

Coaching Day / Weekend How-to Guide

This guide summarises the tasks involved in organising and running a WRC coaching day or weekend, based on experience of an initial event held in September 2018.

Coaching input

Identify and invite an experienced guest coach, to assist WRC's lead coach deliver the event and introduce some variety of coaching techniques / styles. The initial weekend attracted around 35 participants across the two days, with each of the four sessions having around 20 rowers out on the water for a couple of hours. Two coaches, each in a launch, were necessary to ensure all participants received an adequate level of attention. Coaches to decide and plan the focus and content of each session in advance.

Participation

Promote the event to WRC members, together with anyone else you'd like to invite, at least two months in advance to ensure a good level of participation. It may be necessary to limit numbers, e.g. to around 20 per session, depending on the availability of boats, blades and coaches. Have a cut-off for sign-ups of two weeks before the event, to enable organisers to sort crews and equipment appropriately.

Equipment

Currently (2018/19) WRC has sufficient blades and boats to accommodate a maximum of around 20-24 participants per coaching session. In addition to limited equipment, the time needed to launch and land boats means that a higher number of participants would start to make sessions unwieldy. The use of some stable boats was useful, even for those used to rowing in fine quads and doubles, to enable participants to concentrate on technique exercises. Moreover, the weather during the initial event was quite windy, with conditions on the lake pretty choppy, further supporting the decision to use some stable boats.

Crews

As far as practicable, crew members of similar experience and / or ability should be put and kept together for the duration of the coaching event, to enable them to progress in unison and on the same techniques at, hopefully, the same rate. If boat set-up permits (i.e. it is not a coxless boat), it is useful for quads to have a cox, to enable rowers to concentrate on improving their technique, rather than bow-steering.

Timing

The Spring or Autumn months are likely to be optimum in terms of member availability, a reasonable chance of good weather, sufficient daylight, while avoiding the busiest time of year on the Lake / at Fell Foot. For the initial weekend four coaching sessions, of two-and-a-half hours each, were delivered over the two days (Saturday morning and afternoon, Sunday morning and afternoon). The session duration included time for an initial briefing, plus launching and landing around 20 rowers in some 8-9 boats.

Cost

Attracting a guest coach is likely to incur some costs in terms of a coaching fee, or at least travel (and possibly overnight accommodation) expenses. Participants to the initial event were charged £5 per session, each lasting around two-and-a-half hours. To encourage people to make the most of the opportunity, those who attended all four sessions were only charged for three. Coxes were not charged for the session they coxed, but were still eligible for the whole weekend discount if they attended all four sessions (£10). After the agreed fee (£200) to the visiting coach had been settled, the Club made a small surplus (around £150). From this an honorarium was paid to South Windermere Sailing Club for use of their launch as one of the coaching boats.

Safety

A standard WRC session risk assessment should be sufficient for special coaching events, as long as the number of participants and extent of the area of the Lake utilised do not deviate significantly from a (popular) standard Club rowing session. It is useful to appoint a 'boating supervisor' for

each session, in addition to the coaches, to oversee the smooth running of launching and landing boats and crews.

Social aspects

The new (in 2018) Fell Foot Active Base provides an ideal venue for an event of this nature, with changing, shower and locker facilities, together with a warm and spacious club room, complete with kitchen and (free) hot drink making facilities. Participants can bring a packed lunch, or make use of the National Trust café nearby. It is possible that the South Windermere Sailing Club 'bacon butty crew' may be on duty during the morning sessions, as indeed they were for the initial event in September 2018. An evening Jacobs Join social event punctuated the initial weekend on the Saturday evening, which was well attended. However, in future, it may work better (be more time efficient and less tiring) to have a 'high tea' type social, to which all participants make a contribution, just after the last coaching session. Having an opportunity to meet, mix, row and generally socialise with a variety of other WRC members was an important and valued aspect of the initial coaching weekend.

Day or weekend?

The initial event was held over a weekend. On reflection, it was felt that an option could be to confine similar future events to one day. There are pros and cons to both formats, so maybe a good approach would be to alternate between the two.

Coaching day

Pros

- Less tiring (for organisers, coaches and participants).
- Slightly less complicated to organise.
- No overnight accommodation needed to be provided for visiting coaches.

Cons

- Participation likely to be lower, as some members won't be available on the chosen day.
- Level of organisation not much less than for a weekend, but for only half the coaching input.
- Less of an 'event'. e.g. some WRC members (and honorary members) changed holiday plans and travelled a distance to participate in the initial weekend, which might be less likely for a single day.

Coaching weekend

Pros

- With more session options, a weekend offers greater opportunities for participation among WRC members.
- Provides for more coaching input than a single day, with little more needed by way of the level of organisation required.
- It enables a succession of interrelated coaching techniques to be covered in a step-by-step way. For the initial weekend, the rowing stroke was broken down into four constituent parts with each of the four sessions concentrating on one element: the catch, the drive, the finish and the recovery.
- A weekend event may be more effective in attracting (good) coaches from further afield than a single day event.

Cons

- Could be quite tiring for participants, particularly coaches and those involved in the organisation and delivery.
- Fatigue could lead to a dilution of the effectiveness of the coaching input as the weekend progresses.
- Having different participants spread over four different sessions (rather than concentrated into two) undermines the effectiveness of learning and improving in crews together.