

# MOUNT VERNON CREW

## 2012 COXSWAIN ORIENTATION AND GUIDELINES

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Congratulations! You are going to be a Mount Vernon Crew coxswain and will be training with the most elite athletes in high school sports. The hard work and intensity of rowing requires you as a coxswain to learn a whole different language, some physics, have some charisma and most of all, become a leader.

### MV's 7 rules of coxing:

1. **You are in charge in the boat.** If you let your team walk over you then you have failed as a coxswain
2. **Be polite and courteous** to other coxswains on the water, and to the rowers in your boat
3. **Have a positive attitude** "you're going to die" is not the type of phrases you want to be saying to eight freshmen at their first race. Encourage and compliment them when they are doing well, but get on them when they are rowing poorly. A positive attitude may include aggressiveness, and that is okay, as long as it works for the shell you are coxing.
4. **Obey the traffic patterns** Green buoys to your starboard red buoys to your port, and maintain a relatively straight course. The more experienced Coxswain when traveling in fleets (two or more shells) must stay closest to the shore.
5. **Be alert on and off water** It is your responsibility to look out for obstacles that could potentially wreck your shell, equipment or rowers so constantly scan the pathway of your shell to and from the water and the water for obstacles, debris or buoys that are in your path.
6. **Remain Calm** Rowers face the rear of the boat so they can't see where they are going and rely on you. Rowers will sense if you are nervous and this will bring tension in the boat which causes poor rowing. If you let your focus drift, you will not be able to make quick decisions that could potentially save your boat and equipment from damage.
7. **Be the cheerleader and slave driver** A coxswain must have the capability of switching gears in a matter of seconds. You need to be able to go from calm and relaxed in the rower's eyes, to intense and urgent. This is mostly accomplished by tone of your voice not by actually becoming intense and urgent because you lose focus, but making the rowers think you are as you sound. Do not forget to encourage them. You must be able to react quickly to sloppy rowing and also be quick to drop a complement if a rower has improved.

### Coxswains Responsibilities

To be an effective coxswain you need to know what your responsibilities are. At Mount Vernon these include:

- Safety of the boat and the rowers -both on and off the water
- Launching
- Steering/ control of the boat's course
- Landing
- Giving direction to rowers for better rowing style while on the water
- General care of the equipment you use
- Giving feedback to the coach
- Making sure your assigned shell is strapped and secured on the rack at the end practice
- Care and charging of your cox box

Memorize the seating positions and which side each seat rows on. This is common knowledge to all coxswains and you are expected to know this the first day of spring practice. It is easiest to count the riggers to find out which seat number you are commanding to row.

## **General procedures and policies of Mount Vernon Crew Coxswains:**

As a coxswain, you are responsible for the boat you are in and therefore the rowers in that boat. Respect from and to your fellow athletes is key. Watch your tone of voice and choice of words. Maintain a level of professionalism, especially in the boat.

### **\*\*Once on the water-Never be out of sight of your coach\*\***

\*bring a hat and sunglasses to every practice/regatta

\*Make sure you have your cox box and that it is working

\*assemble rowers and alert coach to missing rowers, if any

\*ask what direction you are going once on the water: north towards Mount Vernon Estate or south around Fort Belvoir

### **\*acknowledging the coach**

On the water when given instructions, directions, or commands from the coach, acknowledge that you heard and understood him/her by a quick raise of one of your hands. It is sometimes difficult to hear a verbal "OK-coach" but a hand signal can be seen

### **\*caring for the rowers in your boat**

As a coxswain, and the only one with free hands when carrying a boat to the dock, you'll more than likely be carrying the water bottles and assorted other items your rowers need while on the water. If a rower has a medical condition and needs to bring supplies with them (inhaler, sugar tablets, etc), be sure that they have these prior to pushing off the dock

### **\*problems in the boat**

Discuss with the coach how he or she wants you to handle correcting technique and speaking to rowers while the coach is talking. If you're not sure, ask, especially when it comes to drills and workouts. Always follow a criticism up with the way to correct the problem. If there is a personal problem, handle it off the water one-on-one with the rower and coach, if necessary

### **\*reporting injuries and damage**

Safety is paramount. If a rower has open wounds (blisters) that may ooze on the oar, encourage him/her to tape it or use liquid bandage. If an injury occurs during a practice or race, first make sure the rower is okay and able to row. Report the injury to the coach or official at the first opportunity

If damage to the boat occurs, notify the coach as soon as possible

### **\*coxswain selection for races**

Coxswain selection for a specific boat is up to the coach. Many factors will be taken into account, including attendance, general skill, steering, motivation technique, and the chemistry of the boat.

### **\*Potential Emergency situations on the water:**

#### **Weather:**

If you think that you hear thunder or see lightning, bring it to the attention of your coach. Follow his/her directions on your course of action. If there is significant wind, sometimes being closer to the shore is safer than being in the middle of the river. Observe the waves. If you need to turn and your boat will be hit by the wind or waves on its side, execute the maneuver **as quickly as possible** to avoid swamping the boat

#### **Swamping:**

DO NOT PANIC. Remember you are in charge of your boat until the coach takes over. If the boat is completely submerged, and the **coach** decides to evacuate it, he/she will do so by pairs. Port and starboard rowers evacuate at the same time. Failure to evacuate the boat properly can result in the shell breaking in half. Don't forget to grab your cox box when you leave the shell. If you must leave the shell, rowers should always hold the side until loaded into the coaching launch.

**\*\* DO NOT LEAVE THE BOAT TO SWIM TO SHORE. Keep your rowers together with the boat\*\***

Older oars can float and the boat will float even if it is full of water. You can use the oars or the boat to stay afloat until the coaching launch arrives.

The coaching launch has all needed emergency equipment and coaches are well trained in emergency procedures. This is another reason why you should **always** have your coach in sight while on the water.

#### **Rower ejected from the boat:**

**\*\*DO NOT LET ANY OTHER ROWER LEAVE THE BOAT TO HELP\*\***

A rower can be ejected from the boat by the force of the oar hitting his body when he catches a "major" crab. If this occurs, stop the forward movement of the boat immediately by calling "Hold water". Get the rower in your sight and signal the coach immediately. This can be done by waving your hands over your head, calling out to the coach and/or blowing your whistle (attached to the cox box handle).

#### **Debris:**

A coxswain must constantly observe the river for debris or other obstacles that potentially can damage the shell or endanger the rowers. Be careful going around turns as there are often logs waiting for the unsuspecting coxswain.

## Equipment

As a coxswain you are suppose to be a technical expert, or at least make your rowers think you are. Before every regatta you should take a wrench (seven-sixteenths or 10mm) and make sure all the nuts and bolts are tight on your shell. Always check the top nuts on every rigger. Electrical tape and bandage tape should be with you at all times. Consider carrying a small over the shoulder bag because 9 out 10 times you'll be carrying every rower's water bottle. Later in the season the coach will teach you how to adjust the spread of the riggers to fit your crew's height and reach

Cox boxes are essential equipment on the water. With a cox box, a coxswain can monitor several aspects of the boat's training and relay that information to the coach. Cox boxes are expensive, costing over \$800 each, so you must properly care for them. Coxswains are be assigned a specific cox box for the season. You will be responsible for its care, plugging it in to charge at the marina and returning the cox box with all its equipment at the end of the season.

### Do's and don't of Cox Boxes:

**\*You are required to wear the cox box headband and headset.** Put it on before pushing off the dock. This leaves both of your hands free to steer the boat.

\*Keep your cox box charged. Plug it in before leaving the marina. The cox box should light up red, indicating that it is being charged. The light will NOT turn off when the box is fully charged. Be gentle when attaching the charger plug to the cox box. It will only go on one way.

\*Don't toss the cox box around, leave it on the ground or drop it. If not in use, the cox box should be stowed in its carrying case or in the boathouse.

\*Make sure that the cox box is turned off before storing it.

\*Although the cox box is watertight, avoid immersing the unit in water. The unit can be dried using a soft cloth. If the unit, headband or inside the carrying box get wet, leave the carrying box open overnight to allow it to dry out.

\*Do not bring the charger and carrying box down to the launch dock with you and the boat. Leave these items at the boathouse during practices and in the trailer at regattas.

\*Always know where your cox box is, especially at regattas where there are many teams in close proximity. Cox boxes look alike and can be accidentally picked up by another team.

### **Coxswain's responsibilities before practice:**

- Remind rowers to move their name tag to present
- Stretch out rowers (captains are also responsible for this)
- Remind all rowers to have water, inhalers, etc.
- Use bathroom (Very important! Laugh now, be sure you remember )
- Remind rowers to put sun screen on (unless raining)
- Make sure all rowers have on proper rowing attire ( if it's cold –then layers, no baggy clothing)
- Aid coach in anything he/she asks
- Check your cox box to be sure it is working, gather your box, hat, glasses and have them ready

### Launch and recovery procedures

You are required to behave in a patient and courteous way when launching and returning:

- Yell “heads up” when coming near rowers
- Watch your boat when moving to and from the launch dock. Be especially careful near pleasure craft stored at the marina and parked vehicles
- Wait your turn for placing the boat in the water
- Take your turn when landing and do not move ahead of another boat who arrived earlier
- Dock by pairs only; don’t row in at mach speed
- Clear your boat off the dock as quickly as possible
- Assign a pair of your rowers to come back after your boat is on the rack to get the oars
- Assign rowers to wipe the boat down with a towel once it is on the rack
- Assign rowers to strap down the boat on the rack

## **Boat Wash Thursday**

Every Thursday at the end of practice, the boats will be washed. Instead of placing the boat on the rack at the end of practice, you will instruct your rowers to place the boat upside down in the slings at one of the washing stations.

As you land at the dock:

- Assign 2 rowers to spray liquid boat soap (Sprayers)
- Assign 2 rowers to use rags to wash the boat down (Washers)
- Assign 2 rowers to rinse the boat down using the sponges and water bucket at the wash station (Rinsers)
- Assign 2 rowers to bring the oars up off the dock, those rowers will then dry the boat with the towel at the wash station (Dryers)

This entire procedure should take 5 minutes or less to do. You are responsible for keeping your rowers moving and doing their assigned tasks. You do not leave your boat. Once the boat is dried, have your rowers put the boat on the rack and secure it.

## **Traffic regulations**

\*Stay in the channel when entering or leaving the Belvoir marina. It is clearly marked with buoys. Failure to stay in the channel could mean beaching your boat causing it to get damaged

**\* Don’t pass the birds nest in the cove while waiting for your coaching launch. You are responsible for the behavior of your boat while waiting for the coach**

\* Be watchful of boats entering or leaving the marina. Smaller craft have the right of way

\*Pass to the left of other boats. If it is necessary to pass a fishing boat, give the boat plenty of room

\* Keep control of your boat when entering/exiting the marina. Do not have your rowers rowing at full pressure but move slowly through the waterway

## **Steering**

Every time a coxswain steers, boat speed decreases with the increased drag in the water. The best steersperson is the one who can follow the best line with the minimum amount of steering. In a regatta, this is simply the straightest line. Steering is the most visible part of a coxswain's job while practicing and racing. You may be the most knowledgeable coxswain in the world, but it will not help your boat's chances in a race if you are steering a course that covers an extra 100 meters.

Coxswains must also remember that steering is a constant concern. Just as cars can be out of alignment due to a wheel problem, shells can also be "out of alignment" by a side that rows stronger than the other. With eight rowers of equal strength and abilities, a port-rigged boat will naturally turn to port since the starboard oarsmen are furthest forward. With the exception of rowing on a dead calm lake, shells will always be pushed around by wind and currents. Attempting to control these natural forces can result in over-steering which will leave a visible series of S-turns in the water.

Steering a large boat almost 60 feet long with a rudder the size of a postcard looks challenging. It is for the first few months, but with focus can be mastered quickly. The most important thing to remember about steering is that it is a delayed response. This delay is up to three or four strokes. You must plan, begin, and end your turns in advance!

The basics:

A shell is more stable when the blades are in the water.

A shell is less stable when the blades are out of the water.

The boat accelerates on the drive and decelerates on the recovery.

Turning slows the boat because of rudder drag and for other reasons.

The coxswain should steer as little as possible.

Shells don't go straight by themselves-rowers have different strengths, sometimes washout, the current and wind push the shell around, etc

## **The Rudder**

In most boats (those where the rudder cables do not cross to make an X), pushing the right rudder toggle forward turns the boat to starboard. The rudder cable is a continuous loop so pushing the right toggle forward is the same as pulling the left toggle back. If the rudder cable in your boat has some slack in it and hangs loosely, take a few minutes before practice to tell your coach.

## **Your Body Position**

As you cox your boat, your body position should not sway from side to side or front to back. The best way to describe your proper body position is that you are part of the boat. If the boat leans tremendously to port, do not lean away to starboard to counteract the problem. By doing so, you are letting the rowers fail in their responsibility to hold the boat on keel. They need to know what to do when the set falls off. By moving around in the stern, they have no idea if they have fixed the set or if you did it by leaning.

## **Do not move around in the stern. Sit still!**

Looking at the narrowness of a shell, it is obvious that leaning out of the boat will cause the set to fall to one side. It may not be as obvious that a turn will also throw off the set. Steering the boat towards port will cause the set to fall to starboard and vice versa.

## **When To Turn**

Approximately three strokes before the turn is needed, gently pull, not yank, on the rudder cable. Novice coxswains should use the rudder throughout the entire stroke; experienced coxswains

should steer only when the blades are in the water. As you begin to finish the turn, remember the delay involved in turning. Stop using the rudder several strokes before the turn should be completed. Steering does not just happen; you learn how to steer. Take the time to learn how to steer when no one really cares - during the first month of the season. When racing season approaches and you need every last tenth of a second to win, it's too late to learn how to steer properly and your team will suffer.

## **RACE DAY**

Remember that you, the coxswain, have control of the boat and are responsible for the on time launch and recovery of your assigned shell. To do so, you must know the boat and its rowers. On regatta days, you will be responsible for making sure your rowers are stretched, the oars are down at the dock, a shoe bucket is available at the dock but most importantly, that your boat launches ON TIME. Coaches will put your event time and launch time on the event dry erase board at the tent. Know these times and who is in your boat. Although coaches try to be there to launch the boats, it is your job to get the boat to the launch dock regardless of whether a coach is available.

### 1) Before Race Day

- a) Mentally prepare yourself--review the racecourse, competition, weather, commands
- b) Make sure your Cox Box is charged, you know where it is, and that you have it with you when you launch
- c) Know the boat /race you are in and the rowers in your boat
- d) Know the time to report to the regatta for the coxswain meeting. This meeting is MANDATORY for all coxswains and takes place very early on race day morning at the regatta site

### 2) On Race Day

- a) Ensure that your rowers inspect their seat in the boat. (They are responsible for attaching the rigger, the seat, checking foot stretchers, etc. for their position in the boat). You are responsible for getting the specific boat bag of tools for rigging and for ensuring that those tools are returned
- b) Be sure you check the boat from bow to stern and top to bottom  
Look for loose/broken equipment, proper rigging, slides are free
- c) Obtain a bow number for your race and attach to the bow (use black electrical tape to secure it to the bow number holder)
- d) Prepare a race strategy with the coach
- e) Know your event number, what time the coach wants your boat to meet at the trailer and the launch time for your race
- f) Warm up your rowers (quick run and stretches) and remind them to have a bathroom break before launching
- g) Be sure that your oars are taken to the launch dock
- h) Be sure that someone is bringing a plastic tub for shoes to the launch dock
- i) Bring your cox box and wrench to the launch dock

### **Launch dock-Race Day**

Just before you get to the launch dock, you will be stopped at the dock by a regatta official. You will be asked your event number, name of your crew (Mount Vernon), and your shell will be checked for a bow number, bow ball, and that each shoe has a heel tie that is the approved length and secured to the shell. Officials will talk to you as the coxswain and usually request that you give commands to your crew so that the boat can be inspected. Listen to the official for directions and be prepared for this inspection. As you approach the dock, there will be another regatta official (called the dock

master) who will call you onto the dock and tell you where to put the boat in the water. The launch dock is usually very busy with many crews launching so be efficient in getting your boat launched.

### **On the water heading to the start line**

You will be told the traffic pattern and any known obstacles at the coxswain's meeting and a course map will be posted at regatta headquarters. The course map gives details on the traffic pattern that will be used for this regatta. Usually you will be going up the river at the same time races are proceeding down. Be aware of your boat's position in the river at all times so that you are not on the racecourse. When a race comes down the course, you must stop your boat until the race passes your boat. Failure to do this can result in a penalty for your boat. DO NOT stop your shell on/near the finish line while a race is coming down. You can be penalized by the referees for this. Use the row to the start line as a warm up of your crew so that when you arrive in the marshaling area at the Start everyone in the boat is ready to race. Listen to regatta officials in the marshaling area as to where your boat should be. While in the marshaling area, you must constantly watch for other boats and debris near your shell and monitor your position.

### **During the race**

Regatta officials (called referees) will follow the race down the course in launch/safety boats. These officials are there to ensure safety and fairness in the race as well as keep the time of the race. They may give directions to crews both verbally and by using flags during the race. If you are given a command by the referee, you must obey it.

### **After you finish the race**

After the race is over, crews stop their boats a safe distance past the finish line. During this "cool down" time, you still must be aware of the position of your shell and potential dangers to your rowers and equipment. If you have a rower who is ill, raise your hand so that the referee knows to come to you. This is also your opportunity to let the official know if you have a protest or other issue. If you are protesting the race, you must raise your hand high in the air and keep it there until the referee comes to you. Clearly state your issue to the referee and listen to his/her explanation of what he can do to remedy the situation. If you do not agree with the referee's decision tell him/her and then speak to your coach immediately when you get to land to determine any other actions that may be taken. Once you have been cleared by the referee to leave the area, begin rowing to the recovery dock. Again, watch for other crews heading to the start or towards the recovery dock and be aware of your position in the water.

### **Recovery dock**

As you approach the recovery dock, you'll be directed by regatta officials where to land. You may have several people yelling commands to you from the dock. REMEMBER-you are in charge of your boat and the safety of your rowers and equipment. If someone on the dock is telling you to land with all 8 rowing or to land when your boat is perpendicular to the dock; it is up to you to dock your boat in the safest way. The coach will not care what someone on the dock told you to do if you damage the equipment with a poor landing. Like the launch dock, the recovery dock is usually very busy. Once docked, be efficient in getting your boat out of the water. Again, coaches try to be on the dock to help you with recovery but it is not always possible. If the coach is not there, you are responsible for getting your boat back to the trailer.

Oars are taken off the dock and placed in a specified area just off the dock for pick up once the boat is back at the trailer (be sure to assign a few rowers to get them or ask rowers at the trailer). Hopefully your shoe bin will nearby and someone can get it for your rowers.

## **The Landing**

Landing is an important part of your coxing abilities, not only because an improper landing can damage your boat, but also because landings are one of the few visible signs of your abilities. If you cox the best race of your life and follow it with an awful landing, you will probably be remembered more for the poor landing than for the great race.

Do not hesitate to ask for help from someone on the dock

If you are in difficult landing situations, stay calm.

If the landing you are attempting is hopeless, stop the attempt. Back it down from the dock and try again.

## **Boat issues on the water:**

### **IF SET IS OFF:**

\*\*the side that catches first will pull the boat down first. The side that releases (finishes) last will pull the boat down last. (so if you're down to port and it flops to starboard, port may be catching before starboard and starboard may release last)\*\*

\*check catch timing off of stroke: first port side, then starboard. Let each person know if they are late or early. Remind them to follow the person in front of them and use peripheral vision to help. Tell them to slow the slide down, imagining a balloon in between calves and thighs...compress gradually.

\*check release timing off of stroke: if they're popping out early...are they going in early? If so, remind them to slow the slide and catch with stroke. If they are not going in early, but are catching with everyone else, remind them to lay back and reach at the catch to make the stroke take longer.

\*consistent hand levels: have them sit by 6's at the catch and bury the blade so that the top of the blade is visible under but does not break the water's surface. This should be their catch height. Have them pick some point of reference on the boat or the seat in front of them so they can maintain that height. Then have them sit at the release (finish) with blade buried as described above. Pick point of reference. Each stroke should be drawing a line between the two points.

### **FOR SET OR KEEL PROBLEMS**

\*Are the catches early on one side or the other? Call out the offender, and then remind them to slow slides down, reach towards ankles, layback, and keep legs flat until the back extends over it, call catches

\*Are the catches late on one side or the other? Call out the offender, and then remind them to get quick hands away, follow the wheels in front, and take less time on the slide, call catches

\*Are the releases early? Call out the offender, then check to see if they are catching early. If so, see above. If not, remind them to lay back. Check to see if their blade goes in all the way. If not, remind them to lift up at the catch and feel the bite of the water before pulling through.

\*Are the releases late? Call out the offender, then check to see if they are catching late. If not, check blade depth. (water should not roll off more than 1 ½ feet of the oar handle). If blade is too deep, remind them to pull in horizontal.

\*Is there a dip to one side at the catch? If so, check to see if the other side is in early. If so, correct catch timing (see above). If not, remind them to keep the outside shoulder up and extend the neck and relax the shoulders. Shoulders should remain parallel with the oar handle.

\*Is there a dip at the release? If so, check to see if one side is out late. Correct the side to get in time with stroke. Check blade depth (see release late).

\*Is there a wobble during the recovery? If so, remind them to slow the slides and keep body weight center line. Lean gently into the rigger (but not so much that you can see their faces). Keep outside shoulder high

\*Is it down to port on the recovery? If so, have starboards lower hands on the recovery.

\*Is it down to starboard on the recovery? If so, have ports lower hands on the recovery.

### FOR RUSH

\*Remind them to slow slides, follow the person in front of them

\*Is the stroke rate too high for them to handle?

\*Keep your voice calm

\*Count out the slide from the release to the catch

\*Call catches

### MISSING WATER

\*call out offender, and then remind them to lift at the catch before they drive with the legs, remind them to relax shoulders and keep the chin high

\*check oar height at catch and finish when boat is stopped to make sure rigger isn't too high. (oar handle should be between the bottom of the ribcage and the belly button)

\*remind them to put the blade in behind the oarlock

### WASHING OUT

\*call out offender, remind them to lay back and breathe, get the legs fully extended before pushing the oar out of the water

### SKYING

\*call out offender, remind them to lift up at the catch like the blade is a skier going off a ski jump, remind them to have steady hand levels

## TO GET MORE RUN

\*Remind them to relax the shoulders, reach, and layback. Keep necks up and chins up. Put the oar in behind the pin.

## LATE ROLL UPS/FLIP CATCHING

\*call out offender, remind them to start rolling up as soon as they get the oar feathered.

## ABOVE ALL TELL THEM WHEN THEY HAVE MADE THE IMPROVEMENT!

## PICK DRILL

This is the basic warm-up

Start with bow pair or bow 4.

**BOW FOUR, SIT READY, ARMS ONLY, READY, ROW**

(you should see them sitting up tall and using arms only. If not, remind them to sit up and get arms away quickly)

-do this for 10 strokes. On number 8, say "ADD BACK IN TWO, ONE, TWO,

-you should see them extending the arms, then the back. Remind them to keep nice, tall backs and reach towards the feet. Do arms and back for 8 strokes, then say, "FULL SLIDE IN TWO, ONE, TWO," and they should slowly take strokes. Do this for 8 strokes, then say, "SWITCH TO STERN

**FOUR (or pair) IN TWO, ONE, TWO, SWITCH, STERN FOUR, ARMS ONLY.**

-continue as above