

INSPIRING A LEGACY



What can we learn technically from the Olympic rowers? **Robin Williams** looks at eight areas that should be on your hit-list, whatever your ambitions

The motto of London 2012 was “Inspire a Generation”, and if you watched any of the events live or on TV how could you fail to have been inspired by the Olympic Games. The rowing regatta was a spectacular success with wonderful performances on the water and unparalleled enthusiasm from the crowds and volunteers. So if you are thinking about your own rowing career, what legacy can you enjoy from the whole experience, and in particular what about the *technical* legacy?

If you are a youngster with sights on Rio or beyond or even just involved in club rowing but wanting to get the most out of yourself, there are all sorts of questions arising: how

says you might be 24 before you achieve success at world level. If you start at 20 then you'll get there at 30. That's fine if you are starting from scratch, but plenty of our London Olympians have done it in much less time. And that's possible because they have transferred pre-existing skills and fitness.

Sophie Hosking (LW2x) played soccer; Helen Glover and Heather Stanning (W2-) were both fast middle distance runners. Steve Redgrave, Matthew Pinsent, Will Satch, Kat Copeland, Zac Purchase, Peter Chambers and many others achieved Olympic success at a very young age, progressing straight from GB juniors and under-23 teams to the Olympic podium, so don't be daunted by the time-scale or it may put you off starting!

“Technique and training are not mutually exclusive!”

long does it take, how good to do you have to be, what qualities do you need, what are these Olympians like? I have put together a sort of hit-list to try to help with some answers.

#1 – Time scales

Many people will advise that it takes 10 years to become world class at something; not just at rowing, but all sports. Even music, study, and business.

Matthew Syed's book 'Bounce' is well worth a read because it talks at length about what makes champions. The key point is that people who appear to be prodigies or naturally gifted, genetically superior individuals, have just done the hard yards much better than others.

For instance, if you are 14 years old the theory

#2 – Attitude to learning

All the examples above are of people who made their youth and *inexperience* work for them. They did not have the 'baggage' of losing or grinding along for years trying to uncover the 'secret of rowing'. They just came to training with passion, a cheerful attitude and a can-do approach; they listened, observed, and trusted the coaches they worked with. They believed anything was possible and were 'radiators' rather than 'drains', meaning everyone around them benefited from their presence rather than being dragged down by them. If you get in the boat with someone like that you will make fast technical progress because you are receptive, not afraid to try things, have better confidence – and you will have a lot more fun!

#3 – Priorities

When you are young, is it better to focus on the hard physical training, technical proficiency, or trying to gain experience? Ideally of course, they all develop concurrently, but in schools and junior clubs, for instance, it can be difficult to provide enough technical coaching whilst keeping large groups under control and getting some training done. Nevertheless an early focus on technique has plenty of rewards: if you row well you get a better physiological training effect than from a poor stroke. Your technique is your gearbox and your body is your engine, so a poor technique is like driving fast in third gear! It might work for a few races but not in the long run.

Sophie Hosking and Kat Copeland, the youngest Olympic champion in the GB Rowing Team squad



Win win win!

We have ten paperback copies of Bounce to give away, courtesy of Harper Collins. Retailing for £7.49, Matthew Syed's book explores high achievement in sport and is a compelling read about the science of success. Read more at www.matthewsyed.co.uk or see www.youtube.com/watch?v=I1K6bOG8mj8

To enter the prize draw for a copy of Bounce, email magazine@britishrowing.org with 'Bounce prize draw' in the subject line. The first ten names to be pulled out of a hat will win a copy. Closing date: Friday 19 October.



What's your favourite drill?

Why not send in your favourite technical exercise to R&R? Each month we will publish the one we like best with photos, and if you want to video it we can print a link so others can view it too! Get in touch via magazine@britishrowing.org

“If you row well you get a better physiological training effect than from a poor stroke”

Robin Williams

Robin coaches the GB women's pair who delivered Team GB's first gold at London 2012. He coached the lightweight men's four to gold at the 2007 Worlds and to fifth at the 2008 Olympic Games. From 1995 to 2005, Robin was Chief Coach at CUBC, achieving seven wins out of 10 in the Boat Race against Oxford. After learning to row at Monmouth School and then representing the University of London Boat Club, he gained his first GB vest in 1981 when he was selected for the Worlds.

PHOTO: PETER SPURRIER

#4 – Health

If you are young and building your rowing career, then establishing really good technique early on means you are less likely to get injured or ill. Rowing is pretty safe, but you do take thousands of strokes per week so injuries often have their source from years before with some quirky technique which never got sorted.

#5 – Technical recommendations

What specifically would I recommend youngsters to work on technically? Well sitting correctly, your back posture, and the way you use your back would be my number one.

Of course rowing is all about legs – and they need training, although they tend not to get injured because what they do is simple and in a seated position. The lower trunk, however, has to transfer all that leg pressure to your hands so it is a vital linkage in the system. Sitting without a slump in your pelvis is important and keeping shoulders down and forward are two simple goals.

#6 – Get the simple things correct

So push first, then pull. It is only too common for people to pull their backs early and overload the stroke – or worse still, pull the arms too early. It sounds crazy, but even at Olympic level you find

athletes who are trying to unlearn and correct this. So much better to start out correctly in the first place.

#7 – The ergo

Most of us train quite a bit on the ergo, so make good use of this time for technique too. In my coaching days at Cambridge we had to do this because we lacked water time. Use mirrors around you to monitor technique, get a friend to video you, use sliders or similar to get synchronised together. Work on your basic sequences of legs-only, legs

and backs, etc. For clubs who struggle to provide adequate coach / athlete ratios on the water, this is an ideal vehicle for technical work especially in the cold winter weather.

#8 – Think laterally

Technique and training are not mutually exclusive! You can achieve both aims together, so why not come up with drills that achieve both? For instance you can do legs-only work as a light technical skill or you can do it as a hard piece of training.



Will Satch and George Nash on their way to an Olympic bronze at Eton Dorney

PHOTO: PETER SPURRIER