect crews pick up from video replay and comments from peers and supporters, especially at this early stage of their rowing careers. As coaches you will all have your own views on how adjustments and crews should look but we should not lose sight of the fact that what the blades are doing is more important than a pretty looking crew. At a more senior level where rowers and more particularly scullers, often come together to form composite National crews, we see almost perfect blade work if that's what you focus on but also often unusual individual positioning or movements if you focus only on the movements of the body. Obviously the coach has worked on positive and effective blade work and not been preoccupied with individual styles of the rowers.

This article was first presented by Stuart Wilson (General Manager) at a VIS Coaching Seminar held in early September 2005.