

It is the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of school when your son/daughter calls home with the news: "Hey Mom! Hey Dad! Guess what? I joined the rowing team! I'm going to do crew! Cool, huh?"

Do you have any idea what they are talking about? Well, hopefully after reading this guide you will know much more about this fantastic sport.

**"The oldest collegiate sport in America is all about glory, pain, and sweaty shirts"**

### Rowing 101

Commonly referred to as Rowing or Crew, it is one of the oldest sports in the world. Like many sports, rowing has practical roots as a method of transportation. As newer modes of transport developed, rowing changed course and became a competitive sport with a wide following. Today this amateur sport is a part of many high schools and colleges throughout the United States and Europe. It is even an Olympic event. The Harvard-Yale race, first held in 1852, is the oldest inter-collegiate athletic event in America, and continues to this day.

Rowing is a demanding sport requiring strong core balance as well as physical strength and cardiovascular endurance. As well as physical strength and stamina, rowing provides unique opportunities to work both individually and as part of a precision team.

While rowing, the athletes sit in the boat facing backwards (towards the stern), and use the oars which are held in place by the oarlocks to propel the boat forward (towards the bow). The number of rowers in a boat varies – individual, pair, four & eight events.

Rowing may be done on a river, lake, sea, or other large body of water. In the case of GVSU crew, we train on the Grand River which provides a 26 mile stretch of protected water with ideal river levels. Our training program is focused on development throughout the year with an increased level of intensity during spring in order to enable our athletes to reach their peak performance during our championship regattas in May.

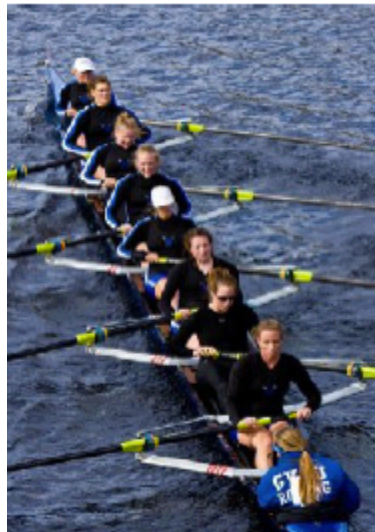
### Sweep vs. Sculling

SWEEP - ONE oar/rower  
SCULLING - TWO oars/rower

There are two forms of rowing – Sweep and sculling.

In sweep, or sweep-oar rowing, each rower has one oar, held with both hands. This type of rowing can be done in pairs, fours and eights. Each rower in a sweep boat is referred to as either a "port" or "starboard", depending on which side of the boat the rower's oar is on. In most sweep boats, there is a seat for the coxswain, or cox, who steers the boat.

In sculling each rower has two oars (or sculls), one in each hand. Sculling is usually done without a coxswain, in quads, doubles or singles. The oar in the sculler's right hand is the port oar, and the oar in the left hand is called the starboard oar.



### The Equipment

Rowing boats, or shells, are thin with a special fiberglass, carbon or wooden laminated exterior structure just 3/23rds of an inch thick over a framework. An eight person boat is about 60ft long and weighs about 200 lbs. Cost: \$35,000!

Sweep oars are 12 ft. long, while sculls are 9.5 ft long. The blades, the surface of the oars, are painted in university colors and help identify the crews as they come down the race course.

### Positions

The seats in a boat are numbered from bow to stern. Therefore, in an "eight", the person sitting closest to the bow is number 1 (bow seat), while the person sitting closest to the stern and the coxswain, is number 8 (stroke seat). From here the coxswain steers and communicates race strategy to the rest of the crew through a microphone system and is considered the "brains" of the operation. The person in stroke seat dictates the stroke rate (strokes per minute), or the pace of the boat. This person often has a great sense of rhythm, rows technically well and is very competitive.

Rowing is the ultimate team sport; it takes 9 people working together to make a boat go as fast as possible down the race course. There are no "MVPs" in rowing!



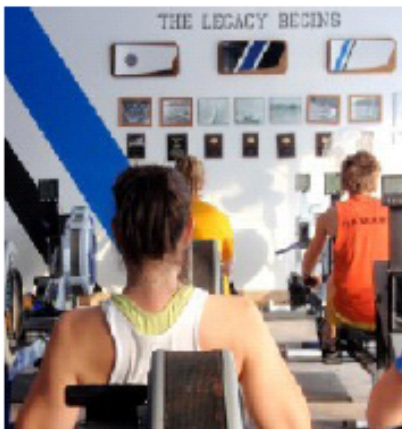
### The Rowing Stroke

The rowing stroke incorporates all the major muscle groups in the body – legs, back, and arms. Each part of the stroke involves the sequential overlap of these major muscle groups. The legs are much more involved in the stroke than most people realize. The legs account for about 70% of the power in the rowing stroke. Rowing is a very physically demanding sport that requires power, endurance, balance, control and rhythm.

### **Training**

Rowing is a strength-endurance sport. We practice six days a week for two hours each day. Weather permitting, we are in boats on the water. Alternatively, we have the Rowing training Center (RTC), across from the University entrance on Lake Michigan Avenue, that houses 36 ergometers (erg or ergo), indoor rowing machines. While there is no substitute for taking strokes on the water in a boat, these machines allow us to simulate the rowing stroke while it gives feedback about how hard the rower is pulling. In the winter, the majority of our training is done at the RTC.

Periodically, we will do testing on the ergs to monitor our training efforts. For a test piece, there is a set distance or time that rowers try to complete as quickly as possible. These tests are important because they show the coaches the rower's fitness level and power. When it comes to boat selection for a race, erg test scores are looked at when determining who will be in what boat for a race. However, it is not the only tool that the coaches use for boat selection. Others include rowing technique, work ethic, and attitude.



### **Racing**

In the Fall, the races are about 3 miles long and crews race AGAINST the CLOCK. Boats are lined up – parade style – and sent across the start line at full speed in 10-20 second intervals. This is called a “HEAD RACE”.

In the Spring, we have our big championship regattas. Each race is a 2000 meter SPRINT, six boats across, ALL starting from a standstill. The first boat to cross the finish line, wins. This is the rowing you see during the Olympics.

#### What Happens on Race Day?

Regattas are much like track meets with events scheduled throughout the day. Depending on the size of the regatta, there could be heats, semi-finals, and finals for each event or just certain events based on the number of entries. On the schedules, race times are listed but crews often have to launch from the dock to warm-up anywhere from 30 – 40 minutes before their scheduled race time. We ask the athletes to meet at the trailer 90 minutes before race time. During the regatta we ask that the trailer is kept as an “Athletes Only Zone”. The time before a crew launches is used to prepare and focus for their race. Similarly, after a race, coaches will usually like to talk with the crew about how everything went on the water. During these times, we ask that you please stay away from the trailer.

You will have plenty of time to talk and visit with your son or daughter on regatta day. We often have a tent set up where the rowers, along with their families, hang out, eat, and socialize during down time between races.

**Grand Valley Rowing challenges its student-athletes to reach the highest level to which they aspire both academically and athletically, while continuing to build and sustain a nationally competitive intercollegiate rowing program.**



about \$1,000, which includes dues, training trips, races, travel and clothing.

**A:** All novice rowers travel and race in fall regattas (East Lansing – Head of the Grand; Indy - Head of the Eagle; Frostbite Regatta (usually South Bend).

check frequently for updated schedules, information, News articles, etc.

### Frequently Asked Questions

**Q: “My son or daughter has never rowed before. Does that matter?”**

**A:** No, not at all! More than 90% of our team members have not rowed prior to attending GVSU. Our team’s competitiveness is built entirely on the efforts of walk-on athletes. Most of our athletes have some form of athletic background, be it track, swimming, football, soccer, basketball, volleyball, or cross-country. Anyone who is interested is encouraged to learn the sport.

**Q: “When are your practices?”**

**A:** For first year rowers- novices – practices will all be in the afternoon. Even if a rower has prior rowing experience, they will most likely start on the novice team and may have the opportunity to move up to the varsity team. Practice is mandatory if you wish to remain part of the team.

**Q: “Are there dues? All in all, how much does rowing cost?”**

**A:** Yes. As a club we are responsible for our own budget and raise this money through dues and fundraising by the athletes. Rowers pay each semester, but have the opportunity to work it off through the Rent-A Rower program. The Rent-a-Rower program is where we as rowers are hired to help out in all sorts of ways, such as game security, snow shoveling, heavy lifting, gardening, etc. The program is utilized throughout the community and on campus. Rowers are responsible for paying a total of \$295/semester. Rowers have the option of paying the entire sum, paying part of it and working part of it off, or working off the entire payment through the Rent-a-Rower program. An entire year costs

**Q: “I’m worried about my son or daughter having enough time to study. Will this interfere?”**

**A:** One of the really important things that rowing will help your child learn is the importance of good study habits. Rowers very quickly learn how to maximize time and prioritize as the student learns to structure his/her day to include working out, class time and studying. Being a student-athlete is definitely challenging in ways that it isn’t in high school; it may require some sacrifice of TV time or just “hanging out doing nothing in particular”. Welcome to the real world. Good grades are very achievable with the right approach. Student-Athletes usually have some of the highest GPAs as they learn very good time management.

**Q: “Do you miss a lot of class time for travel?”**

**A:** In the entire year, the rowers may miss 2-3 days at the varsity level while novice rowers will miss one day. They will occur in the spring, and students are expected to make the necessary arrangements with their professors.

**Q: “What clothing/apparel is necessary and when is it ordered? Is any of it included in the fee? What if Mom wants a sweatshirt?”**

**A:** Every novice gets a pair of black spandex and a blue racing shirt. Other clothes are available to be ordered (sweatshirts, JLs, sweatpants, etc. for both athletes and parents.

**Q: “When will my son/daughter know which events they are rowing in so we can decide whether we can go watch or not? Which regattas are you participating in during the Fall season?”**

**Q: “If you go to any events out of town (South Bend, for instance) what costs are covered and what costs are not – hotel, food, transportation, etc.?”**

**A:** Housing/transport is covered in the fall dues.

**Q: “Is the spring break trip/training something that novices as well as varsity rowers go to? How much does it cost?”**

**A:** Everyone travels for the Spring Training trip and only those selected go to Florida during winter break. Spring break costs between \$250-\$350, which includes travel, hotel, two meals/day, dock fees, etc.

**Q: “As a parent, how can I help the rowing program?”**

**A:** You can help with a monetary donation via the donation form in our newsletter, *The Crewthorn*. For regattas, we ask all parents to provide food or cash donations to go towards the regatta food fund.

**For more information, you can visit the following Rowing websites:**

(some may also have professional photos from the larger regattas that can be purchased online)

[www.row2k.com](http://www.row2k.com)

<http://www.usrowing.org/index.aspx>  
- US Rowing

[www.regattacentral.com](http://www.regattacentral.com)  
- Regatta Central

GVSU Rowing  
[www.grandvalleyrowing.com](http://www.grandvalleyrowing.com)



**The coaching staff would like to welcome you to GVSU crew and thank you in advance for your support.**

If you have any other questions, feel free to contact us at any time.

Sincerely,

John Bancheri  
Head Coach & Director of Rowing Men and Women  
616-331-2369, Office  
[bancherj@gvsu.edu](mailto:bancherj@gvsu.edu)  
[Rowing@gvsu.edu](mailto:Rowing@gvsu.edu)

Lisa Saladino  
Varsity Assistant Coach  
[lisa.m.saladino@gmail.com](mailto:lisa.m.saladino@gmail.com)

Kelsey Arnold  
Assistant Women’s Coach  
[arnokels@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:arnokels@mail.gvsu.edu)

Geoff Sadek  
Assistant Men’s Coach  
[sadekg@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:sadekg@mail.gvsu.edu)

Tyler Sellmer  
Facilities Coordinator



## A Rower's Perspective...

### Rowing Terminology

**Coxswain** (cox, coxie) The small-statured person who is charged with steering the larger boats (4s, 8s). They will be seated in the stern of the 8 and in the bow of the 4. They also make various calls over the race; perhaps calling a burst, and maintaining the stroke rate of the crew.

**Cox-box** – microphone/voice amplifier system for the coxswain.

**Sweep** – Each rower controls ONE oar

**Sculling** – Each rower controls TWO oars.

**Head Race** – a typical Fall race; staggered start; rowers race against the clock. Course is about 5 k (3.1 miles). Winding course.

**Sprint race** – typically, a Spring race. 2k (1.25 miles); Boats line up evenly at the start line, and race directly against each other. Usually a straight course.

**Catching a crab** – A rowing error where the rower is unable to timely remove or release the oar blade from the water and the oar blade acts as a brake on the boat until it is removed from the water. This results in slowing the boat down. Occasionally, in a severe crab, the oar handle will knock the rower flat and end up behind him/her, in which case it is referred to as an 'over-the-head crab.'

**Stroke rate** – The number of strokes taken per minute. For a Fall race this could be between 26 (novice) to 36 (varsity crews). In Spring, could be between 32 to 40 for any crew.

**Straight** – how the coxies are supposed to steer.

**Lightweight** – Class of rower, who in some cases will be in a race with other lightweight crews. For men, the boat must average 155 lbs., max. 160 lbs. For women, they must average 135 lbs.

**Erg** – **Ergometer** – Indoor rowing machines

**Betting Shirts** – In collegiate competition, men's teams sometimes "bet" their shirts on the race, and the loser must render a racing shirt with their logo on it to the winner.

Traditionally, this was done as the boats were pulled together right after the race ended and shirts were exchanged, but it is now usually done off the water. Because women's crew is governed by the NCAA, which forbids betting on athletic events, shirt betting is usually only done by men's crews. The term can refer to either the practice or the shirt itself; some crews have shirts made specifically for betting so as to keep their racing jerseys should they lose a race.

**Repechage** - The "second chance" race given to those crews which fail to qualify for the finals from an opening heat. "Rep"

qualifiers move onto semi-finals or finals

depending on the number of entries.

**8+** refers to boat of eight rowers plus coxswain

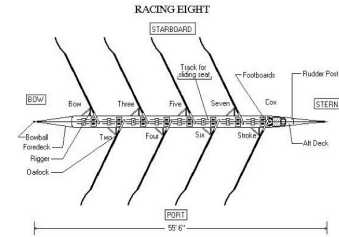
**4-** refers to boat of four rowers – no coxswain

### Regatta Food

There is a delicate balance involving ideal food before races. We love brownies and cupcakes and puppy chow. However, we are also nationally competitive collegiate athletes who need fuel and not just sugar. No one can agree exactly upon the formula for combating this contradiction, so here is the best we can do:

The more serious the race, the more serious the food. At early races like Lubbers or various scrimmages, bring on the Kool-aid and hot dogs. They make us happy. But the more intense the races become (SIRA, Knecht Cup, Vails, ACRA, MACRA) the more athletes appreciate food that is geared toward highly competitive athletic situations.

Chicken sandwiches  
Bagels  
Fruit (especially bananas)  
Veggie Trays  
Clif / Power bars  
Gatorade  
Pasta Salad



**"Seat Personalities"** : a humorous approach to who rows where in the boat, well-known in the rowing world...and usually true. (author, Mike Sullivan – summarized...)

**Cox:** It's pretty obvious what traits a cox must adopt...to learn to do a good job in this most unique position... They can't drive a car anymore. They take 10 miles to change a lane, oversteer, can't find the brakes, and yell to the car a lot. ...Coxes also begin to squint a lot. No loss in vision, they just squint.

**Stroke:** "It's a tough job, but only I can do it". The meekest, most frightened non-rower in the world. When plugged reluctantly in the stroke seat, stays meek up until the first few strokes. Back on the shore, the real personality will percolate back to the surface. 'I hope you guys could follow me ok'. In the boat they're thinking: 'stop rushing, you weenies!' Strokes are born and made to be the most competitive person in the boat by far, and if they stroke long enough, become overly competitive in everything they pursue...The only one that can beat him to the chow line is the Three man (more later) because the stroke was delayed trying to put more oars away in the rack than anyone else.

**Seven:** You could teach Mother Teresa to row in a tank, stick her in a boat at Seven seat for the first time, and as the stern Four is rowing away from the dock, she'll turn around and yell at the bow Four to set the boat. The longer one rows at Seven, the more sophisticated and complex the complaining becomes, changing from a crude verbal rowing suggestion to the Six man in the early stages to long-winded treatises after every piece.

**Six:** If you bred Arnold Swartzenaggar with a Golden Retriever, you get a Six. Six is Seven's yin. The gentle giant. Six absorbs most of Seven's complaining and keeps it from moving through to the rest of the crew. Six nods and agrees a lot... Sixes marry, go to work for, and lend their power tools to Sevens.

**Five:** God. Yahweh. Allah. Buddah. It's not that Five IS those things, it's just that's how Five gets treated. They're the older brothers/sisters that get special treatment, and have no idea. If a photo is taken of the crew, Five will look great; everyone else is caught with shirttails out...

**Four:** The Amnesia seat. Take a genius with photographic memory. Row said genius at Four. Listen to him ask for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in the same warm-up 'How many of these 500s are we doing?' Four is not stupid; just has immediate and catastrophic memory loss.

**Three:** Late in the water. Late to practice. Late to class. Late to work. Late out on the water. Late to his date. Late to the team bus. Late for everything except the chow line.

**Two:** Cheerleader. It's amazing to sit at Four and Five after a particular piece – Seven is whining about the balance, the spacing, no swing, rushing – and Two is back there with pom poms saying ALL RIGHT GUYS! LETS DO THAT AGAIN!

**Bow:** The Bow seat creates a strange fatalism. ...in a catastrophic situation, they know they'll be the only one to die or get paralyzed. Consequently there is a constant quiet stream of one-liners that Two or Three could probably hear if Two were not cheering so loudly. Otherwise, someone is likely to hear the Bow joke about Three being late, Five not pulling hard, or the coxswain's course looking like a signature...you're sure to catch a chuckle if you listen.

### **Visiting With Us (your Children) at a Regatta**

Don't count on being able to spend too much time with us at a regatta. Oftentimes, we are sequestered before a race, to focus on what we need to do on the water.

Regattas are the reason we train so unreasonably hard all year round, and are not social events for us, particularly the larger ones in the Spring (Dad Vail , ACRA). Generally after a competitive race, we will be exhausted beyond all reason and (we hope happy, but) sometimes upset. Since regattas are held in open venues and lack the locker room customary to other sports, the privacy for conversation between athletes and coaches immediately post-race is ultimately a matter of patience and respect on the part of spectators. Rowers are usually also responsible for de-rigging their boat almost immediately after their race.

The best rule of thumb for seeing an athlete after a race, regardless of the outcome, is to hang back and let us come to you. We will.

As for photography, we LOVE having pictures of us looking intense while racing, biceps bulging, walking on Purdue. It's the only way we can remember our lineups from four years ago and how ripped we looked. We'll put them on Facebook. However, the best rule for taking pictures is "Out of sight, out of mind". We like the photos, but we don't like being reminded that we're being photographed, especially fresh off the water or trying to focus before the race. Maybe invest in a telefoto lens or be sneaky. We'll appreciate it and thank you later.

### **Who We Are and How You Can Help**

Grand Valley Rowing is a largely student-run organization. Since we operate as a club, we do not receive the same funding from the University (although they are very supportive) that varsity sports have: no scholarships, no free travel, no free team apparel. Thus GVSU rowers are required to pay rather hefty dues to be a part of the program, and we rely heavily upon support from parents, alumni and donors to operate and continue our nationally competitive level.

Since a racing shell costs roughly the same as a car and we regularly transport 90+ athletes across the country – our bottle/can drives, Rent-a-Rower jobs, like snow shoveling, rummage sales and spaghetti dinners can only do so much. Many rowers work one or two jobs in addition to taking classes and rowing time.

If you can help financially,

- a. we will love you forever.
- b. Please visit our website and make a donation to Grand Valley Rowing

If you bring food,

Rowers are always hungry. As a general rule, there is a 30minute window following strenuous athletic activity to restore glycogen levels. Translation: we've gotta eat right after heats to avoid death in the semi-finals.

As college athletes, we have mostly surpassed the phase of being embarrassed by our parents' presence at our events. Mostly. Having a core of support at regattas makes even races 14 hours away from home feel more like home. And there's nothing like hearing the roar of cheering and "GV - SU, GV - SU" as we surge past the 750 mark. If you can make it to regattas, you can be a tremendous asset to coaches and athletes. And if we hear you cheering, we go faster! Please feel free to come to races and yell for us and learn about the sport to which we have chosen to dedicate so much time and effort and sweat.

### **The Events**

Events are divided into two categories: lightweight and open.

Race times can vary considerably depending upon the course and weather conditions. Tailwinds will improve times, while headwinds and crosswinds will hamper them.

If a crew "catches a crab," it means the oarblade has entered the water at an angle instead of perpendicularly. The oarblade gets caught under the surface and will slow or even stop a shell.

A "Power 10" is a call by the coxswain for 10 of the crew's best, most powerful strokes. Good coxswains read the course to know how many strokes remain for their crew to count down to the finish.

Crews are identified by their oarblade design. You can identify a crew by the college colors on their oarblade.

It doesn't matter whether you win an Olympic medal or don't make the finals – each crew still carries their boat back to the rack.

Coxswains from first-place boats worldwide are thrown into the water by their crews.

### **Sculling and Sweep Rowing**

Sweep rowers come in pairs with a coxswain (2+) and pairs without (2-), fours with a coxswain (4+) and fours without (4-) and the eight (8+), which always carries a coxswain. The eight is the fastest boat on the water. A world-level men's eight is capable of moving almost 14 miles per hour.

The pairs and fours with coxswain are sometimes the hardest to recognize because of where the coxswain is sitting. Although the coxswain is almost always facing the rowers in an eight, in pairs and fours the coxswain may be facing the rowers in the stern or looking down the course, lying down in the bow, where he or she is difficult to see.

Athletes are identified by their seat in the boat. The athlete in bow is seat No. 1. That's the person who crosses the finish line first (which makes it easy to remember – first across the line is No. 1 seat). The person in front of the bow is No. 2, then No. 3, No. 4, No. 5, No. 6, No. 7 and No. 8, a.k.a. the stroke. The stroke of the boat must be a strong rower with excellent technique, since the stroke sets the rhythm and number of

strokes per minute the rest of the crew must follow.

PARENTS...

### **What to Bring?**

Dress in layers. Be prepared for rain. Bring a **folding chair, binoculars, camera sunglasses, sunscreen** for those warm?, sunny? days.

### **Good rule of thumb: plan for bad weather and hope for sunshine!**

Snacks and beverages help as well. Some events have food vendors; some do not.

PLEASE HELP US OUT AND PROVIDE YOUR EMAIL, so we can keep in touch with you!

If you can sign up to bring a Food item, please contact the Parent Food Tent Coordinator.

If you cannot attend, you can send in a check as a donation for food, and receive a letter from the University for tax purposes.

Make check payable to:

GVSU ROWING  
"Donation" on memo line

(include a **separate** note: "Food Tent", dues, trip fees and rower's name)

THANK YOU!!

### **Race-Watching Tips**