

# CAN-DO ROWERS

## PARA-COACHING TIPS

BY BRITISH ROWING ROWABILITY PROJECT OFFICERS **KATHERINE MORRIS** AND **MADDIE MILLICHAP**

### A – Physical disability

- 1 Medical screening is key.
- 2 Ask questions – do not presume.
- 3 Everyone is different. Two individuals may present with the same condition, such as MS, yet they may have very different functional ability.
- 4 Pressure sores – cover any sharp edges that the athlete may come into contact with.
- 5 Have a risk assessment and recovery drill in place.
- 6 Watch out for fatigue and weather changes, as athletes with a spinal cord injury or amputation have difficulty regulating body temperature.

For more tips look out for details of the 'Coaching rowers with a physical disability' workshops on [www.britishrowing.org](http://www.britishrowing.org)

### B – Visual impairment

- 1 Always identify yourself to someone with a visual impairment, ask how much sight they have and offer to guide them.
- 2 Allow for orientation.
- 3 Use indoor equipment – a tank or mock-up boat.
- 4 Adaptions may be made to the equipment. Keep instructions simple.

### C – Hearing impairment

- 1 Check their communication preference.
- 2 Allow for orientation.
- 3 Use indoor equipment – a tank or mock-up boat.
- 4 Have a plan in place. For instance, how will you attract the athlete's attention when on the water?

### D – Learning impairment

- 1 Hold short sessions; provide structure and repetition.
- 2 Keep instructions short and concise.
- 3 Allow time for a rower to respond to coaching.
- 4 Break tasks down so they are sequential with attainable goals.
- 5 Identify the athlete's best learning style.
- 6 Provide positive feedback.
- 7 Work on what people can do.

## GET IN TOUCH...

You can get in touch with Katherine Morris (East of England) and Maddie Millichap (West of England) at [katherine.morris@britishrowing.org](mailto:katherine.morris@britishrowing.org) and [maddie.millichap@britishrowing.org](mailto:maddie.millichap@britishrowing.org) – or visit [www.britishrowing.org/taking-part/rowability](http://www.britishrowing.org/taking-part/rowability)



In a new series on para-rowing, **Martin Gough** visits Guildford

RC to find out how they started a Rowability group

PHOTOS: **DON SOMNER**

**W**hen rowing became a Paralympic sport in 2008, there were very few opportunities for people with disabilities in the United Kingdom to try the sport. By 2013, more than 50 clubs offered facilities for para-rowing, and that number is still growing.

In the last year, almost 300 people became involved for the first time in what is now known as 'Rowability' – participation in the sport for anyone who has a physical, sensory or learning impairment. So if your club is interested in getting involved, where do you start?

Guildford is well established and is a great model for any club just starting out. Robert Hall coordinates a team of volunteers supporting 12 or so rowers taking to the water each week, on Friday mornings and Sunday afternoons.

The club was home to Helene Raynsford and Vicki Hansford, who both won Paralympic medals in Beijing five years ago, but the programme has become more embedded at the club over the last four years or so.

**“We set it up as sport for all – competing is less important than having fun”**

They have links with Tedworth House and Headley Court – recovery centres for servicemen and women injured on duty – and with a local multiple sclerosis therapy group.

“We set it up as sport for all – competing is less important than having fun,” says Robert

“I had a British Rowing Instructors Award and I learnt on the job. It was not that difficult and I don't think it's any different from teaching any other novice or junior beginners, although there is a maximum level of disability we can cope with because of lifting issues.”



Robert Hall, far left, has been coordinating the Rowability programme at Guildford RC for almost five years

If rowing is almost the same, though, there are more challenges surrounding logistics: the practicalities of boating, the equipment needed and extra safety and staffing considerations.

Guildford RC is on the River Wey, which is narrow, seldom hit by bad weather and allows boating straight from the bank, rather than having to negotiate beaches, ramps or pontoons.

Vice-captain Claire Dean has been around more than four years, having started on a rowing machine at the Samson Centre, a local multiple sclerosis (MS) therapy group.

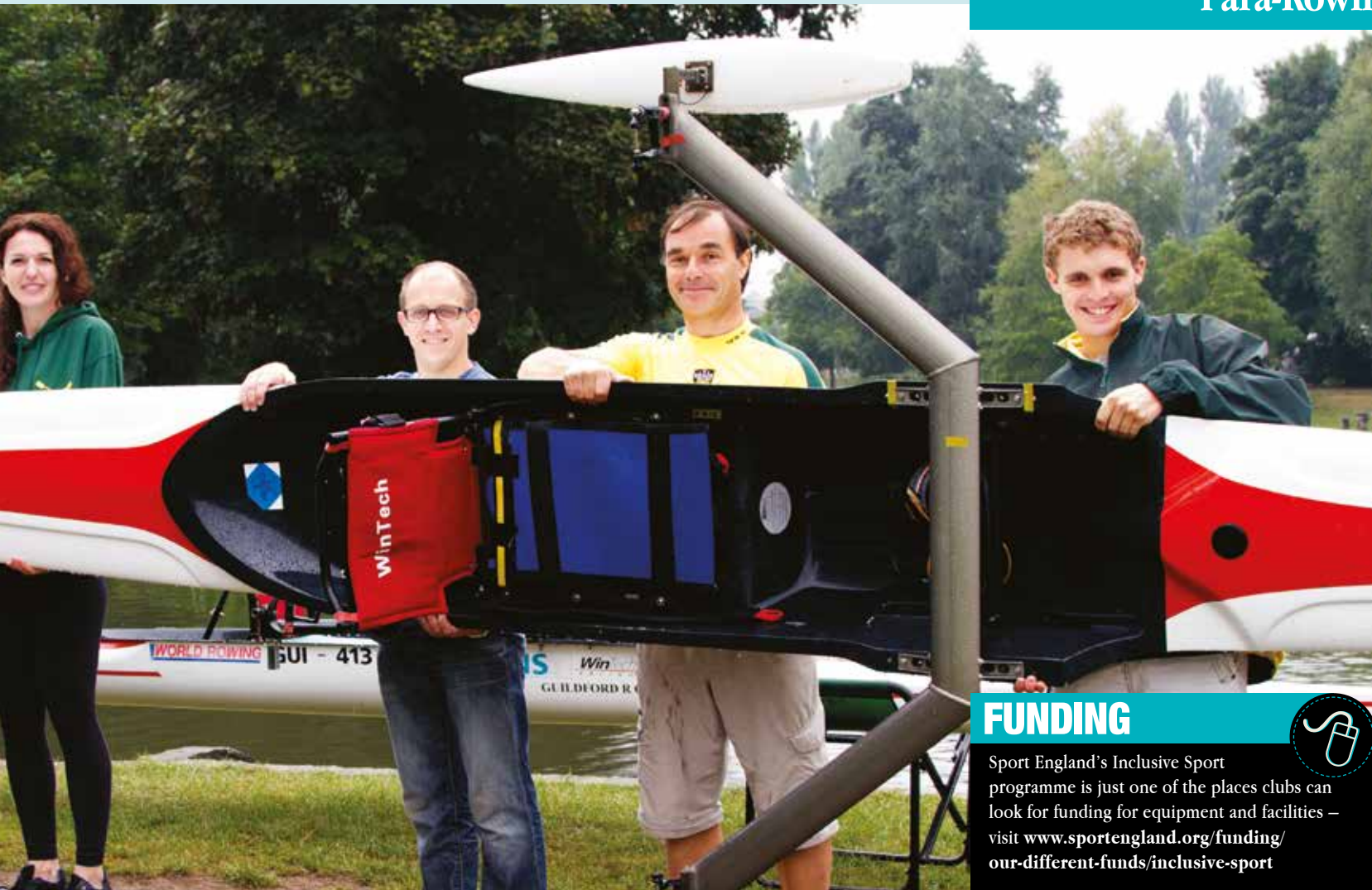
“I'm in my wheelchair on dry land but when I get on the water it's complete freedom,” she says.

“I'm getting way more out of it than I ever expected I would.”

Each crew is supported by a volunteer who cycles on the bank along the 1300m stretch, with a throw bag to hand. They are able to deal with capsizes but do not see them as a particular problem.

Robert realised early on that experience in rowing was not necessary for all those helping out at Guildford, and found support after he put a poster in a local volunteer centre.

“You don't need to be a rower to help people



## FUNDING



Sport England's Inclusive Sport programme is just one of the places clubs can look for funding for equipment and facilities – visit [www.sportengland.org/funding/our-different-funds/inclusive-sport](http://www.sportengland.org/funding/our-different-funds/inclusive-sport)

on and off the water or to set up a boat. We have one extremely good coach who doesn't have a rowing background."

Of the three classifications of disability, the one with least impairment, known as 'Legs, Trunk and Arms' (LTA) means rowers are able to use standard rowing equipment, so any club is already on its way.

While there are standard designs for other boats, each athlete is unique and this is particularly true if they have vastly differing disabilities.

"There is a lot of satisfaction about getting the right thing to work," says Robert. "One of our guys with a severe disability could hardly hold an oar so we used a double gate and fixed his blade square. Everyone has their seating different."

Several of Guildford RC's boats were bought from national teams after each Paralympic Games. Their names reflect donations from a cluster of

sponsors, who have combined to provide £15-20,000. For instance, a double scull is named RoboCop after grants from the Rowing Foundation and the Co-operative Community Fund. The Rowability section runs without any further funding from the rest of the club.

"Equipment is the easiest sell to any charity, and I make sure charities see what we have done with their money," says Robert.

Maddie Millichap, one of British Rowing's two project officers for the scheme, believes finding funding is one of the key challenges for clubs looking to introduce Rowability. She and colleague Katherine Morris each focus on 10 clubs a year.

"Clubs come to us and we can look at facilities and give advice on which levels of disability they might be able to offer rowing for," says Maddie.

"We want to help make each club sustainable, build a volunteer base, attract new members and find its own funding."

Rowability focuses on the grassroots of the sport but there is no reason that those taking up the sport in clubs could not represent their country at the highest level.

Nick Beighton – an Army captain who lost his legs after stepping on a roadside explosive in Afghanistan – learned the finer points of the sport at Guildford before going through trials to gain a place in the team to compete at the London 2012 Paralympics.

Robert Hall describes Beighton's success as the "icing on the cake" for Guildford. Yet as he looks for the volunteers to allow the programme to expand, the Rowability ethos of involvement for all clearly underpins the club's work. □



Guildford's vice-captain Claire Dean was one of the first members of the club's Rowability programme



Mark Sinclair, who has multiple sclerosis, moved into a fine single scull a few months ago



Rory Mackenzie was a member of the Row2Recovery crew who crossed the Atlantic in 2012