

STAGE 3 TRAIN AND COMPETE

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ABOUT THIS STAGE

Chronological Age: 13-19

Target Audience: Competitive Junior

Stage 3 starts when a teenage athlete decides to further advance their athletic ability and rowing performance potential by seeking out greater challenges and competitive opportunities. Rowers may begin rowing in Stage 3 for the first time, without considering Stage 1 or Stage 2 as a prerequisite. Stage 1 serves as the general introduction to sports, water and the outdoors, and perhaps early rowing ability for children with access to age-appropriate rowing equipment. Stage 2 exists for middle school rowers with competitive aspirations to begin basic rowing training, as well as for all teenage rowers who wish to participate in rowing for personal development and challenge, such as in the context of a community or recreational junior rowing program. Stage 3 overlaps in age with the high school age of Stage 2, but differs in personal athlete motivation. Stage 3 rowers participate in a competitive rowing program with an emphasis on training, racing, and developing for future competitive rowing performance.

Training should come in a wide variety of forms and develop the athletes' technical, tactical, physical, and psychosocial abilities. Athletes should be encouraged to explore their limits during training sessions and seek failure as a means of growth. Competitions should be framed primarily as learning opportunities, paired with a performance curriculum that includes nutrition, sports psychology, and other elements of holistic performance.

Rowers in the early years of Stage 3 (age 13-15) should not participate in a heavy regatta schedule, due to the disruptive impact that regattas and travel can have on training and skill development. Instead, we recommend at-home skills exhibitions, recurring time trials, and local competitions, perhaps including USRowing regionals as the substantial competitive experience of the year. Rowers in the later years of Stage 3 (age 16-19) should participate in appropriately challenging races and regattas for motivation, challenge, and improving competitive ability. This should include regional regattas, such as those within a 3-hour driving distance, and potentially select national-level regattas. Rowers with the desire and ability to compete at the national and international level will do so in Stage 4, beginning at age 17.

ATHLETE

BEGIN TO FOCUS ON PARTICULAR SPORTS

Stage 3 rowers may do another sport in the non-rowing season(s), or athletes may choose to specialize in rowing at this stage. Stage 3 rowers should not attempt to do two sports in a single season, as the training workload will be too high to maximize performance while in-season, and risk of burnout or injury will increase from trying to manage both sports.

USE MULTI-SPORT PLAY FOR CROSS-SPORT DEVELOPMENT

Coaches of Stage 3 rowers may continue to use multi-sport play to supplement rowing and further develop all aspects of athletic ability. For example, using sports like Ultimate Frisbee or soccer during a land training day offers effective cardiovascular training, different athletic participation, and an enjoyable social setting. Stage 3 rowers may also participate in other sports for enjoyment or to complement rowing-specific training. For example, cross-country skiing in the winter off-season season or cycling during the summer off-season season both offer ways of improving endurance, physical fitness, and enjoyment of other forms of training besides rowing and erging.

PARTICIPATE IN A FUN, STRUCTURED AND ONGOING TRAINING PROGRAM

Fun: Coaches should recognize the need for fun throughout the season. Opportunities for fun are necessary for social development and effective as a form of recovery/rejuvenation. It can be in small quantities on a daily or weekly basis to fill free time if a team has completed all the prescribed work ahead of schedule. Alternatively, entire events or sessions can be dedicated to fun as a means of developing a team identity or de-stressing after a prolonged period of training.

Structured: Coaches of Stage 3 rowers need to plan practices and training sessions ahead of time. Identify priority races ahead of time, and communicate to athletes the role of earlier races in developing racing ability. Rowers should clearly understand the technical model.

Ongoing: Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should continue to develop training plans as athletes age, progress, and increase capacity for training. Days should build into weeks, weeks into months, months into seasons, and seasons into years.

UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE DUE TO DIFFERENT MATURATION RATES

Stage 3 rowers may range from age 13-19. This can include female rowers in the late stages of puberty, male rowers in the early stages of puberty, and post-pubertal rowers. Rowing presents a challenge for the “late-bloomer” as a sport that prioritizes muscular strength, aerobic endurance, and height or limb length above other athletic qualities. See more in the strength training information below about developmental growth and athletic training.

Coaches of Stage 3 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 early Stage 3 rowers involved with rowing. If used, intense erg tests, strictly ranking rowers by speed or ability, and differentiating athletes into competitive set lineups is appropriate for late Stage 3 only, and only when communicated thoroughly and implemented thoughtfully by coaches in alignment with the rest of the rowing program and goals.

TRAIN

SEEK OPPORTUNITIES TO FURTHER DEVELOP SKILLS

Daily challenges such as completing a difficult drill or rowing a new boat class should be regular and frequent. We encourage coaches to get creative and build challenges that are unique to their specific training environments. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers may use more advanced drills and technical sessions than in Stage 2, given the greater age and competitive focus of the athletes. Consider ways to provide detailed and improvement-oriented assessments, of technical proficiency as well as physiology, to track individual athlete improvement. For example, providing technical rubrics that score various aspects of the stroke from 1 to 5 to each athlete along with utilizing video review to provide examples. The tone of any formal critique should be positive and come with clearly defined steps for improvement.

Rowing-specific testing such as a [Jensen test](#) may be implemented with athletes mature enough to handle several days of testing. For younger athletes, erg pieces can be used in conjunction with more generalized fitness assessments such as 5km runs or time trials in a single if consistent water conditions are available. Without guidance, athletes can begin to fixate on these assessments and begin to view them as a competition unto themselves and experience unnecessarily high levels of stress as a result. Coaches should be careful to frame any assessments they administer as training tools, and clearly delineate between training assessments and lineup selection processes.

FOCUSED TRAINING THROUGH COACHING

A major purpose of Stage 3 is teaching young, developing athletes how to train and compete. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers are responsible for teaching the “what,” which is to say the skills and abilities, as well as the “how and why,” or the athlete’s approach to development. This is a vital foundation for future success in Stage 4 “Perform and Excel,” as athletes must have experience with training and competing, success and frustration, and an appreciation for the long-term process of development as a rower. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should develop, clearly communicate, and instruct a consistent technical model of stroke performance. Teach rowers to be comfortable discussing technique during video review and in pre/post-practice meetings.

FOLLOW A CONSISTENT TRAINING SCHEDULE

Stage 3 rowers should use an annual training plan, dividing the year of training into smaller blocks of time or phases of training, with specific focus goals for each one. This is broadly the definition of periodization. There are [different ideas and methods regarding periodization in endurance sports](#) and in rowing. The consistent idea is that we do not try to

train every athletic quality to peak performance simultaneously, or overtraining, burnout, and/or injury is likely to occur. A periodized training plan takes into account different phases of training over the year, including modifications for multi-sport athletes, seeking to selectively develop certain athletic qualities while maintaining others, for the goal of long-term performance improvement.

INCREASE SPORT-SPECIFIC TRAINING

Stage 3 rowers should do specific training to target major goals of improving aerobic capacity, VO2 max, cardiovascular endurance, anaerobic fitness, and strength. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should learn these different elements of performance and the kind of training to elicit these results, then plan training sessions in advance to achieve these major goals over a week, month, season, and year of training according to their periodized plan.

Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should introduce a model of training intensity distribution to guide aerobic and anaerobic training. This could be as basic as a three-zone model with low-intensity training, middle-intensity training, and high-intensity training, or more complex models like the USRowing six-zone model (See USRowing Level 2 Manual/Curriculum).

EMPHASIZE COMPETITION SKILLS

Stage 3 rowers should learn specific skills of racing performance, including race planning, starts, pacing, sprints, and passing, specific to the parameters of each race they enter.

UTILIZE MORE SPORT-SCIENCE RELATED INFORMATION SUCH AS NUTRITION AND SPORT PSYCHOLOGY

Part of teaching Stage 3 rowers how to train and compete includes the use of additional skills and knowledge beyond just rowing and erging. As athletes develop and increase their capacity for training, additional skills are necessary to sustain and facilitate the adaptation process. This includes rowing-specific nutritional guidance to keep the body appropriately fueled, sports psychology to help manage stress that may accompany training and competing at a higher level, and more. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers may bring in experts from these fields and more, either on an occasional basis (ie. clinics and workshops) or as support staff for the rowing program.

PARTICIPATE IN DEVELOPMENT CAMPS

USRowing offers development camps and other events for a variety of rowers in Stage 3. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should be aware of state, regional, and national opportunities, and encourage rowers to participate in these events as appropriate to their individual level and desires. This includes talent identification camps, such as the [U19 National Team ID Camps](#). The [Olympic Development Program \(ODP\)](#) is a USRowing program to help develop talented young rowers into future national-level rowers. Participation in these programs is not required for future success in rowing. USRowing has designed these opportunities for

young rowers to experience different coaching, learn from new resources, and socially connect with rowers from other geographical areas.

COMPETE

COMPETE IN MORE CHALLENGING SITUATIONS

Stage 3 rowers should gain experience in more challenging competitive situations. This can include different race formats, such as head races, as well as standard 2km racing against competition of a greater level. Coaches of Stage 3 rowers should continue to introduce, communicate, and guide rowers through these competitions so that they are motivating in victory or defeat and contribute to long-term development.

IMPROVE SKILLS AT THE LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND/OR NATIONAL LEVELS

Stage 3 rowers should learn how to compete on different waterways, in different regions, and against different competitors. This is important from a rowing and racing perspective, as well as for teaching competitive skills for future racing, such as personal preparation, travel management, nutrition on-the-road, navigating warm-up areas, and more.

STRENGTH TRAINING

Stage 3 rowers learn how to strength train and develop specific physical qualities that contribute to rowing performance and long-term athlete development. Stage 3 rowers will develop beyond the basic low-intensity “open gym” or boathouse environment and will need structured strength training to further challenge themselves. While strength training is more optional and recreationally focused in Stage 1 and Stage 2, it is crucial in Stage 3 to improve rowing performance, reduce risk of rowing injuries, and prepare for Stage 4.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[The USOPC Quality Coaching Framework](#) is a document that outlines an overarching set of principles that is designed to inform how to coach most effectively. This is a six-chapter free PDF that applies across sports, focusing on athlete-centered outcomes of competence, confidence, character, and connection.

[Presentation Slides: Training Young Athletes \(PDF\)](#)

This presentation by Chris Chase (USRowing, Saratoga Rowing Association) outlines approaches for young rowers including the first year of high school. See the slides for information on long-term athlete development, practice plan snapshots, and more resources to guide development.

Webinar: “The Art and Science of Coaching Young Women” (2021)

This is a free webinar by Sport New Zealand. The article includes additional information about physical and physiological changes during puberty for young women, and provides suggestions for coaches and parents to support and train appropriately. [Direct link to webinar here.](#)

USRowing Webinars Page

USRowing has a huge amount of educational webinars available to members, including replays of prior USRowing Convention events, replays from the 2020 Daily Webinar series, and more. Access webinars via the member portal.

THE NEXT STAGE

Stage 3 rowers may move to Stage 4 after age 17. Stage 4 exists for competitive high school seniors, collegiate rowers, and high-performance rowers in the national team system. A Stage 3 rower can also graduate high school and go to Stage 5 as a mentor (coach, official, etc.) or masters rower.

Go to Stage 4, “Perform and Excel.”

Go to Stage 5, “Row for Life.”

**If you have additional questions please
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