

Rowing and growing



Carrying the launch - one of many chores for your average junior rower...



Maintaining the right loading and control in the kinetic chain is important for all rowers. But for junior rowers, there are specific issues to bear in mind, advises **Mark Edgar**, Head of Medical Services for the GB Rowing Team

There is an ever-increasing perception that our children are doing less physical activity. Rowing is an ideal sport for both sexes to engage in for good physical engagement and for fun.

When children and young teenagers are involved in rowing there are a number of issues for coaches, parents, and the juniors themselves to be aware of. This article is not meant to be a doctrine, but rather to offer some ideas and suggestions that parents, coaches and rowers can take into account when looking at the teenage, adolescent or younger rower. Some of the topics discussed may also apply to other levels of rowing and rowing training.

While we don't have too many rowers in

the under-12 age group, it is worth bearing in mind that young girls have their first and main growth spurt from 12 to 15 years and a second spurt from 17 to 19 years. On the other hand the boys begin both stages a bit later, starting from 13 to 16 and 18 to 20-odd. Of course there are variations to these norms as we can see just from looking around the boatshed.

During these growth spurts the obvious size and shape changes take place in each of the respective sexes. With regards to rowing, the increased height of a junior will often also bring a loss of coordination and more inflexibility as the long bones grow first or quicker than the associated soft tissue. Muscle bulking will follow later.

Because of this time delay and variation, different rowers will need to have their training adapted to their own particular body. Of course this is not possible in all situations but here are a few examples for reference:

- A tall, gangly rower who cannot achieve the desired postures in the rowing boat would probably progress faster if they include flexibility and core work in the programme. On the other hand, it is not a good idea for a long, uncoordinated frame to pull heavy weights as this may lead to injury.
- A rower who has finished a growth spurt and has started to bulk up may not be

Bewdley Regatta



PHOTO: SIMON WAY

going to grow further. At this point selected weights (resistance) training could take place, provided that the rower can achieve the position and posture in the boat that the coach requires.

- A hyper-flexible rower may need to do more stabilisation and core work. They should be careful not to overload flexible, but poorly controlled, joints by using too much resistance or weights that are too heavy.

Keeping to the subject of loading, in our sport loading is obviously important in producing the power to propel a boat forward. In general terms rowers are very good at training their legs, and indeed these are the prime movers in the boat. Most rowers usually succeed in training their arms with a variety of bench pulls etc. However, historically, they tended to be less good at trunk strengthening and the core although there has been a huge change in this over the last few seasons. So perhaps we are still not good at making sure that the combination of the above - the 'kinetic chain' - is as strong as it could be.

In short, the coach should be looking at the kinetic chain when deciding what emphasis to place on a rower's training programme. It is important to bear the following in mind:

- If the rower is inflexible then flexibility exercises should be incorporated.
- If the rower is collapsing during the power

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phase then accurate coaching will be required to address this specific problem - trunk and core exercises may be helpful.

- If the rower is weak in the legs or arms or has a coordination issue then perhaps resistance exercises are required, including some weight training.

But before I progress to weights let's consider a few things we expect our youngsters to do in an average week...

- Ride their bikes around the park.

How much and how often?



How much should juniors train and how many times a week? What do you think the answer is to these common questions? The GB Rowing Team have recently published advice on 'How much training and how often?' - check it out on www.britishrowing.org Plus, look out for more information on junior training in R&R.

- Carry a bag of books to, from and around school.
- Help carry the coaching boat and engine down to then up from the river / lake.
- Get the oldest and probably heaviest boat from the most difficult racking position in the club - the top ranked club crew probably has the best rack and the lightest boat.

Resistance training also - but not exclusively - includes weights, power strokes and some circuit / trunk / core exercises.

Weights are an excellent idea with which to teach youngsters how to correctly load when doing any - and every - exercise. They can do weights with anything from a broom handle and a couple of plywood discs through to an Olympic bar with some metal discs on the end. What is essential is that the lifts or actual exercise is taught correctly.

The resistance level must be appropriate for the rower and reflect their ability to apply that amount of load to the oar or scull handle. The overall aim is to have the appropriate level of loading and control through the whole of the kinetic chain. ▀



Lending a hand at the Schools' Head

Be body aware



Getting the most out of your rowing isn't just about choosing the appropriate training programme or exercises. It's also about taking care of every aspect of your wellbeing. **Wendy Martinson**, Lead Nutritionist for the GB Rowing Team, gives five tips for a balanced daily regime

- 1 Always have breakfast before training and eat at least five fruit / vegetables per day.
- 2 Following training take some form of carbohydrate snack or drink.
- 3 Make sure you stay hydrated and drink fluids during training.
- 4 Have calcium rich foods for bone growth - include three portions of dairy per day.
- 5 Make sure you have enough rest so you can recover properly before the next training session.