

The *Experienced*
Rowing Parents'
Guide to Rowing
for
Parents New to
Mercer Junior Rowing Club



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INTRODUCTION

Rowing, really?

Congratulations on having a child fantastic enough to want to row!! Relatively few young athletes discover and develop a passion for this unique sport. Rowing is not a mainstream sport in this country but one that will set your son or daughter apart and benefit him or her in ways you cannot yet imagine.

This is a great sport and one of the few that offers a chance to start at an older age (no one has been rowing since they were a small child!), provides overall body conditioning and, at Mercer, provides an opportunity to make friends from all across the area. Your child will learn all sorts of things about teamwork, commitment and motivation while at the same time making wonderful friends and getting in terrific shape.

Now, we know it can be a little disorienting to have your child start participating in a sport that you have never even watched much less tried yourself. But don't worry, by this time next year it will all make sense!

The questions and answers in this guide will hopefully speed you on your way to understanding what you need to know AND are ones that many of us Mercer parents have puzzled over when our child started rowing.

Welcome to the world of rowing!

PRACTICE: GENERAL

1. If practice starts at 4pm (or whatever) why does my child insist on getting there 15 to 20 minutes early?

Most Mercer teams are expected to already be warmed up and ready to go by the time practice starts. Some days this will involve a run from the boathouse up to the stop light on Village Road and back. Other days it will be a dynamic warm-up near the boathouse. This takes some time.

2. Why isn't my child ready to go at the scheduled end time for practice?

Sometimes the coach will want to talk to the kids after practice as a group to discuss an issue or prepare them for something coming up later in the week. Sometimes your child may have a particular issue that s/he needs to talk to the coach about. When they are practicing on the water – unexpected trouble getting a boat docked or onto a boat rack may delay not only the kids in that boat but anyone in a boat behind them in line. Most parents bring reading material or make calls during those delays.

3. Why isn't Saturday or Sunday practices at a firmly set time?

Sometimes a weekend event at Mercer County Park will affect the times that our kids can be on the water. Sometimes there is a National Team practice or US Rowing event using the facility that coaches need to work around.

4. Why is it such a big deal to miss practice?

Unlike most sports that high school kids participate in, most kids are rowing for the first time and are trying to go from learning basic skills to being competitive at a regional and national level in a couple of years. Missing building blocks can cause a child to fall behind. Secondly, when the kids are on the water, coaches plan the line-ups in the boats carefully and one unexpectedly missing rower can mess up the line-up or in the worst case, keep the other rowers in a boat from being able to practice on the water (which makes the other kids really MAD!).

5. My child is sick – whom do I tell?

It is your child's responsibility to let the coach know if s/he is missing practice. If the absence is known in advance, it should be reported through the Absence Reporting Form link which is available on the Mercer pages of the rowpnra.org website ([MJRC - Absence Notification Form \(google.com\)](#)). If is a last minute sickness, your child should email the coach as early as

possible in the day (to give the coach time to adjust line-ups). If your child is too sick to get on the computer, you should e-mail the coach.

6. What should my child wear to practice?

Spandex shorts (some kids wear shorts over their spandex for running and/or weightlifting), a comfortable shirt that is not too long, running shoes and enough layers to stay warm. Remember – your child does not know for certain whether they will be inside or outside on any given day – so they need to be prepared!

Some kids are self-conscious in the beginning about wearing spandex – but anything else is likely to get caught in the seat mechanism of the boat when they are rowing. (This is also the reason for not wearing shirts that are too long.) Don't worry – they get used to it fast!

7. What else should they bring with them?

Besides the layers to stay warm, they should bring a water bottle, Band-Aids, sunscreen, snacks and if appropriate – extra hair ties and any necessary medicine (inhalers, epi pens, etc.). Most kids maintain a log of the practices and their personal results and will bring that as well.

8. Why does my child start yelling at me if I drive more than halfway through the parking lot?

Because the coach probably will yell at him or her. The part of the parking lot closest to the boat house is reserved for coaches' cars, boat trailers and buses.

9. Why is the speed limit on the access road only 25mph – it's a straight road with almost no traffic?

As a park road, it is used by a lot of pedestrians and bicyclists (and deer) – so the speed limit is kept low. Plus the turn into the parking lot is blind due to the vegetation causing most people driving out of the parking lot to take the turn wide – you or your child cannot see a car or a running rower coming toward you and if you are moving fast it would be easy to hit something – or someone.

The kids (and sometimes their parents) will tend to rush down this road if they think they are running late. Keep in mind it is just .53 miles from Conover Road to the far end of the parking lot. If you are going 45 mph rather than the posted 25 mph you will only save about 35 seconds. Encourage your child to make up this time by having their water bottle already filled or their sneakers already found by the time it is time to leave for practice!

10. Is it okay to come in the boathouse to get my child after practice?

Not really and not unless the other members of your child's team have left. The coach is

probably talking with him or her and your presence can be disruptive and/or embarrassing. It is better to call or text your child if that is an option.

11. Is there a lost and found?

Yes, in the workout room – and your child knows this. The seventh or eighth time you remind them, they may remember to look for their lost item(s).

Also, encourage your child to put his or her name on everything s/he wears to practice (especially Mercer gear which all looks alike) which will increase the chance of it being identified.

12. I need to talk to the coach – should I just grab a few minutes before or after practice to talk to him/her?

A lot is going on at the end of practice and you will probably be waiting for a while before the coach is free – and s/he may or may not have much time. It is usually best to e-mail the coach and ask when would be a good time to talk.

Also, you should ask yourself if whatever you want to talk about should be handled by your child and give him or her the chance to address it before you get involved.

And remember, many questions can be answered by your parent liaison or through the other parents on the Parents of MJRC Facebook page.

PRACTICE: ON THE LAND

1. How can ROWING practice be on the LAND?

Rowing involves stamina, strength and technique. Running, weightlifting and rowing on a rowing machine help to build these. The work done on land helps to maximize the experience of being on the water. Also, a lot of the team bonding happens during these on land activities.

2. Why do kids roll their eyes if I mimic rowing by moving my arms back and forth or comment on how they must be building up their arm muscles?

Although it is not obvious when you are watching someone row, rowing is a *pushing* sport not a *pulling* sport. Most of the power comes from the rower's legs (about 60%), followed by the core muscles (about 30%) and the arms (about 10%). Since only rowers know this, they feel much smarter than you when you talk about their arms (which ARE getting much stronger by the way!).

3. What is an erg?

An ergometer or "erg" is a rowing machine. Erging is rowing on a rowing machine. The rowing machine measures the time you rowed and how much power you generated and calculates a presumed distance rowed from that information. While there are many types of rowing machines, the one that Mercer athletes will use most is made by Concept 2 (C2 -who also make oars).

4. Can you really learn to row on a machine?

You can't learn everything but you can learn a lot. The erg allows you to get a feel for how the parts of the stroke fit together without having to worry about the motion of the boat or coordinating your actions with another rower. Also, erging builds stamina and strength.

5. How come when I ask my child about practice, (s)he starts spouting off random strings of numbers?

Honestly, many of us spend over a year just nodding our heads and trying to judge from our child's expression whether we should look happy or sympathetic.

So your child probably says something like:

"We did 2 times 3K and for the last 500 of the second piece I pulled a 2:15:8." Or "we did 5 by 5's and I broke 2".

When the kids practice indoors on the erg, the coaches instruct them to do sets of exercises

(called “pieces”) that are either to see how fast (s)he can do a preset distance or how much distance (s)he can cover in a given amount of time. Usually a piece is done multiple times in a single practice with short rests in between.

- The first number is the number of times the piece is done.
- When a number has a “K” in it – the piece is a test of how fast your child can row a certain number of kilometers (rowing always measures in kilometers or meters). So in the example above the kids rowed three thousand meters two times.
- When there is not a K after the second number – the piece is a test of how far your child can row in a certain number of minutes. In the case above they are rowing for five minutes five times.
- The last number represents the time it takes to row 500 meters (also called a “split”). The time is measured in minutes, then seconds, then tenths of a second. In the first example, it took the rower 2 minutes, 15.8 seconds to row the last 500 meters. In the second example, the rower had some portion of the piece where s/he was rowing at a pace at which s/he would complete 500 meters in less than 2 minutes.

6. What is a 2K test and why is my child FREAKING out about it?

A 2K test is the standard method of comparing the power of various rowers; it is sort of the SAT of rowing. It is a test of how fast a rower can go 2000 meters on a rowing machine. Although a good 2K time does not guarantee that someone will be a good rower on the water – it is indicative of their power which is a very critical element of rowing.

It is often dreaded by rowers because, first, it is HARD. Rowers are expected to give it everything they have – imagine sprinting for seven to ten minutes! Second, it is fairly public – your teammates know how well or poorly you do. Finally, it is a key element in how coaches evaluate rowers and is used by them to help determine what boats rowers will be placed in.

7. What’s a PR?

PR is an abbreviation for Personal Record. It refers to the best time a rower has gotten on the erg for a particular type of piece. A PR is always good news. A PR on a 2K is great news!

8. What is an oar run?

In an oar run, the team divides into pairs. Each pair of rowers runs several miles carrying an oar. The oar run is generally prescribed by the coach to give the team the opportunity to reflect on the poor judgment or carelessness exhibited by one or more team members that resulted or could have resulted in damage to one of the (very expensive) boats or other pieces of equipment.

PRACTICE: ON THE WATER

Rowing shells (boats) are called by the number of rowers in the boat. Most novice rowers row in an eight person boat (“an eight”) so all the following answers refer to that size of boat.

Way the heck
that way...
←
Finish Line



Starting Line

1. What does it mean that my child is a “starboard”? A “port”?

Starboard is a nautical term that mean the right side of a boat from the boat’s point of view. Because rowers sit backwards in the boat, this can be confusing since the starboard side of the boat is on the rower’s left. Port is the term for the left side of the boat (on the rower’s right).

Each rower uses one oar. Rowers whose oars extend from the right side of the boat are called starboard rowers or “starboards”. Rowers whose oars extend from the left side of the boat are called port rowers or “ports”.

Most rowers feel more comfortable on one side or another and usually settle into being a port or starboard rower. It is not uncommon for a coach to switch a rower from one side to the other – especially when the rower is a novice.

2. I was watching practice and only six of the rowers were rowing. Why?

The rowing stroke is a highly precise and technical set of movements and can be challenging to learn. It is more difficult to learn if the boat is leaning to one side or the other. For this reason, one or more pairs of rowers may be asked to sit out for a period of time to “set” the boat – i.e., help stabilize it - while the others work on their stroke. The people sitting out are rotated so everyone gets more or less the same amount of time rowing.

3. Why does my child row in a different seat every day?

In rowing the idea is for all eight rowers to be rowing in perfect unison, with no motions that interfere with the forward motion of the boat. That being said, the different positions in the boat have slightly different roles to play. Although, any rower should be able to row any position, the coaches will switch the rowers among seats to find out which rowers excel in which positions and which combination of rowers can move the boat fastest.

All the rowers need a combination of strengths: technique, rhythm, power, balance, and the ability to adapt to the motion of others. Each seat makes slightly different demands on the strengths of the individual:

- Eight seat, also called stroke, sits in the rear of the boat (or “stern”) nearest the coxswain (see below). Since everyone sits backwards this is the rower that all the other rowers must follow in order to row together. The stroke must have strong technique (since the others are matching his or her motion) and a good sense of rhythm (since s/he is responsible for adjusting the stroke rate in response to instructions of the coxswain).
- Seven seat rows on the opposite side of the boat as stroke (i.e., if the stroke is a starboard, seven seat will be a port and vice versa) and, like stroke, needs strong technique plus the ability to mirror the motions of the stroke (but on the opposite side). All the rowers on who row on the same side as the seven seat mirror his or her actions. Stroke and seven seat together are called stern pair.
- The four middle rowers (six, five, four and three seat), while still demonstrating the combination of strengths, are generally the most powerful rowers, with six and five the stronger pair. You will sometimes hear the middle rowers referred to as the "engine room."
- Bow pair is made up of two seat and bow seat (who is for some reason not called one seat) and amongst the pair's other strengths, excel at “setting” or stabilizing the boat to ensure effective forward motion.

And, by the way, it’s pronounced [bou] not [boh]



NOT



4. How come my child is working out on land today and many of the others are on the water?

There are many reasons why a rower may not be “boated” (assigned to a boat) on any given day. First, there are only certain number of seats and not everyone can go out every day. Coaches try to be fair in making sure that everyone gets their share of time on the water. Second, for safety reasons, there needs to be a certain number of coaches out on the water per number of boats. With brand new novices, there are fewer rowers on the water per coach. Finally, the coaches will use their discretion in whom to place in a boat and someone who misses practice, is chronically late or slacks off during practice is less likely to get put on a boat.

5. What does a coxswain do? It looks pretty easy.

It is NOT easy. The coxswain or “cox” is the person in charge of the boat and the rowers, who sits in the stern (back) of the boat and is the only person without an oar and the only person facing forward. Coxing is hard because there are so many varied responsibilities:

- Steering – an eight person boat is almost 60 feet long – longer than anything most of us have ever driven. Now imagine driving something that long where there is a delay in the steering, may have more power on one side (which pushes your vehicle to the opposite side), is greatly affected by wind and tide, and instead of an accelerator and brakes you have to control speed by telling your vehicle to speed up/slow down and use more/less power. Oh, and did I mention that you are probably short and can’t see the front of your vehicle over the heads of the eight people in front of you but must avoid hitting logs and other debris at all costs?
- Running drills – At typical drill in a boat will be to have six rowers do one part of the stroke for X strokes, then add in another part of the stroke for X strokes, until the rowers are doing the full stroke. Pairs of rowers are switched in and out so that every rower does the drill three times and sets the boat one time. The cox (while still steering) has to keep track of the number of strokes and switch rowers in and out of the drill. Alternatively, a drill will be for rowers to row at a set rate (e.g., 20 strokes per minutes, and after X strokes increase the stroke rate to 22 strokes per minutes.) In this case the cox (still steering) is counting strokes and watching the monitor to keep track of the stroke rate.
- “Coach in the Boat” – the coxswain is also responsible for giving feedback to the rowers. S/he can tell whether they are moving together, whether they are at the correct stroke rate, whether one side of the boat is rowing more powerfully, etc. Additionally, the coxswain is expected to be able to motivate the rowers – knowing what to say when they are ready to give up, or bringing them back into a unified

motion when they lose focus. In a race, the coxswain is responsible for the execution of the race plan and for making adjustments to reflect the actions of his or her own rowers and that of the competitor boats.

- Safety of the Boat – the coxswain has overall responsibility for the safety of the boat when it is on the water, coming into dock and being moved on land. The cox is the person you will see walking by the boat when the other are carrying it, giving instructions to the rowers to make sure they are all moving together.

6. Why do I sometimes see the coxswain raising his or her hand while in the boat?

The coxswain raises his or her hand to signal to a coach or race official that they have heard an instruction and understand it. In races, the coxswain may raise a hand to let officials know that the boat is not ready to begin the race. After a race, a coxswain may raise his or her hand to indicate a problem with a crew member or to protest the results of a race.

7. What should my child wear for practice outside?

Long or short spandex on the bottom and layers that can be removed and shoved under the seat as s/he warms up. Rowing is hard work, so don't be surprised if your child looks underdressed for the weather. Often in colder weather you will see kids in short spandex and short sleeves but wearing a hat.

8. Is the boat likely to tip over?

No. Most people go years (and perhaps their whole rowing career) without having a boat tip over. Also the eight is the most stable type of boat which is one of the reasons it is used for beginners. Although the boat is thin, the oars extending out on either side provide stability and make it fairly difficult to tip over an eight person boat.

9. Why does my child refuse to wear gloves when it is cold?

Rowers don't wear gloves. The explanation is usually something along the lines of, "it ruins the feel of and connection with the oar." Yes, your child's hands may get cold, but at Mercer, boats don't go out if it is below 35 degrees – so although it may be uncomfortable, most kids quickly learn to accept it as part of the experience.

10. I asked my child if they had paddled well during practice and s/he got mad at me. Why?

When rowers are told to paddle, it means that they can row slowly and without much pressure. A paddle is a rest stroke. To imply that someone was paddling when they should have been rowing is something of an insult – sort of like asking a sprinter how they enjoyed their stroll around the track.

11. My child has gotten terrible blisters. What should s/he do?

Blisters are part of rowing and comparing blisters is a common rower activity. We have found the best thing is to keep them clean, leave them uncovered during the school day so they dry out and then put Band-aids on them while rowing. Blisters turn into callouses and are not a frequent issue once your child has been rowing for a while.

If a blister is raw and open, try to keep it dry and put antibiotic ointment on it to keep it from becoming infected, a great but painful treatment is called New Skin (can find at any drug store), it burns while going on but creates a new layer of skin and it will feel better almost instantly.



12. My child said a teammate caught a crab today. Are there crabs in Mercer Lake?

I don't think there are any crabs in Mercer Lake. When a rower says that someone "caught a crab" they are describing a mis-stroke in which the rower is unable to release the oar blade from the water and the oar blade acts as a brake on the boat. Because the boat is still moving the handle of the oar tends to come back with some force and the rower will (get the oar out of the water) often end up lying flat in the boat. It can be difficult for the rower to get the oar back into position until the boat has slowed sufficiently and reduced the pressure on the blade.

13. What is "seat-racing"?

Seat racing is one input that coaches use in figuring out the final line-up for a boat. By having two boats race during practice, then switching one rower at a time and racing again, the coach can see what impact a specific rower in a specific "seat" has on a boat and what combinations of rowers are most effective. Seat racing most often occurs in the lead up to a regatta.

14. My Child talks about Catches and Releases, are they talking about fishing?

No, your child is not talking about fishing but rather the parts of the rowing stroke. The “catch” is when the oar is dropped into the water or catches the water. This occurs when the rowers is at full compression with the knees up, the back forward and the arms fully extended. The rower will then “drive” the oar through the water by first pushing down with their legs, followed by an opening of the back and finally pulling the arms in to the torso. The oar is then “released” from the water at the “finish”. The rower begins the “recovery” where, with the oar out of the water, they will extend the arms, swing the back forward and raise the knees to come to the catch and begin the process all over again.

During the recovery, the rower will “feather” the blade or rotate the oar so that the flat part of the end of the oar (the blade) is parallel to the water. This reduces wind resistance and also makes it less likely that the oar will accidentally hit the water during the recovery. The rower then “squares up” the oar (blade perpendicular to the water) before dropping the oar into the water at the catch.

Another important term for the rowers is the “set” of the boat. The boats are narrow and tip easily to either side so that the oars will drag on the water making in more difficult to row. When a boat is “set” it is balanced so that none of the oars are dragging on the water. This is a challenge and requires all rowers to work in unison and hold their oars at the proper height during the drive and recovery.

REGATTAS

1. How do I know what time my child's race is?

First, your child's coach will tell them the approximate time they are expected to race. Times can move around depending on competitor no shows, weather and other factors outside the coaches' control – so be prepared to be flexible.

Second, most regattas have websites and they usually allow you to download a "heat sheet" before the regatta. The heat sheets list the times of the races, as well as the lane assigned to each boat. Wait until the night before or the morning of the regatta because these can change.

2. Why does my child have to get to a regatta so much earlier than the start time?

In addition to time for you to get lost or otherwise delayed on the way to the race site, there is a lot to do. If the boats have been brought to the race by trailer the kids need to reattach the riggers (the part that has the oar lock and that sticks out from side of the boat). For both home and away races, the kids check over the boat and make sure it is ready to go. The kids also need to warm up, get final instructions from the coach and get into a racing frame of mind.

3. How early should I get to a regatta to see my child compete?

For away regattas, most people come with their child and spend the entire day. The coaches will tell them what time to arrive.

For home regattas or if you are coming separately to an away regatta, you will want to get there at least 30 minutes before your child's scheduled start time. It takes a little while to get from the parking lot at Mercer Park to the race site and sometimes it can be quite a walk at away regattas. You can always come earlier and cheer on the rest of the Mercer team!

4. Where do I park for a regatta?

For away regattas, parking information is usually available on the regatta website. Generally, the parent coordinator will also send out this information prior to the regatta.

For home regattas, spectators gather in Mercer County Park on the side of the lake opposite the boat house. Parking lots (staffed by Mercer parent volunteers) are on one of the lawns next to the main road of the park. It can take 5-10 minutes to walk from your car, so leave yourself enough time. Please do not park on the boathouse side unless you have

volunteered for a job on that side of the lake. For scrimmages, however, most people park on the boathouse side of the lake and cheer from that side.

5. I dropped my child off at the boathouse – now how do I get to the viewing area across the lake?

- Drive out the access road. Remember to be careful – there is a lot of traffic on regatta days.
- Make your first right onto Conover Road. Go about a mile and a half.
- Turn right on Edinburgh Road. Go about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile. You will pass an entrance to the park on Edinburgh Road. That is not the entrance you are looking for!
- Turn right on Old Trenton Road. In less than $\frac{1}{2}$ mile you will see the entrance to the Park. Turn right into the Park and follow the Regatta Parking signs until you reach the parking area.

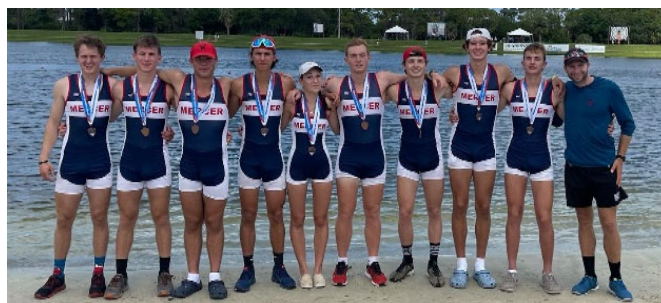
6. What should I bring to a regatta?

Regattas take a long time and you will most likely be there for multiple hours. Bring more layers than you think you need – you will be sitting there for a long time and it is easy to get cold. Bring whatever food donation you are supposed to bring for the food tent. Most people bring folding chairs, many bring binoculars and cameras. You should bring a water bottle and travel mug as we are trying to reduce our use of disposable cups. You may want to bring something to do (books, newspaper, work, etc.) since it can be a long time between races that include Mercer boats. Some people bring bicycles to enjoy the venue and to follow along the race route.

7. What should by child be wearing to a regatta? Is there a uniform?

For most races, varsity athletes will row in a Mecer “uni” (or unitard) a one piece racing suit made of spandex that has legs that are shorts length and a top that is cut like a tank top. For most novice races and for some varsity races, the kids will race in Mercer t-shirts and black spandex shorts. The coaches will let them know what is expected. For Head of the Halloween , all rowers row in costume.

Mercer
rowers
wearing
“uni’s



8. Are races ever canceled due to inclement weather?

Yes, but it is highly unusual. Generally a regatta will proceed unless and until the officials determine that it is unsafe. Sometimes a decision will be made that it is not safe for novices, but is okay for more experienced rowers. We have all been at regattas in the rain and the cold – so remember, bring clothes appropriate to the weather and bring more layers than you think you will need.

9. How do I know if my child is going to compete in the regatta?

First, not all teams go to all regattas. Some regattas are only for boys or for girls or only for varsity or novice. This is indicated on the schedule.

Second, only a certain number of boats will be entered in regattas. The coaches are trying to put together the strongest boats that they can and may be working on the line-ups until a few days before the race. They will let your child know as soon as possible.

10. What is a head race?

There are two main types of races – sprints and head races. A sprint is what you think of as a race – everyone lines up at the start and the first one to cross the finish line wins. Sprints are most often 2000 meters.

A head race is a race in which the rowers all start at the same place but at staggered times. The first boat goes and then the next boat chases it down the course while in turn being chased by the third boat and so on. You generally do not know who wins until the end when the times are announced. Head races are pretty boring to watch – the only excitement is when one of the boats catches the boat ahead of it. A head race is generally longer than a sprint.

11. What is the difference between first, second and third boats?

The first boat is made up of the eight rowers (and the coxswain) that the coaches believe can together row faster than any other potential combination. Second boat is the made up of the eight rowers out of the remaining rowers that can row fastest together. Third boat is the next eight.

12. Is there a junior varsity (JV) boat?

Junior varsity is not really a common term in rowing. The novice teams are made up of boys and girls new to rowing. After their first year of rowing (sometimes sooner), a rower will move up to varsity. Sometimes, people will refer to the second and third varsity boats as jv, but that is not really common.

13. My child is in second boat but has a better erg time than a kid in first boat. Why? It doesn't seem fair.

Erg score is only one of the considerations that a coach uses to determine the line-up in a boat. In order to be good, a rower needs not only strength and stamina, but good balance and the ability to move in unison with his or her teammates. Superior strength can make up for some weakness in form; the ability to follow the movements of teammates can make up for some degree of lesser strength – the ability to consider the strengths and weakness of each rower and put together the fastest boat possible is one of the core jobs of the coaches.

Additionally, the coaches are looking for kids that they and the child's teammates can depend on. A child who misses practices or slacks off during practice may not get placed as highly as their skill level would otherwise warrant.

14. Is it okay to go over to the boat trailer to wish my child and the team good luck?

No. The kids and the coaches are busy before the race and the area around the trailer is generally very crowded. Although you stopping by will only take a few seconds, there are eight other kids on that boat and several other boats – a parade of well-meaning parents is not really helpful. Also, the same applies for congratulating the kids after a race – the kids will return to the food tent as soon as they are through with the post-race activities.

15. The boats are really far away – how can I tell which one is the Mercer boat?

If you printed out the heat sheet from the regatta website prior to the race, you can check a specific race to see which lane Mercer is in. If you did not, there is usually a parent around who has and will let everyone know.

Second, every rowing team has their oars painted in a unique way and wears a unique team uniform. Generally, these designs can be seen from fairly far away. Below is an image of that shows how the Mercer Oars look.



16. I can't really tell who's ahead - how can I tell whether they are doing well?

This is one of the real challenges in being a rowing spectator. Binoculars will help, choosing a landmark on the opposite shore and trying to see who passes it when can help. Some parents will move farther down the race course toward the finish line. And remember – the races are long, the boat that is ahead early or midway through the race may not be by the time they get to the finish line.

One parent explained it like this, “If they look like they are not working that hard and you don't see a lot of extra motion or splashing, they are probably doing well. If it looks like they are working really hard, aren't moving together and you see a lot of splashing – they are probably having a rough day.”

17. Should I yell out my child's name when they go past?

Probably not. Rowing is a team sport and the kids learn to take pride in their accomplishments as a team. Generally, there will be groups of Mercer parents, siblings, grandparents and friends in groups along the shoreline, screaming, “GO Mercer,” “Let's go, boys (or girls, as the case may be) and similar sentiments. All of us cheer for all the kids, the idea is to be the loudest cheering section at the regatta!

18. I don't understand the descriptions of the volunteer jobs – is it really okay to sign up for anything?

The really hard jobs are filled on a long-term basis by experienced parents. Other than grill cook, which you want to help out on a few times before trying, pulling the trailer, which requires a big vehicle with a tow hitch, and launch driver, which requires a NJ boating safety certificate and boating license*, you can sign up for any job. There is almost always someone with more experience there to help show you the ropes and the volunteer coordinators will explain what you need to know.

*This entails taking an all-day class and passing the test, then going to DMV to pay a fee to get “BOAT” on your driver's license. No previous boating experience is necessary.

19. If I don't know what time my child is racing – how do I know what time to sign up for volunteer work?

This can be a challenge since generally you sign up before you know what time your child is racing. Generally, the coach will give your child some idea of the time and the regatta website will have a general schedule. Also, all the other parents understand that you want to see your child race and are generally flexible about covering for you briefly if you need to step away to watch your child.

20. Is it okay to eat the food at the Mercer tent?

Yes, the food quantities are estimated assuming that families and other guests will be eating. Some key items are usually held back for the kids – who generally will eat little or nothing prior to racing. Please come and hang out with the other parents at the food tent – it is one of the real pleasures of regatta days!

21. Can I bring wine or beer to the regatta?

No.

OTHER

1. Do parents attend the end of season banquet?

Yes! You will not be sitting with your child, since the teams generally sit together at a table. It is an enjoyable evening – the kids get dressed up and, although the awards can sometimes go on a little long, it is always impressive to listen to the graduating seniors talk about what rowing has meant to them and to witness the camaraderie that has grown within the teams. Your child works hard all season – come celebrate with them.

With the COVID pandemic, the banquet and other meetings maybe done virually.

2. This sport looks like so much fun! Can I try it?

Rowing is fun! If you want a small taste of rowing, come out for US Rowing's Learn to Row Day, which is the first Saturday in June. Mercer hosts an event and you will get to try the erg and get out on the water – it will give you a new appreciation for what your child has been doing!

Alternatively, if you want the full experience, come out for Mercer Masters. There are learn-to-row programs several times a year – three days a week for six weeks. A number of the Masters have children who are on or were on the team. Why should your kids have all the fun?!

3. What if I have more questions?

There is lots of good rowing information on line, you can ask your parent coordinator, post a question on the Parents of MJRC page on Facebook, ask another parent at a regatta or after practice – or ask your child!