

# Carnegie Lake Rowing Association

## Coxing Manual

### Purpose

The purpose of this CLRA Cox Manual is to make the lives of our volunteer coxes a little easier. Anyone who has ever coxed knows how complex the job is even for experienced coxes—there are so many factors to process at the same time. And for those of us who have never done it before, it can be pretty intimidating.

This manual tries to simplify the coxing process. It is designed for use by CLRA coxes on Lake Carnegie. It does not necessarily address all the skills you'll need to cox elsewhere, nor does it attempt to teach you how to cox a race. If you're interested in learning more about coxing than can be presented in this short summary, please check the CLRA library for further resources. You can also contact our Coxswain Captain Sharon Eaton.

Since club policies require that everyone coxes, we hope you'll approach this manual with an open mind. Remember, a coxswain is a valuable part of practice and if you are more prepared to do the job right, you and your boat will have a better row!

A coxswain can make or break a crew. From the coach's standpoint, the coxswain is the most vital member of a crew. Without a good coxswain, the boat does not steer straight, the crew may not be properly relaxed and focused for workouts or races, and most importantly, rower safety may be compromised. A good coxswain has safety in mind as a first priority, steers straight, can motivate the crew to row their best, provide some humor when it is most needed, and keep his or her head in difficult situations. A good coxswain will also make the workout more efficient by anticipating and starting, staying and stopping next to the other crews. The success of rowing at CLRA depends upon a group of coxswains who are just as dedicated to their coxing as to their rowing. Without them, we don't go anywhere, much less anywhere fast.

A note on the format:

- The information takes you through an entire practice session from start to finish.
- Also included are several series of typical commands used in different parts of a session. Most are universal to rowing, but obviously you will need to be flexible in determining what commands to use in any given situation. We encourage coxswains from other clubs and other schools to help us expand our vocabulary by introducing us to new ways to call things but remind them to read through our commands first. Costly errors, for example, can be circumvented by realizing that our club stops at "weigh enough" and keeps going at "continuous rowing" or "ready all row."

### Safety

Your primary concern as Cox is to **maintain the safety of the people and equipment** in your charge. It is your responsibility to see that no one is hurt getting the boat in or out of the water, and that the boat is not damaged in the process. On the water, even if you remember nothing else, you must give steering first priority. If you see a hazardous situation developing, do not hesitate to bring the boat to a stop ("Weigh enough! Check it hard!") if that is the only way to avoid a collision with debris, the shore, with another boat, or with a launch. Because the National Team has so many crews on the water, many of which are "straight" or coxless, we need to be especially alert.

Please review the safety information on the CLRA website. In an emergency, you, the Cox will be responsible for directing your crew out of danger. If you believe a crewmember or a piece of equipment is in trouble, immediately "weigh enough!" to stop the boat and assess the situation. Be prepared to flag the coach for further help.

Weather conditions can change suddenly, even on our small lake. If you have started out on a practice and run into dense fog, turn around and head back where it's clear to wait for instructions from the coach. Dense fog will not only hide other boats from your view, but muffle their sounds as well. If you are caught in fog, follow the **shore on your right** and row by pairs only so you will be able to stop quickly if needed.

Return to the boathouse immediately if there is lightning nearby. In all cases, follow the coach's instructions.

## Communication

After ensuring the safety of your crew and equipment, your biggest task as cox is to communicate effectively. You play several interlocking roles. You are the ninth (or fifth) member of the team. You are also in charge of your boat, giving the rest of the crew directions. Occasionally, you will need to act as their coach as well. And you are the only means of communication between the coach and your rowers out on the water. The more you cox, the better your communication skills will become.

- **CLARITY:** Be sure your commands are decisive, loud and easily understood. For example, prepare your rowers for a command by hesitating after saying, "Ready all?..." Make it clear at the start of the practice which position you want the rowers to stop at when you say "weigh enough!" Be clear when explaining drills and make sure YOU understand what the coach wants you to do before you proceed. If you are in doubt about a coach's instructions, raise your hand and ask him/her to repeat the commands.
- **TONE:** Everyone responds to an upbeat, encouraging tone of voice. Be firm when necessary, but above all, keep a sense of humor. Misunderstandings are going to occur, and you can choose to get on with the practice with a cheerful response. Although you are in charge, be part of your team; let your rowers know you'd welcome their help and are prepared to admit your mistakes. However, since you are in charge of the crew, it is important that you do not let your own nervousness take over the boat. Perhaps Douglas Adams (*The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*) has the best advice: Don't panic.
- **COACHING:** Don't be seduced by the sense of power that comes with giving orders. The coach is ultimately in charge. You have a very important job to do, but you are not the coach. No matter how much you think you know about rowing, you don't know as much as s/he does. Except in an emergency, don't talk while the coach is speaking. Especially in the beginning, stick to giving directions, with only an occasional comment to a rower to adjust a flagrant mistake. Nobody likes to be constantly criticized, so let your rowers row in peace, even if you see mistakes. They'll figure out a lot of it on their own, especially if you remind them to relax. We're all tempted to tell someone what they're doing wrong—remember to tell them when they're doing something right. Phrasing corrections in a positive way is more helpful to your crew. For example, instead of the negative "Don't sky your blade," say "Raise your hands at the finish."
- **SILENCE IS GOLDEN:** Sometimes it's tempting to talk too much as cox. Remember it's helpful to let your crew row in silence. You have a lot to think about to do your job well, and so do your rowers. Try to find a balance of talking and quiet times. If it's not essential, don't say it. You'll only distract your rowers.

## Equipment

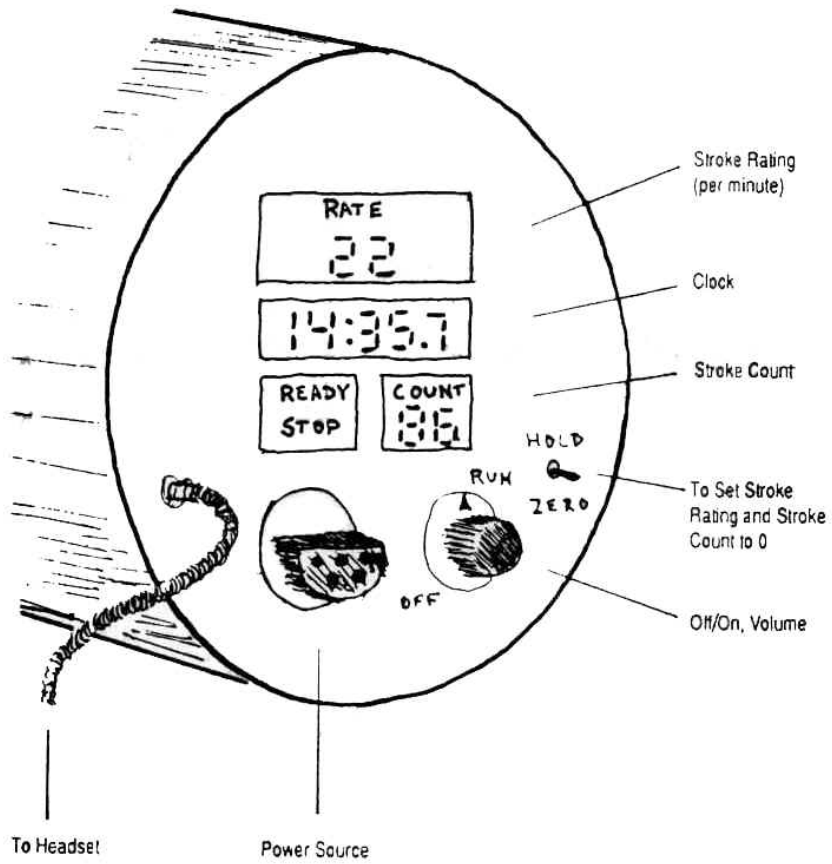
When you've confirmed that you will be coxing, collect the gear you will need to take with you. Cox boxes, crates for shoes, seat cushions, and cox bags can be found to the far side of the tanks in the first bay. Boat lights are also there.

- **EXTRA CLOTHES:** It's always colder than you think out on the water. So when it's cool, take an extra jacket (preferably water-resistant), hat and gloves. A foam seat pad can also help. Don't hesitate to make yourself as comfortable as is practical, since you will be able to concentrate better if you're not shivering or constantly shifting in your seat.
- **COX BAGS:** Located in the crate box next to the cox box rack are bags which contain everything you'll need (and more!) to go on the water as a cox. Inside you'll find a tool (the wooden dowel used to loosen (never tighten!) the nuts on the foot stretchers), tape, Band-Aids, a felt pen, an adjustable wrench, a flashlight and a clear bag with extra spacers and wing nuts. If your kit is missing anything, please inform cox captain Sharon Eaton.
- **COX BOX:** Unplug one of the boxes sitting in the cox box rack at the front of the bay. Your cox box should have a headstrap/microphone. Boxes without headstraps can still be used, just tuck the mic into your hat! Once in the boat, slide the cox box into the circular holder and plug in to the hanging wire. Make sure that the plugs inside the connector line up with the holes in the cox box. Test for sound and adjust the volume so that the whole boat can hear you. Be considerate of the ears of those rowers sitting next to the speakers: don't shout. But remember to speak loudly enough so that 7 seat (who doesn't have a speaker), can hear you. Cox boxes should always be carried by their white handles, never by the microphone cords. Any broken boxes should be reported to Veronique Oomen who oversees the cox boxes and associated equipment. Always plug a box back in upon its return to the rack.

Carry the cox box, bag, and seat cushion in a crate. NOTE: Rowers often put their water bottles and seat pads in the box as well. Once you have removed your session equipment from the crate rowers can place their shoes in the empty crate.

- **BOAT LIGHTS:** In early spring and late fall early morning rows occur in darkness. At those times boat lights must be affixed to the stern and bow of the boat. Lights are stored near the rest of the coxing equipment in a tool box. Test a red and a white light to make sure they work. The red light goes in front, on the bow deck, and the white light in the rear, on the stern deck. A way to remember is that it is the opposite configuration on your car. The lights have large suction cups, wet them before attaching them. Remember to remove them after the boat is docked.

# Illustration of Cox Box



*Drawing by Weir Strange*

## Getting the Boat out of the House

Once you have your equipment in hand, get your crew together near the rack of your assigned boat. Make sure they have taken the correct oars out first. Place oars at the tank side of the cement platform. If there are oars in the way, direct your boat to an opening between them, rather than having rowers step amongst them as they carry the boat. To keep crowding at the dock to a minimum, do not move your boat until you are sure there is space on the dock. Remember that Princeton University and the National Team have docking and launching priorities.

Take a minute to figure out the best way to get the boat off the rack and out of the boathouse. This will depend on which rack the boat is located.

The first command is "hands on the rollers – roll it out."

### Overhead:

- Have the tallest and strongest rowers at each end.
- Have the shorter rowers reach up, even if they cannot touch the boat.
- Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. The command is "up an inch and side-step to the center."
- Command: "Down to shoulders, splitting opposite the riggers."
- One side of the boat down - "bridge side down" or "tank side down" (this ensures that the riggers will not hit the bay door frame when moving the boat out of the boathouse).
- "Walk the boat slowly out of the boathouse."

### Shoulder high:

- Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. The command is "up an inch and side-step to the center."— "Down to shoulders, splitting opposite the riggers."
- One side of the boat down ("bridge side down" or "tank side down").
- "Walk the boat slowly out of the boathouse."

### Waist high:

- Each rower reach across the boat and grip both gunwales, or sides of the boat.
- Carefully lift the boat slightly and move it off the rack. The command is "up an inch and side-step to the center."
- Starting at bow, every other rower ducks under the boat, one at a time, and grips his/her side of the boat. Command, "starting at bow, every other rower duck under one at a time to be opposite your rigger."
- Each rower should now be holding only his/her side of the boat, at waist height.
- Lift to shoulders.

- One side of the boat up ("bridge side up" or "tank side up").
- Walk the boat slowly out of the boathouse.

#### **On the floor:**

- Roll boat out from under the rack by placing one hand on the hull and one hand on the lowboys.
- Rowers line up opposite their riggers.
- "Lift to waist."
- "Bridge side up" or "tank side (or tree side) up."
- Walk the boat slowly out of the house.

**Special situations:** If there is a boat on stretchers in the aisle, there will be a tight squeeze getting the boat out. In choosing which side to lower, look where the riggers will pass most freely, paying attention to both the boat on stretchers and boats on the racks.

#### **Important Things to Remember:**

- You will stand at the bow while coxing the boat out of the boathouse. Watch the riggers on the boat on the rack above yours. The most common accident is scraping the bottom of your boat against the riggers above.
- When coxing the boat in and out of the boathouse, remember that some rowers may have switched places to accommodate heights. To give commands based on "ports" and "starboards" might be confusing. Use terms such as "tank side" or "bridge side," "water side" or "house side" instead.
- Be sure the boat is walked out through the center of the doors (make sure the doors are opened completely) and that riggers on both sides are clear.

## **Getting the Boat in the Water**

Stop the boat when the bow ball is clear of the building "down side" or "up side" should return to shoulders. Swing the bow towards the bridge and walk the boat slowly down onto the dock. Remind rowers to be mindful of the step down from the platform onto the dock and to be careful of the gap between the platform and the dock. (Injury could occur if a rower's foot got caught in this gap.) In cold weather, caution rowers if the dock is icy. Rowers should cautiously move when icy conditions occur.

Dock space is always tight, so put your boat in the next available space **along the dock**, as close as possible to any boat already in the water. The rowers will stand at the edge **of the dock "toe the edge"**, take the boat **overhead and then roll it down to high waist, reach out and place the boat into the water**. Remind rowers to bend their **knees as they lower** the boat rather than hold the weight of the boat in their lower backs and to place the boat evenly on the water so that outside riggers do not go down into the water.

**NOTE: BE SURE TO PUT YOUR HAND NEXT TO THE FIN AS YOU GUIDE THE BOAT IN THE WATER.** Losing a fin/skeg on the dock is one of the most common ways this vital piece of equipment is broken. Be sure to lightly push the boat out and away from the dock, hand by the fin, as the rowers lower the boat from waist to water.

While the rowers prepare their spacers and foot stretchers, you can place the cox box in the plastic holder and connect to speaker wire. If lights are required place the red light in the bow and the white light in the stern. Place your cox equipment bag in your area and if you are using a seat cushion place it on your seat. Collect shoes in the crate and place the crate to the far sides of the platform. If it is raining your rowers appreciate placing the crate with their shoes under the overhead of the building so that shoes remain dry.

## Getting into the Boat

Ask for a countdown of your rowers to let you know their readiness to step into the boat. Outside oars are put across onto the water with blades flat. Rowers always hold the oar handle while getting into the boat. Command "one foot in and down." While your rowers are getting settled in their seats you can now get into your coxswain seat, turn on the cox box and test the volume by asking if rowers can hear you. The volume may need to be increased once on the water. The rowers will let you know.

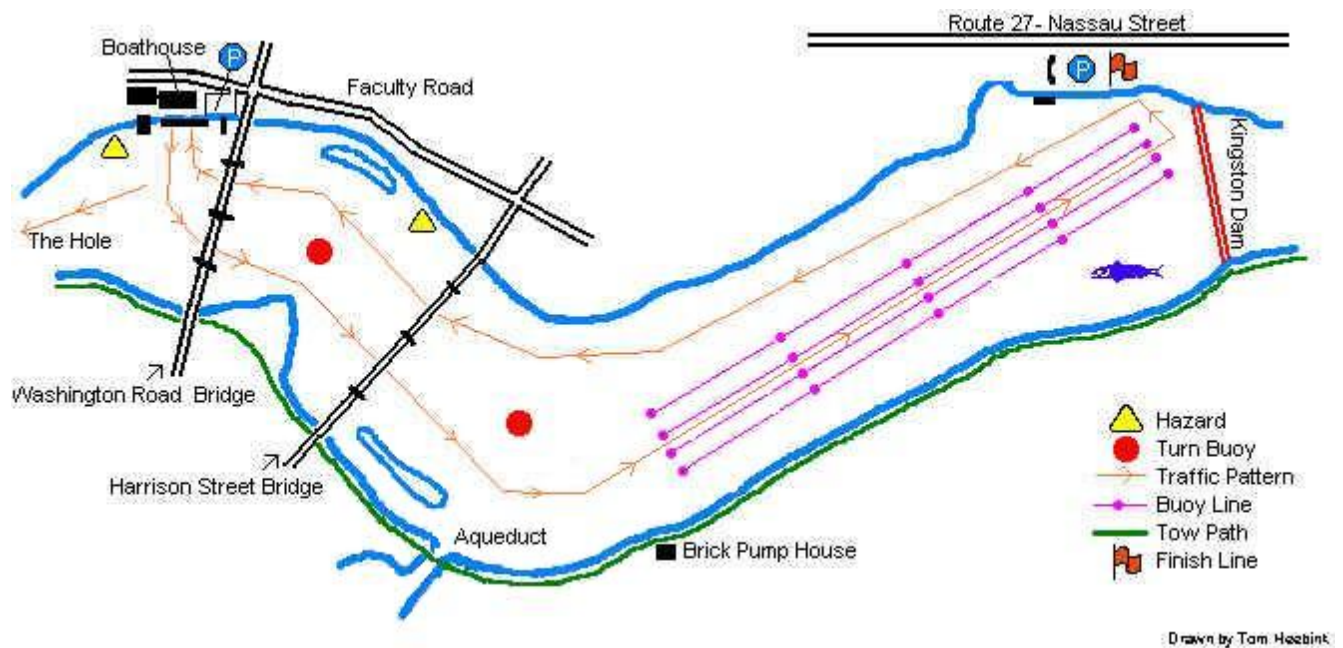
Ask for another countdown to ensure that all rowers are ready to push off the dock. "Hand on the dock, in two we will push off. One, two, push." Depending on how your boat is rigged, number two or three seat will use their oar to push the boat away from the dock. This same rower will take a few strokes to position the boat to safely move through the bridge. Once you have your "point" you can add additional rowers.

## Traffic Flow & Illustration of Lake Carnegie

Follow the rules of the road on Lake Carnegie—stay to the right. Imagine the lake as a highway, with an imaginary line down the center. Do not cross into the oncoming lane under any circumstances (unless directed by a coach). Also, stay off of the imaginary "shoulder" on your right side, where it's very shallow.

- Always go through the arch which is second from the right as you face either bridge, in either direction.
- Stay alert for the following hazards:
  - Wakes: Alert your crew to stay relaxed as they row through a wake. Tell them which side it's coming from.
  - Debris: Steer around it. If you get close to a something floating in the water, tell the rowers on that side to "watch your oars."
  - Fishing boats: Don't expect them to move. We share the lake with others, so please be considerate of them. But it is you who must get out of the way.
- To help the coaches help us, wait for them at an agreed upon place on the water. They will not be able to coach your crew if you take off down the lake alone. Stay next to any other boats grouped with you under the same coach.
- To avoid collisions and confusion, remember to communicate as often as necessary with the coach and other boats.
- Never cut the corner at either of the two major turns on the lake. Stay to the right at all times.
- The race course is 2,000 meters. Large red balls indicate 500 meters and the small red balls 250 meters.

## Lake Carnegie



## Steering

- Once you're away from the dock, the workout has started, and you're calling the shots (following the coach's instructions, of course). Your most important job on the water is to steer clear of any hazards and to maintain as straight a course as possible.
- To steer: grasp the cords at your sides with both hands. Push your right hand forward to turn right. Push your left hand forward to turn left. Some fours have a tiller for steering, move it to the right to go right, left to go left.
- It takes practice to learn how a boat will react to steering. Usually we all over-steer, and over-correct, as novice coxswains. Remember that the faster a boat goes, the greater the effect of the rudder. In other words, at high speeds, a small steering correction is all that is needed. When the boat is going very slowly, you won't be able to steer with the rudder and will have to have the rowers adjust your direction by pulling harder on one side or the other.
- Ideally, you will steer only when the oars are in the water, not on the recovery. This means that you will turn a small amount in "pulses" with each stroke, rather than by holding one hand forward throughout the turn. Steering this way takes practice, but it will affect the set of the boat less. It is also possible to ask for more pressure from either ports or starboards to help get you around a corner. Remember to ask for equal pressure again when you are headed correctly. Many novice coxes also seem to dislike wearing the cox box headband. Please wear the headband to keep your hands free. Pulsing on each stroke means that your hands need to be on your rudder strings, not holding your microphone.
- Warn the rowers when it's your steering which is causing the boat to go "off keel." They will appreciate knowing what's causing the change in the set of the boat.
- To steer a straight course, set a point. Look ahead of the boat and pick a target, such as a tall tree or other easily distinguishable feature. By keeping that point ahead of you, you will avoid carving serpentine down the lake. Always make sure you are aiming correctly before giving the command to row. At a standstill, you can adjust your line up by asking the bow or 2 seat to "touch it," or to take a light stroke.



## Warm-up

As you begin the practice, it is important to let the rowers loosen up. Row away from the dock by fours at light pressure. Wait for the coach on the far side of the stone bridge. Usually the coach will direct you from there, starting drills as a warm-up. If you ever need to do a warm up first, meeting the coach later, row by fours, switching by pairs or by fours, gradually increasing the pressure. Wait for the coach and any other boats. Allow rowers to take off extra clothes and remind them to drink some water.

- When rowers are not rowing, remind them to set the boat for their teammates by keeping a steady upward pressure on the under side of the oar handle.
- If it's cold, be sure to switch rowers often so that no one sits shivering for more than a few minutes.

## Drills

As a warm-up, the coach will usually call for a series of drills. Listen carefully for his/her instructions. If you didn't hear or don't understand the drill, be sure to raise your hand and ask. You might also get some help from the stroke. If you do understand, be sure to wave your hand, nod your head, or otherwise acknowledge the fact to the coach. The coach may say, "on my command" when he announces a drill or the start of a workout piece. Listen carefully. Begin the drill immediately, and stay even with the other boats. In all drills, be sure the rowers do not rush the slide after a pause. And remind them of the required pressure frequently. In counting power 10's and 20's, make your diction crisp and sharp. In 20's and 30's, count by series of 10's.

### TYPICAL DRILLS

- **Pause:** Usually start with a pause at the hands away position on every stroke. Progress through bodies away, half-slide and 3/4 slide positions. Often 10 strokes at each position, usually at 1/2 to 3/4 pressure.
- **Rusties:** Take one stroke, pausing at the hands away or half-slide position. When the coxswain says "row" rowers return to the finish then move up to the catch and take a stroke, all in sync. The coach may ask rowers to take more than one stroke in between each rusty.
- **"3 and 20 at 26"** (for example): Take 3 strokes to build the pressure to full and the stroke rating to 26. Then take 20 strokes and return to the paddle or half pressure.

You must stay even with the other boats your coach is working with. Anticipate this when you start or finish a drill or workout piece. You may need to adjust the length of your pauses and/or the pressure in order to stay with the other boats.

## Turning Around

Aim for the concrete "bunker" at the far end of the lake. Do not follow the shore on your right at that end. Well before you get to the dam, turn the boat around by "spinning" it. The boat must be completely stopped before the ports back it. Remind the rowers to use only arms and backs to turn the boat, since any more pressure might damage the equipment.

When turning the boat around anywhere on the lake, do it **in two stages**: Turn 90°, **row straight across** to the other side of the lake, **and then turn the final 90°**.

## Racing Starts

On the way back to the boathouse, usually the coach will add in a longer, more intense workout. Sometimes a "friendly" race will be a part of the session. You can help your crew get the most out of a tougher piece by encouraging them with a dynamic tone of voice. Psychology comes into play here: Remind the rowers of good technique and to "hang in there" by using positive self-talk. Remember to set the timer on the cox box if necessary. Keep track of time carefully if the piece is a timed piece. Keep track of distance if the piece is a distance piece. At regular intervals, tell the rowers what their stroke rating is and how much further they have to go. And listen to any suggestions from your stroke, since he or she will often know what corrections need to be made before you do.

- **RACING START:** The coach will begin a race when all coxes' hands are down. So, keep your hand in the air until your boat is pointed and all your rowers are ready in the three-quarter slide position. Then tell rowers your hand is down. You must let your rowers know before the start what the beginning stroke sequence will be. It might be: half (slide), 3/4, 3/4, full, full, 10 strokes at a high rate, then dropping to a slower rate (the "settle"). The rowers start on the coach's command.

## Landing

Bringing the boat into the dock can be a nerve-wracking event, even for experienced coxswains. Don't hesitate to get some direction from your stroke to help. So that CLRA boats are not damaged during docking, a coach must always be present on the dock to receive your boat as it docks. If a coach is not on the dock, wait until he/she is there to guide you.

There are a few things to keep in mind.

- Once you clear the stone bridge, use the stern pair to bring you slowly towards the dock at no pressure for absolutely minimum boat speed. Be ready to ask one side or the other to add pressure or to go light.
- Approach the dock slowly, but with some momentum, at about a 30-45° angle. At a point which you will recognize as you become more experienced, stop rowing and ask the rowers to lean away from the dock. This action will turn the boat parallel to the dock, and your momentum should carry you close enough for a perfect landing. Be prepared to ask stroke or 7 seat to check it or back it in order to bring the stern in closer to the dock. Remember that someone has to be on the dock to catch you before you land, either a coach or a rower from a crew which landed before you.
- After docking, you get out of the boat first.
- To ensure the boat doesn't flip, make sure all rowers are out of the boat before any of the oars are pulled across.

## Getting the Boat out of the Water

Once your boat is docked you are the first to get out of the boat. Once you are out of the boat, ensure that you can see all eight rowers and then command, "one foot out." When all eight rowers have one foot out, command, "and out." When all eight rowers are out of the boat call starboard oars across.

Place your racks on the platform, ready to receive the boat for washing when the rowers bring the boat up. Grab the crate and dump rowers' shoes next to the boat on the dock. Collect rowers' seat pads and water bottles, your coxing equipment, including lights, and place in crate. All oars should be out of the oar locks and placed on the platform.

Command, "all hands on" to position all eight rowers ready to lift the boat. Command, "in two, lift the boat above heads – one, two and up." Then, "split to sides" (ports always go opposite their riggers to the water). Make sure that no one's head is between a rigger. All rowers should be in position and then command, "walk the boat up to the racks." Remind rowers to watch their step going up to the platform from the dock.

When the boat is correctly positioned over the rack command "down to high waist"; make sure the racks are correctly positioned on both ends of the boat. Command, "gently place the boat down on the rack." Assign half the boat (ports, starboards) to wash the boat and the other to return the oars.

## Getting the Boat into the House

When all eight rowers are in position on the boat, command, "hands on"; "up to high waist"; "bridge side (or tank side) up to shoulders." Walk the boat slowly, bow first, into the boathouse until the bow ball lines up with those of the boats already on the racks. Command the boat to shoulders. Which commands you use depends on which rack the boat goes on [see the section on "Getting the Boat Out of the House"]. Tell your crew which rack they're headed for. Before dismissing the rowers, make sure they have put away all the oars

- Once the boat is safely put away, open the round white hatch covers at both ends, and put your Cox equipment back into the CLRA box, plugging the Cox box in to the power source.
- You must check carefully as the boat is put on the rack to see that no riggers hit the concrete pillars and the both gunwales along the length of the boat are **supported on the racks**.
- Watch, too, that riggers on the boat above don't scratch your boat as it's moved onto the rack.
- Take a final look that the rowers have secured their oar locks.

## Conclusion

Congratulations! You have just completed a short course in coxing at CLRA. Because this is just a quick summary, do ask the coaches and more experienced coxes to help you learn even more.

It's also helpful to ask your crew for comments about what worked and what didn't during your practice. As rowers, we all have pet peeves and favorite coxing styles. Think of the ways that certain coxes have helped you to row better. We're all in this together, and if you solicit your crew's ideas, we'll all support each other through this reaming process.

And thanks for coxing. We all appreciate your effort.

If you have any questions or comments please e-mail Sharon Eaton at [seaton18@aol.com](mailto:seaton18@aol.com).