



2026 Rowing SA Coaches Conference

To discuss:

- Clarifying your role as a coach.
- Differences based on context:
Learn to row → Senior
school/club programs.
- Selection considerations.
- Technique.
- Culture.



My Background

1999-2004: Club rowing at Murray Bridge Rowing Club.

2005-2016: Australian Rowing Team Athlete (2008, 2012, 2016 Olympics).

2016-2023: First VIII coach.



Program/Athlete Ambition

Participation?

Master's Competition?

Head of the River?

State Championships?

Intervarsity?

National Championships?

National Team Selection?

Context

Available equipment?

Level of funding?

Training venues?

Size of program?

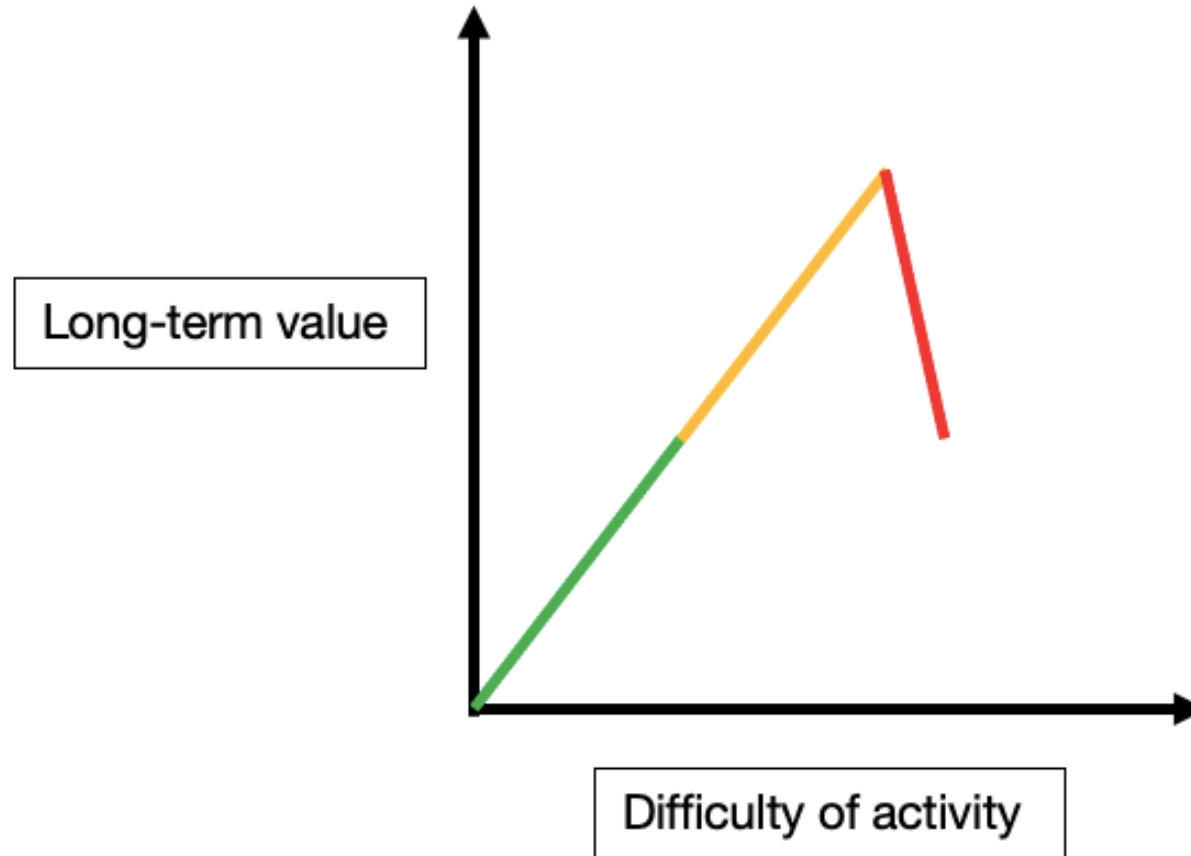
Stakeholders?

Athlete availability?

Every program will be different



Create an enjoyable and effective training environment



	Type I fun	Fun at the time, forgettable experience
	Type II fun	Challenging at the time, fun to reflect on
	Type III fun	Too challenging, good story but negative experience

Learn to row and junior squads

- Focus on safety, traffic rules, basic technique, boat handling and equipment care.
- High proportion of type I fun.
- Hands on coaching.
- Emphasis on how individuals can improve the crew they are in.
- Build value of coxswains and their role (everyone to cox?).



Intermediate Squads

- Slightly more performance driven than junior squads.
- A high proportion of type I fun but familiarize with type II fun.
- More advanced boat set-up and personal responsibility for this.
- Retention more important than performance.



Senior/Club Squads

An inclusive program able to facilitate general participation as well as national standard performance and elite pathways.*

- Emphasis on improving individual performance of every member of the squad.
- Celebrate improvement over ranking.
- Benchmark performances on standards not results.
- A training environment where people want to be.
- High proportion of type II fun.
- Invested in results of all boats in squad. Winning 2nd 8+ or losing 1st 8+?



Selection Considerations

- Expect varying rates of improvement over time. Don't 'pigeonhole' based on current ability.
- Be careful with seat racing. One swallow doesn't make it summer. Variation in performance is often larger between pieces than combinations. Look for consistency of performances.
- Develop entire squad early in season. Allow training without selection pressure.
- Developing combination, familiarity and trust in specific crews is still important. Allow time for this before peak event.
- Ergo times are just a starting point. On-water performance trumps ergo ability.
- Communicate and explain decisions with squad. Speak to individuals before announcing.
- Not every seat is the same



Selecting crews

OFFICIAL RESULTS

Distance: 2000M

[illegible]

OFFICIAL RESULTS

Distance: 2000M

[illegible]

Which crew do you pick?

Technique



- Don't over complicate.
- On water:
- Effective length: Place where you reach.
- Efficiency: Faster not harder.
- On ergo:
- Catch length in strong position, handle to cage.
- Elbows. Can you do it on the water?
- Consistent split: stroke to stroke, piece to piece

Culture

- Measured by numbers. If people enjoy the experience the squad will grow.
- Critical to manage as coach, especially with younger athletes competing for seats.
- Get comfortable being uncomfortable when training.
- Training is not a punishment.
- A difficult balance:
- Athletes should want to make the top crew but should also want everyone in their squad to be as good as they can be.
- The ideal scenario is to be the last picked for a crew.



Athlete perspective – two things can be true...

- You can not be every athletes "best" or "favorite" coach
- I've still learned things from coaches I disliked and coaches who I really connected are not perfect either.
- Coaches are humans too



Bill - School

- Believed in me
- Supported me
- Biggest cheer leader



Kupa - Club

- Tech focus coach
- Very black and white
- Played to his strengths and we adapted



Mark – underage/Sr A

- Felt supported while having the tough conversations
- Believed in me
- Was tough on me



Bert – Senior club

- Would go above and beyond for us
- Biggest cheerleader



Westie – Senior

- Athlete management
- Always give you the time of day
- Worked on himself just as much as the athletes
- Ultimate team member
- Happy to have the tough conversations
- Mutual respect



JK – Senior

- Knew he role as a head coach
- Trusted me
- Knew when he need to step in
- Mutual respect – we could call each other out.



It should also be noted...

- I had success under these coaches
- Also, it is easy to be a good coach to fast crews/good athletes. – what come 1st?



- Play to your strengths
 - know yourself
- Do your athletes feel?
 - Supported
 - Respected
 - Trusted

