

Referee Tip: Referee to Coxswain! Come in Please. Over.

By Jim Kelly

My purpose in this article is to help new or under-informed coxswains avoid penalties, succeed in having their protest aired, getting on the starting line and racing fairly and safely. I do not want to coach you. Rather, I hope to help you interface with the referee in an efficient and minimal way, so you and your crew may execute your racing plan under fair conditions.

Let's begin at the starting zone. Follow the instructions of the starter and start area marshall. Generally, you should enter your lane in an order that does not require crossing an occupied lane. For example, if all crews are entering from the low number side of the course, then lane 6 enters first followed by lane 5 and so forth. In general, this procedure is safer, more efficient, and less stressful to all crews.

If you don't know how to get locked on to a stake boat, please ask your coach how to do it. Also, get the coach's advice on pointing into the wind.

When locked on to the stake boat/platform, you should get your point as soon as possible. If you are off point or otherwise are not ready to row, signal by raising your hand high. Better still, have the bow person raise his or her hand because it is more easily seen by the starter. If your hand is up, the starter wants to see some movement in the boat, like oar movement to get your point. A raised hand is not an approved cure for nervousness.

If you are not ready to start, don't start. If you have a valid reason such as being off point, you will not be given a penalty. If your reason is judged to be invalid, you will most likely be penalized, typically a warning.

So now, the race starts. If an oar breaks or some other vital equipment breaks within the first 100 meters, stop rowing and signal the referee. Try to stop the boat before it drifts beyond the 100 meters.

This is a good practice since it may be difficult for the referee to agree with your claim that the equipment broke before 100 meters if you are talking to him/her at 200 meters!

And now, the race continues. Contrary to popular belief, coxswains do not have eyes in the back of their heads. However you may lend support to this belief by acting as if you do. This is accomplished by having the rower nearest to you (stroke/bow) tell you when you are being given a flag signal by the referee. Also, the stroke/bow person should tell you the direction and color of the flag. Of course, if you heard the referee addressing you, you can ask your rower the direction of the flag. This avoids turning your head which may affect the set of your boat. Excuse me; this last comment is coaching, which I said I would not do.

Generally, don't disagree with the referees directions. Referees don't steer per se, they instruct you to prevent interference or to ensure

safety. You may still be in your lane but if you take a sharp tack toward another boat, the referee must anticipate a possible problem. They tend to do this more often with less experienced crews.

So now you've crossed the finish line. You finished second and you are certain that you have been fouled by the crew that finished first. What should you do? First, you or the tallest guy in your boat must raise a hand and keep it up until the referee sees you. Agree on a spokesperson for the crew. Explain the nature of your protest to the referee. The referee will tell you what he/she saw. If you disagree, tell the official that you wish to continue with the protest. You will have one hour to submit a written protest. The referee should tell you where to submit your protest. You may want to become quite familiar with Article II, Part F of the Rules of Rowing. At any rate, you must protest on the water. Your coach cannot do this. You cannot use a cell phone to get instructions. In fact, you cannot have a cell phone on your boat. If you do, you will be eliminated from the race even if you have not used it!

Finally, remember it is your race. Referees are there to provide safety and fair and equitable racing. Knowledge is power. Know the current Rules of Rowing. Attend coxswain clinics. Race well. I wish flat water to you.