



Guide to Boat Selection

Adapted from Princeton National Rowing Association

There are only nine seats in a boat. Athlete selection must be made, when placing athletes on particular boats. This is never done lightly, and is always done with the best interests of the team in mind. We must prioritize the success of the group over the comfort of the individual.

Our team is comprised of many great student athletes who work exceptionally hard. This does not change the mathematical realities of how boats move swiftly. Being part of a successful rowing team involves hard work, and occasionally disappointment. Our hope as coaches is that we can use these situations to teach our rowers resiliency---to handle and manage disappointment, work through adversity, and commit themselves to a group for the primary goal of helping the team succeed.

Whitman coaches focus on fostering the experiences that help our athletes learn the best lessons the sport has to offer. Leadership, sportsmanship, perseverance, competitiveness, and compassion are all important qualities in rowing, and we look for our athletes to demonstrate these qualities over the course of the season. Rowing is an extremely challenging sport, both physically and mentally. We are looking for people who are up to the challenge and are ready to approach the challenge enthusiastically, all the while knowing that even the most talented rowers are often humbled repeatedly by the sport.

How do you determine who makes the 1st boat and who makes the 3rd boat? Coaches rely on a wide range of data to ensure that the people who make the boat go the fastest end up in the fastest boat. There are many things that make a great rower:

- Erg score
- Technical proficiency/ability to increase the speed and efficiency of the boat
- Coachability
- Attitude (tenacity, persistence, effort, intensity, confidence, concern for the welfare of the crew and the team)
- Experience, racing results in practice and at regattas

Erg testing: Physical testing on the rowing machine allows athletes to demonstrate fitness capacity, power, and mental toughness. Whitman coaches will primarily use distance tests of 5 kilometers in the fall, and transition to 2k tests in the spring.

With **technique**, coaches are looking for improvement, “coachability,” and for the athlete to take individual ownership of his or her progress. All athletes receive feedback on and off the water; however, when an athlete is not responding to that feedback, coaches will eventually move on to athletes who are responding, and selections will be made based on that experience. Daily practice includes drills and concepts that athletes can do on an erg on their own to improve and make technical changes.

Attitude, Work Ethic, Attendance, Competitive Spirit, Enthusiasm: Rowing is physically and mentally demanding. Coaches are constantly challenging athletes to be the best they can, and through the response to this challenge athletes gain a level of confidence, determination, strength, and mental toughness that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. We look for athletes who are team players and for those who bring a positive, can-do approach to practice. Furthermore we look for athletes who will handle the competitive nature of the sport with grace and react well to the difficult situations that come with selection and competition. We want athletes to work hard and demonstrate the desire to achieve their best performance through putting forth a relentless level of effort.

Seat Racing: Seat racing is an on-the-water test of one athlete’s boat moving ability versus that of another athlete. Generally, seat racing will involve a series of intervals at a set time or distance. After one interval, two athletes will switch boats and race the interval over again. The coach will look for the change in margin between the two intervals to determine which athlete had a greater effect on boat speed and thus makes the boat faster when he or she is in it. Seat racing can be useful in certain situations, but it is certainly not the sole deciding factor in who makes the boat. Seat racing is used as a final selection procedure, often between two athletes who have performed similarly when all aspects of the selection criteria are taken into account. Therefore, not everyone is entitled to a seat race for every boat, and due to time constraints, it would be impossible to seat race everyone against everyone. The coaches will do their best to determine the depth chart of their team and conduct fair seat races with transparent outcomes when they feel necessary.

Attendance at practice is critical. A strong erg score but a bad attitude will probably not get you into the seat that you desire. Likewise having a great attitude and a great erg score but bad technique won’t get you there either. Coaches want to see progress across each of these key criteria and this can only be achieved through regular attendance at practice.

Coaches’ Judgment: In certain circumstances when two athletes are extremely close, the coaches may be forced to make a judgment as to who is a better fit in a particular crew. Example: Athlete A is just a little smoother and more experienced technically than Athlete B, but A is slower on the erg and narrowly lost a head-to-head seat race versus B. However, Athlete A demonstrates the ability to blend in better with the top lineup of athletes and ultimately makes that boat go faster. In this example Athlete A might allow the other rowers to row technically better, and thus he or she adds an element that is hard to extract through the other parts of the selection process. In this example the coach will have to look at all the data and ultimately make a judgment call about what is better for the crew.

Boat selection is based solely on the coach's philosophy and each coach will make choices based on what he/she feels is the most beneficial for their individual team. Our goal is to make the team as competitive as possible, at the highest levels of the sport, by producing the fastest boats. A coach cannot accomplish that without committed athletes.

There are no guaranteed spots on any rowing team at any point in the season, and a dominant erg score does not necessarily lend to racing proficiency. Coaching involves subjectivity. A coach's success on behalf of their team is inherently tied to the success of each athlete. If a coach puts an athlete in a boat, it is because he/she believes that this athlete will contribute to boat speed in significant way. Crew is a competitive sport both individually and as a team. There will be ups and downs for all athletes. It is a sport that requires resiliency. But no matter the boat placement, all athletes are valued members of the Whitman Crew team.