

STAGE 2 PARTICIPATE, DEVELOP, CHALLENGE

TABLE OF CONTENT

About this stage	Page 2
Athlete	Page 2
Participate	Page 3
Develop	Page 4
Challenge	Page 6
Strength Training	Page 6
Additional Resources.....	Page 7
The Next Stage.....	Page 7

ABOUT THIS STAGE

Chronological Age: 10-18

Target Audience: Youth and Recreational Junior

Stage 2 exists for middle school rowers and junior rowers who participate in a recreational or community rowing program. The middle school rower may choose to enter Stage 3 around age 13 with enrollment in a high school or junior rowing program, or the rower may stay in Stage 2 and row for recreation and social community as primary goals. Middle school athletes are still in a participatory and developmental stage of development, even if they intend to be competitive later on. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should focus on providing a positive athletic environment focused on participation opportunities, development of athletic and social skills, and productive personal challenge for the individual athletes.

Stage 2 rowers who develop a love for the sport, basic techniques, and have the desire and opportunity to pursue competitive rowing will do so in Stage 3, or even in Stage 4. Early athletic success means little for future competitive success, especially in a sport with a long development arc like rowing. Stage 2 rowers who remain Stage 2 rowers through high school will graduate into Stage 5 “Row for Life” as masters rowers or otherwise still engaged with rowing.

There is overlap in chronological age between Stage 1 and Stage 2. This is due to the natural variance in timing and rate of development among athletes. A middle school rower with competitive aspirations might participate in an appropriate Stage 2 training starting as early as age 10 and shift to Stage 3 as early as age 13. This is especially true for females, who in general develop earlier and more rapidly than males until around age 13. However, it is important to note that early development has no bearing on an athlete’s ability to reach an elite level of performance as an adult. Athletes who enter Stage 2 at age 12 or 13 do not have a lower potential relative to athletes who entered Stage 2 at an earlier chronological age.

ATHLETE

UNDERSTAND RULES AND TECHNIQUES OF THE SPORT

Rowing has a relatively long list of prerequisite skills and knowledge necessary to participate safely and effectively when compared to other sports. This includes knowing how to navigate variously designated waterways and what to do in the case of an emergency. It is critical that all athletes [watch the USRowing safety video](#) and are educated on their clubs specific emergency procedures.

Stage 2 rowers should also learn basic technique (stroke techniques and the use of legs, back, and arms sequencing) and know the different phases of the stroke cycle (catch, drive, release, recovery).

COMPETE AT A LEVEL AND FREQUENCY THAT MATCHES SKILL AND INTEREST

The desire to compete is not inherent to all rowers and is not a prerequisite for participation in the sport. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers must understand the motivations of the rowers they coach and plan competitive opportunities accordingly. Stage 2 exists as the introduction for middle school athletes with future competitive aspirations in rowing, as well as the community or recreational junior rowing program through high school. Coaches should prioritize skills and development over competing or preparing to compete. If used, competitions should be a way for athletes to test and apply their skills in a fun and exciting way.

Understand the impact on performance due to different maturation rates. Rowing presents a challenge for the “late-bloomer” athlete who grows and develops later, as a sport that prioritizes muscular strength, aerobic endurance, and height or limb length above other athletic qualities. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers need to understand that early competitive success is not a predictor of future competitive success, and should provide as many participatory opportunities as possible to keep Stage 2 rowers involved with rowing. The use of intense erg tests, strictly ranking rowers by speed or ability, and differentiating athletes into competitive set lineups restricts participatory opportunities and does not fit with Stage 2 rowing.

PARTICIPATE

PARTICIPATING IN SPORTS TO BE SUCCESSFUL AND HAVE FUN

Rowing can be a thoroughly enjoyable and deeply rewarding experience independent of any competitive component. The main goal of Stage 2 rowing is to participate in rowing for personal enjoyment, success, and development of future abilities. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should make every effort to create a space to enjoy the sport, where competition is not a primary driver in program design and decision-making.

FOCUS ON ENJOYING TIME PLAYING, AS WELL AS THE HEALTHY BENEFITS OF SPORT PARTICIPATION

Emphasize and celebrate individual athletic development and improvement of rowing skill and performance. Minimize comparison to other athletes, such as comparing Stage 2 rowers to arbitrary erg performance standards (eg. the 7-minute for men or 8-minute for women) or ranking athletes within a boathouse.

PARTICIPATE IN MULTIPLE SPORTS FOR CONTINUED MOTOR AND PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT

Stage 2 rowers should continue to participate in multiple sports, avoiding specializing in rowing. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers can integrate ball sports and other skill activities from the athletic motor skill competencies (AMSC) for coordination during land training. See Stage 1 for AMSC details.

Encourage participation in other sports during non-rowing seasons, both through verbal encouragement and by creating training structures that make it possible for athletes to participate in multiple sports. For example, coaches of Stage 2 rowers should not use ergometer tests in the early phase of a season to evaluate athletes. This indirectly punishes athletes who do not row or erg during the off-season and rewards those who specialize more year-round. This can be demotivating and is inappropriate for the Stage 2 development.

PARTICIPATE IN A FUN, STRUCTURED AND ONGOING TRAINING PROGRAM (AS OPPOSED TO PARTICIPATING IN "OPEN GYM")

Strength and conditioning training offers benefit to Stage 2 rowers as a form of physical education, rather than competitive preparation or performance training. While "open gym" was appropriate for free play style training in Stage 1, Stage 2 rowers will likely need more instruction and structure for a safe and effective strength training environment. Teach and provide ongoing supervision and instruction for any strength training activities. Consider contracting a certified strength coach or training or certifying one within your organization. See below for more information about strength training with junior Stage 2 rowers.

DEVELOP

Coaches can think of development from the perspective of five main pillars: physical, psychological, social, technical, and tactical.

PHYSICAL

Core movement fundamentals, increasing requirements for speed, agility, balance, endurance, strength and coordination.

Stage 2 rowers build on the very general motor coordination elements of Stage 1 with greater emphasis on basic athletic movement patterns within and outside of the sport of rowing. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers can use land training time for instruction of core movement fundamentals from general categories push, pull, squat, hinge, and trunk stability exercises. Master unloaded movement before progressing to external loading, and continue to emphasize fun and diverse movements, not "grind" in reps, load, or specificity. The on-

land warmup is an opportunity for physical skill development. See below for more information about strength training with junior Stage 2 rowers.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIAL

Interpersonal skills, teamwork, communication skills and adapting to the growing challenges of sport development.

Psychological: Stage 2 rowers should be gradually introduced to more personally challenging situations, including possibly competitive opportunities, guided by a coach to teach good mental skills. Stage 2 rowers who intend to move on to competitive rowing in Stage 3, as well as Stage 2 rowers who are participating in rowing for personal development, will benefit from early positive, formative experiences.

Social: Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should teach through activities how to be a good teammate and create a positive team culture, how to communicate with coaches, how to appreciate and respect other teams, volunteers, officials, and others involved in rowing, and how to process challenges and recognize failure as natural part of personal growth.

TECHNICAL SKILLS

Identify personal strengths and areas to improve with a continued emphasis on proper movement mechanics

Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should teach the ability to discuss and evaluate individual rowing using a general technical framework, including bladework, stroke length, drive/recovery sequencing, posture, balance, and other factors. Coaches should provide opportunities for the athlete to track and observe technical improvements to build confidence in rowing and beyond.

TACTICAL

Practice appropriate time to emphasize team and individual skill application.

Team boat rowing can be a challenge for young athletes to learn to manage personal skill development and the intense teamwork required of rowing. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should embrace this challenge as a major benefit of Stage 2 rowing, teaching many lessons for future rowing and life beyond.

CHALLENGE

CHALLENGES SHOULD BE SUBSTANTIVE, YET WITHIN THE PHYSICAL AND MENTAL REACH OF THE ATHLETES

While continuous rowing is productive on its own for many Stage 2 rowers, drills become potentially beneficial as athlete skills improve and learners require greater attention on specific parts of the stroke cycle. Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should start with simple drills,

such as [pause drills](#), [placement drills](#) and “rusties,” and [more](#). Master these drills with a reduced number of rowers before going to more complex drills or trying to perform the drill with the full boat. Challenges can also include semi-competitive activities besides racing, such as rowing the slowest rate, rowing with the best technique, and using the fewest strokes over a certain distance.

RECREATIONAL COMPETITION AT THE LOCAL/REGIONAL LEVEL

Stage 2 rowers with interest in competition may compete at the local or regional level. This includes non-2km regattas, such as 500m sprints, 1km races, and head races, as well as local scrimmages and “for fun” events like ergometer relays, three-minute races, and more. Coaches with suitable equipment and number of rowers can also design buoyed obstacle courses or skill exhibitions at their home waterway, without needing to travel to compete.

COMPETITION IN A WIDE SPECTRUM OF VARIETY

Competition should include “individual vs. previous best” or “group vs. challenge,” not just “peer vs peer.”

Coaches of Stage 2 rowers should also include tracking personal records, best time trial results for each age group or squad, improvement in the boat, on the erg, and in any land-training metrics, social skill improvement, and whole-team collaborative challenges like completing an erg piece in relay format in a certain amount of time (eg. 10k in 40'). Rowers may pursue more traditional competitive opportunities in Stage 3 if they desire.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Although not competitively focused, Stage 2 rowers can still benefit from basic strength training as a form of “advanced physical education.” Strength training is helpful for the development of early Stage 2 rowers who wish to be competitive and move to Stage 3 at age 13. Strength training is also for the Stage 2 recreational junior rower as a form of lifelong recreational physical activity for personal fitness. We can use a structured gym or the boathouse environment to teach basic movements, begin personal skill development, and introduce more physical challenges to athletes.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[PDF: USRowing “Guide to Middle School Rowing” \(2020\)](#)

There is overlap in age between Stage 1 and Stage 2. Many of the concepts from Stage 1 apply to early Stage 2 as well. The USRowing “Guide to Middle School Rowing” addresses key concepts in detail and outlines many activities and practical suggestions for coaches of young rowers.

See webinar below from the 2022 “Chasing Excellence” rowing conference: Coach Manny Valentin breaks down middle school recruitment, program management tips, and how to make rowing a positive and fun athletic experience for youth and recreational rowers.

Website: “How to Coach Kids”

This website outlines key resources and suggestions for general athlete development in the youth audience. This organization is co-created by the USOC and Nike, with support from the Aspen Institute “Project Play.”

Website: “Changing the Game Project”

This is a resource for parents and coaches of young athletes.

Webinar: The Coach’s Role in Creating Healthy Parent Involvement

This is a webinar from USRowing’s 2021 Convention, presented by Dr. Travis Dorsch of the Department of Human Development and Family Studies at Utah State University. Viewers will learn how to utilizing the “Quality Parenting Framework” to facilitate appropriate parent involvement.

THE NEXT STAGE

Stage 2 has the most flexible next-stage destinations of the non-linear ADM. A Stage 2 athlete may go to Stage 3 after age 13, such as the middle school rower who wishes to join a competitive high school program. A Stage 2 athlete may also spend all of high school in Stage 2 and then go directly to Stage 4, such as the talented late-bloomer who enjoys rowing in high school and finds a walk-on opportunity in college or in the national team pathway. Finally, a Stage 2 rower can also graduate high school and go to Stage 5 as a mentor (coach, official, etc.) or masters rower.

Stage 3, “Train and Compete.”

Stage 4, “Perform and Excel.”

Stage 5, “Row for Life.”

**If you have additional questions please
contact Chris.Chase@usrowing.org**