

STAGE 4 PERFORM AND EXCEL

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ABOUT THIS STAGE

Chronological Age: 17+

Target Audience: Competitive High School Senior, Collegiate, Post-Collegiate High-Performance

Stage 4 rowers are those who choose to focus on rowing for high performance and increased competition. Stage 4 is characterized by developmentally mature athletes, a higher training load, and training with the specific goal of succeeding at the highest competitive levels of rowing.

Stage 4 can begin as early as age 17, for a high school junior or senior who is post-puberty, has a significant training age in rowing, and may be interested in rowing beyond high school in either a national-level extracurricular context or a collegiate rowing program. Stage 4 rowers are also collegiate rowers and post-collegiate high-performance rowers, including U23, National Team, and Olympic Team rowers. Collegiate walk-ons or post-collegiate rowers may begin in Stage 4, depending on the program and background of the athlete. Stage 4 can be separated into phases of “Early” for high performance juniors and collegiate rowers with a lower training age, and “Late” for collegiate rowers and post-collegiate rowers.

Early Stage 4 (Junior/HP + Collegiate) training includes JNT (or equivalent) for youth athletes, and NCAA (or equivalent) for adults. Training loads in these environments are periodized annually, and at an intensity that would not be viable for the majority of rowers in their respective age cohorts. Since these early Stage 4 environments are often an athlete's first experience training at a high level, special attention should be given to ensuring the athlete has no gaps in their performance curriculum as any short-comings can be detrimental or even dangerous. As is common throughout Stage 4, The U23 phase emphasizes winning major races as measures for success. What makes early phase environments different from the later senior stage is the recognition that winning at the highest level requires years of training and athletes often need time to continue developing fitness, fill in skill deficits, or retool an ability they had previously mastered so that it is more compatible at the high-performance level.

Late Stage 4 (Senior) training includes National Training Centers and Satellite HP Clubs. These environments are intended for athletes who are fully committed in terms of time and resources to maximizing performance and winning priority races. These environments invest significantly in performance factors including athlete support and equipment. Late Stage 4 athletes are expected to need only minimal skill development and be highly-motivated to win.

ATHLETE

DEDICATE TO MAXIMIZING ATHLETIC POTENTIAL

The Stage 4 rower is focused on maximizing rowing performance as the primary outcome of their sport participation. A rower who splits their sport participation focus between rowing performance and other factors should go to Stage 5 “Row for Life” instead of Stage 4 “Perform and Excel.”

COMMIT TO AN ONGOING ANNUAL AND/OR LONG-TERM TRAINING PROGRAM

The Stage 4 rower should have a training plan that builds individual sessions into weeks, weeks into months, months into seasons, seasons into years, and years into long-term development. This training plan should include rowing training, other forms of aerobic development, strength training, other forms of physical training, and balance with other life responsibilities such as family, school, employment, etc.

SINGLE SPORT-FOCUSED WHILE IN SEASON

The Stage 4 rower may participate in other sports or physical activities in the off-seasons away from competition, but focuses entirely on rowing performance and training for rowing during rowing seasons or race prep.

PERFORM

MAXIMIZE TALENTS

The goal of the Stage 4 rower is to compete in rowing to the best of their individual ability and athletic potential.

FULL-YEAR PLAN TO EXCEL AND PROGRESS

Coaches of Stage 4 rowers must periodize their training plan to selectively build specific athletic qualities while selectively maintaining others. The athletic demands of racing at the 2km distance are too diverse to be able to train all qualities to peak performance simultaneously. Coaches must guide Stage 4 rowers through a year-round development program to maximize performance and reduce risk of overtraining, injuries, or burnout.

Rowers and coaches need to be particularly aware of the return-to-train phase as a sensitive window of increased injury risk. This phase can include the following: returning to routine training following a 1-2-week break away (eg. vacation, illness, injury, etc.), starting a new season, making a major change in training approach, a new coach beginning with a program, and more. Any time there is a significant change in technique, mode of training, volume, or intensity, we see increased injuries when the change is not accommodated for in the rest of the training plan. Reduce training volume and/or intensity during these return-to-train phases.

[Read more here about the return-to-train phase.](#)

Stage 4 rowers should be familiar with at least a three-zone training intensity distribution model ([See Stage 3 “Train”](#)) and will likely use a five-zone model or more, depending on how much detail the coach desires. USRowing uses a six-zone model with more information available on page 123 (Module 6, Topic 2: “Training Methods for Aerobic Fitness”) of the Level 2 manual.

HIGH-PERFORMANCE FOCUS

The Stage 4 athlete is focused on competing at the highest levels of the sport available to them. For the age 17-18 junior rower, this includes USRowing Regionals, USRowing Nationals, and college recruitment, and may also include development camps and extracurricular rowing opportunities, such as the Olympic Development Program, Junior National Team, U19 Rowing, and more. The collegiate rower is focused on performance at their main competitive events, whether this is ACRA Nationals, NCAA Nationals, or the IRA National Championship, and also may pursue extracurricular rowing opportunities such as World University Games and U23 Rowing. Post-collegiate high-performance rowers pursue U23 and National Team selection through the best available opportunities. As the new High Performance Director (Josy Verdonkschot) takes over the Senior National Team, more information will be created for the U23/Senior portion of the elite pathway.

[U19 Pathway Presentation \(Chris Chase, USRowing\)](#)

EXCEL

COMPETITIONS COMMENSURATE WITH ATHLETE SKILL LEVEL, AND TO APPROPRIATE LEVELS OUTSIDE THEIR COMFORT ZONE TO CHALLENGE PERFORMANCE DEVELOPMENT

Coaches of Stage 4 rowers should be knowledgeable of the most recent high-performance pathway and prepared to guide rowers through increasing levels of selection commensurate with skill and ability level. Rowers may pursue competitive opportunities listed above, as well as additional races such as Head of the Charles and ergometer racing if the coach determines benefit to the rower’s development.

ELITE NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COMPETITIONS

Stage 4 rowers must compete beyond the local or regional level to challenge themselves against the best rowers at the national and international level. Coaches of Stage 4 rowers should guide competitive selection and goals for each race to be motivating for the rower and encourage a greater connection to the sport and fellow competitors.

STRENGTH TRAINING

The goal of strength training for Stage 4 rowers is maximizing competitive ability and reducing risk of rowing injuries. Improving performance and reducing injuries are two sides of the same coin, as Stage 4 rowers need to stay healthy in order to be able to perform a high volume of rowing training to drive technical, physiological, and competitive improvement. Different Stage 4 rowers will need different things from strength training depending on their prior development and major training goals. Coaches of Stage 4 rowers should be prepared and qualified to guide and instruct physical development through individualized, year-round, long-term strength training, or hire a strength coach.

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.

[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 4 rowers may move to Stage 5 as a mentor (coach, official, etc.) or masters rower. USRowing encourages former collegiate rowers and high-performance rowers to stay involved with rowing.

Go to Stage 5, “Row for Life.”

**If you have additional questions please
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