

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

# To the readers of *www.row2k.com*

This spring the excerpts on [www.row2k.com](http://www.row2k.com) have been concentrating on the early careers of two of recent American rowing history's most influential figures: **Harry Parker** and **Allen Rosenberg**. This excerpt brings to a close the narrative of the 1960s and 1970s. It is a reminder that into every life a little rain must fall, and with rowers involved, it can be a real gully-washer.

The following .pdf is in the format intended for the final printed book. The color you see will be duplicated in the limited collector edition. All these excerpts are from the third of the four volumes.

Incidentally, all the excerpts that have appeared on row2k during the last six months have since been revised as we work toward publication. The most recent drafts are now posted in the row2k archives.

The **limited collector edition** of my new book, *The Sport of Rowing*, from whence have come all these excerpts, sold out in April in about a week. Thanks so much to all of you who have showed such faith in the book.

The paperback **standard edition** remains on sale at:

[www.row2k.com/rowingmall/](http://www.row2k.com/rowingmall/)

This edition has all the same content as the collector edition. The illustrations are in black and white, and the price is much more affordable.

Both editions will be published in October.

And remember, you can always email me anytime at:

[pmallory@rowingevolution.com](mailto:pmallory@rowingevolution.com)

Many thanks.

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 112. The Rosenberg Style

### *Theory and Practice*



*British Pathé Newsreel, 1812-01, Royal Regatta*

#### **1965 Vesper Boat Club Men's Eight**

Racing Ratzeburger Ruderclub in the Grand Challenge Cup, Henley  
Mid-drive with legs at 80% of their travel, backs at 40%, arms at 20%.

Commitment of every muscle from fingers to toes,  
but contrary to Rosenberg's writings, the camera undeniably captured  
all three muscle groups in action simultaneously.

In **Allen's** words, the intent of the stroke as a whole is to reach peak effort immediately and then "keep pressure on the blade to maintain boatspeed."<sup>5133</sup> This is *Schubschlag*, not *Kernschlag*, mentality, and for Allen the key to achieving this result within the Rosenberg Style is to *integrate* the legs, backs and arms in their overlapping sequential motion.

Allen has described to me his stroke many times as "roughly seventy percent legs, twenty percent back and ten percent arms, so the first phase would be your leg drive, and before the legs are totally exhausted, the back is now beginning to move. As the legs phase out, the back comes in. As the back phases out, the arms

come in, so there is no point where back, arms and legs are used together."<sup>5134</sup>

However, the newsreel frame on this page clearly shows that this was not the case in real life. The Vesper crews of 1964, 1965 and 1974 all moved the three muscle groups simultaneously, albeit with the legs leading.

Yet again, the hybrid-concurrent enigma!

**Rosenberg:** "*These are not separate and distinct functions, but rather overlapping ones, so that the legs begin first, and as they are finishing the back takes over, and as the back is diminishing its work, the arms begin and finish theirs.*"<sup>5135</sup>

"The first impulse at the catch is with the legs, and there should be no concurrent movement into the bow with the head and

---

<sup>5133</sup> Rosenberg, personal correspondence, 1989

---

<sup>5134</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

<sup>5135</sup> Ferris, p. 9

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

shoulders. The photo [this page] shows this.”<sup>5136</sup>

In fact, the film frame clearly shows that while the legs dominated, the back was also swinging at the same time, and indeed the arms were already broken as well.

Some have concluded that the Rosenberg hierarchy of strength, with legs at the top, followed by backs and arms in that order, implies a similar hierarchy of importance. This could not be further from Allen’s intent. In fact, he has also stated many times that in order to maintain steady pressure, the draw into the finish requires “the hardest work in the entire stroke”.<sup>5137</sup>

He even speaks of “kicking the *bejazzis* out of the finish!”<sup>5138</sup>

In summary, the Rosenberg Style as he has described it requires strong and instantaneous legs at the entry, with back and arm force application following in that overlapping sequential order to produce a single, steady pullthrough.

Prof. **Andrew Carter** describes the biomechanics of the Rosenberg Style as follows: “We don’t see extension of the vertebral column [swing of the back, in the unscientific language of average rowers] immediately following the entry, at least not in ‘good’ technique [as defined by Rosenberg].

“However, we should not be looking for sequential **recruitment**<sup>5139</sup> of the [muscle] segments. Rather, we should look for



Philip Mallory

**Allen Rosenberg** and the Author, 2004

*simultaneous* recruitment of the segments but sequential segment *movements*, which will overlap one another.

“This movement sequence is legs, back, arms.

“The analogy of a pyramid conjures images of seamlessly building one movement upon another - *summing* them by the end. Hence **Summation of Segment Velocities**, but this should *not* be confused with recruitment of musculature in three [temporal] segments.”<sup>5140</sup>

**Rosenberg**: “I don’t have a problem with Carter’s description. In fact, I can’t believe that it is different in any way from what I taught.”<sup>5141</sup>

### Acceleration or Not?

**Emory Clark**: “[In 1964,] certainly, we accelerated through the stroke.”<sup>5142</sup>

<sup>5136</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit., 2007

<sup>5137</sup> Rosenberg, USRA Clinic, Chula Vista, CA, Sept 11-2, 2004

<sup>5138</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5139</sup> In biomechanics, “recruitment” of muscles means the initiation of muscular effort.

<sup>5140</sup> Carter, personal correspondence, 2005. See Chapter 48.

<sup>5141</sup> Rosenberg, personal correspondence, 2007

<sup>5142</sup> Clark, personal correspondence, 2006

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

**Rosenberg:** “Emory seems to be confused. I teach ‘steady draw with arms only,’ and that is *not* an acceleration. It is the smooth transition of what has gone before to the point of ‘sending’ the boat at the finish of the stroke.”<sup>5143</sup>

“I don’t like the concept of accelerating the finish. To me, acceleration and speed are pretty much the same. I think if you can keep a firm and steady draw of the handle into the body, you’re far better off.”<sup>5144</sup>

Here again lies the by now common but crucial disconnect. We have the very same sentiments and the very same natural confusions of the physics of the stroke that we run into with such other rowing luminaries as **Ted Nash** and **Melch Bürgin**.<sup>5145</sup>

“Acceleration” and “speed” are most definitely *not* the same!

Rosenberg’s “firm and steady draw” throughout the stroke will yield steadily increasing speed, in other words **acceleration**, throughout the stroke.

**Rosenberg:** “Once the boat is at full speed [through the use of legs and back], the trick is to keep it at top speed until the finish. There are many factors which will lead to deceleration, but these are controlled by the arms.”

This is a description of what we might call **defensive rowing**, but neither the 1964 nor the 1974 crew rowed defensively to the finish. They did everything they could to keep the boat accelerating, in Allen’s own words, “kicking the *bejazzis* out of the finish!”<sup>5146</sup>

They rowed aggressively and offensively all the way to the release. They used their legs not just early in the

pullthrough but all the way until just before the finish. Even more crucially, they used their backs in conjunction with their arms all the way to the moment of the release. Allen Rosenberg disputes this interpretation, but the photographic evidence is incontrovertible.

The issue of acceleration to the finish is a difficult one for coaches and rowers alike and is easily subject to misunderstanding. Like Allen, **Ted Nash** is also uncomfortable with the issue. Quite rightly, he does not want his oarsmen to imagine themselves increasing their *effort levels* toward the finish, as that would indeed inappropriately shortchange the front-half of the pullthrough.<sup>5147</sup>

Even though Rosenberg disagrees, the 1964 Vesper and Lake Washington crews had a great deal in common. For both, the intent *and* the result were a strong, steady *Schubschlag* pullthrough, not a *Kernschlag* explosion at the catch, and contrary to Allen’s intent and recollection, acceleration instead of “smooth transition” continued to the release of the stroke in both crews.

### Alive Arms and Shoulders

According to **Peter Klavora**, the Vesper “entry was initiated with arms alive. Rosenberg prefers elastic arms to straight arms.”<sup>5148</sup>

**Emory Clark:** “I believe we took the water hard [in 1964] with the arm squeeze at its beginning so as to transmit the power of the legs out to the blade.”<sup>5149</sup>

**Bill Stowe:** “At the moment of contact with the water, every muscle in the body needed to tense and be working. A straight

---

<sup>5143</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

<sup>5144</sup> Rosenberg, USRA Clinic, Chula Vista, CA, Sept 11-2, 2004

<sup>5145</sup> See Chapter 168.

<sup>5146</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

---

<sup>5147</sup> See Chapter 168.

<sup>5148</sup> Klavora, *International*, p. 25

<sup>5149</sup> Clark, op. cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



James Drake / *Sports Illustrated* / Getty Images

### 1965 Vesper Boat Club Men's Eight at Henley

Bow **Joe Amlong** 6'1" 188cm 190lb. 86kg, 2 **Hugh Foley** 6'3" 193cm 190lb. 86kg,  
3 **Ed Ferry** 6'4" 196cm 196lb. 89kg, 4 **Tony Johnson** 6'3" 191cm 190lb. 86kg,  
5 **John Abele** 6'2" 188cm 190lb. 86kg, 6 **Boyce Budd** 6'3" 193cm 205lb. 93kg,  
7 **Fargo Thompson** 6'3" 191cm 198lb. 90kg, Stroke **Bill Stowe** 6'3" 193cm 196lb. 89kg,  
Coxswain **Bob Zimonyi**

Note the alive arms.

arm entry meant that the arms were not working."<sup>5150</sup>

On the subject of arms, Rosenberg was referring back to his mentor, **Jim Manning**. According to Allen, Manning used to call "Set the shoulders!" which meant "Anchor the blade in the water at the catch by contracting all the muscles from the latissimus dorsi up through the shoulder muscles and down the arm to the fingers."<sup>5151</sup>

Is there a better justification possible for active arm usage at the entry?

---

<sup>5150</sup> Stowe, personal correspondence, 2006

<sup>5151</sup> Rosenberg, USRA Clinic, Chula Vista, CA, Sept 11-2, 2004

As an example, refer to the photos of the 1952 Annapolis crew in Chapter 64. Manning had been the boatman at the Academy for that crew.

Rosenberg asks his athletes to make their arms "alive" at the entry, but he also wishes to eliminate unnecessary vertical lift of the shoulders and head and eliminate any actual contraction at the shoulders or elbows prior to full lockup.

To accomplish this, he would instruct his Vesper oarsmen to make the entry "the last part of the recovery"<sup>5152</sup> and to anchor at full extension.

---

<sup>5152</sup> Ibid.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

**Rosenberg:** “You can still set the shoulder and not bend the elbows. It’s a call I’ve made many times:

“‘Outreach your shoulder lift!’

“If you reach far enough, you can’t lift the shoulders. You can still set it, but you can’t lift it.”<sup>5153</sup>

When done correctly, the oarsmen would achieve their full extension as their backsplash entry was completed, and their leg drive against the resistance of the water prevented the “alive” and straining arms from breaking to any significant extent until somewhat later in the pullthrough. Note especially Bill Knecht in the film frames in Chapter 109.

### Rosenberg Sequentiality

Unquestionably, Allen has always intended that the shoulders and arms should be working from the entry. He agrees that his use of the term “sequential” in rowing is actually describing the sequential *motion* of the legs, back and arms, instead of a sequential *effort* of the legs, back and arm, just as Prof. Carter has explained.

This is again the classic hybrid-concurrent enigma, one of the infinite possibilities on the continuum between “all back motion” and “all leg motion” at the entry. The Tokyo film frames in Chapter 109 clearly demonstrate that the body swing of Emory Clark, Boyce Budd, Bill Knecht and Bill Stowe all began concurrently with their leg drive, but the high effort of their legs at the entry relative to the effort of their backs *slowed* their back swing to an initial crawl.

Viewing the 1964 Vesper back motion as a whole reveals it beginning its arc relatively slowly and finishing it with a rush, similar to the technique of Penn in 1955 and Yale in 1956.

The Rosenberg Style as rowed by the 1964 and 1974 crews was actually concurrent effort with *subtly* concurrent body motions showing a sequentiality of emphasis.

For Rosenberg, if the backs can actually swing at the same speed as the legs, then the legs have not been applied aggressively enough, and “less speed is achieved throughout the entire rowing cycle.”<sup>5154</sup>

So, in summary, in the 1964 and 1974 Champion Rosenberg eights we had leg *motion* beginning fast and ending steady, at the same time the back *motion* was starting steady and finishing fast, at the same time the arms were working but initially breaking hardly at all, and then picking up speed until they were carrying virtually the entire stroke for the few inches of the pullthrough remaining after the legs and backs had finished their motions.

Sequential appearance, the result of concurrent force application. *Schubschlag* instead of *Kernschlag*.

### Look Versus Feel

But it is the **description** of the appearance of the pullthrough that Allen has repeated for decades now. Interestingly, though he has worked out on an ergometer for the last twenty years, Allen Rosenberg has never pulled an oar in anger. He brought to his coaching the unique perspective of the coxswain’s seat, so would it not be understandable if his point-of-view concentrated on what the stroke *looked* like instead of what it *felt* like?

**Stan Pocock:** “One of the problems one faces when teaching rowing is that it looks so very different than it feels. Sitting in a shell, a rower sees almost nothing of himself. He must depend upon *feel!*”

---

<sup>5153</sup> Ibid.

---

<sup>5154</sup> Ferris, p. 9

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

“Few of the coaches whom I knew continued to row, the sole exceptions coming to mind being **Joe Burk** and **Harry Parker**. [In the United States, **Dietrich Rose**, **Ted Nash**, **Tony Johnson** and **Buzz Congram** deserve to be added to Stan’s list.] I am sure their crews were the better for it. If the coach stays active with his or her own rowing, he or she has a much better chance of putting into words what rowing feels like.”<sup>5155</sup>

A local journalist described **Joe Burk** in 1956: “In the fall, he occasionally takes a seat in a shell with his undergraduate oarsmen, a participation that has several benefits. It inspires the younger men to try to outpull their coach, prodding them into maximum and good-natured effort, and it gives Burk the ‘feel’ of how they’re doing.

“Sometimes you can find out things by the feel of rowing that are hard to observe

from outside the boat,” he commented.”<sup>5156</sup>

**Buzz Congram**, former Northeastern coach: “I would sit down in the rowing tanks or the rowing barge or go out in a single and try to *feel* what felt most effective.

“I think the thing that influenced me most about Allen was how to make the entry most effectively. I found the best way to do that was to have the body angle established and to be making the entry with your arms independent of the upper body and then the back coming on as you drove the legs, and there was an evolution for me from sequential to concurrent.”<sup>5157</sup>

**Allen Rosenberg**: “As for the difference between ‘looks like’ and ‘feels like,’ there has never been any doubt in my mind that I have captured in words what I want the rowers to feel.”<sup>5158</sup>

---

<sup>5155</sup> S. Pocock, p. 64

---

<sup>5156</sup> Dubois, John, *Joe Burk Still Pulls a Mean Oar*, *Main Line Times*, Ardmore, PA, April 12, 1956

<sup>5157</sup> Congram, personal conversation, 2004

<sup>5158</sup> Rosenberg, personal correspondence, 2007

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 113. The Flip Side of Modern Orthodoxy

### *Mutation from Schubschlag to Kernschlag*

The Harvard Style, usually referred to incorrectly as an American version of the **Ratzeburg Style**, had dominated the consciousness of the American rowing community from the mid-1960s into the '70s. Then things began to change. Harvard actually lost a race or two, and then the original Ratzeburger Ruderclub failed to medal at the 1972 Olympics.

Of the two great American coaches of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century, **Harry Parker** has repeatedly stated that he is the coach of Harvard University and *not* a role model for the country. A remarkably private man, he has been enormously helpful and supportive to any and all who have asked, myself included, but he has studiously attempted to avoid the role of national prophet or icon.

By contrast, **Allen Rosenberg** has been a rowing Johnny Appleseed. The 1974 World Championship was his epiphany, and he then took to the road as U.S. Technical Director to spread his message. The technique he so passionately and meticulously described in his clinics and his writings completely took over the United States and also began to make serious inroads throughout the world.

His rowing *persona* seemed as open as Harry's seemed closed, and his rowing style was a refreshing counterpoint to Harvard's, smooth recoveries in contrast to Harry's acceleration, body discipline in contrast to the rag-tag Cantabs, a supposedly American approach to replace the perceived European influence of Harvard. Even Harvard guys seemed to revel in the change.

**Gregg Stone:** "On the heels of 1974, Al's vocabulary had a huge impact on all of us. I got it all second hand, of course, but putting the focal point at the midpoint of the recovery rather than at the finish was a huge revelation."<sup>5159</sup>

In the decades since, Rosenberg's approach has become the **Orthodox Technique of the Modern Age**, believed in with the same passion the British felt for their own English Orthodoxy during its Golden Age and well beyond.

### Mutation

Unfortunately, in another example of "Rowing History's Greatest Lesson," although Modern Orthodox Technique will be rowed with competence and success many times in the following decades, the Modern Orthodox Technique taught by Allen Rosenberg himself almost immediately suffered the same fate as its **English Orthodox** antecedent as well as the techniques of **Steve Fairbairn**, **George Pocock** and **Frank Muller**. It quickly devolved into a fossilized shadow of the original 1964 and 1974 crews. To paraphrase Burnell, the Rosenberg conception of rowing became a detailed analysis of the *movements* of the perfect oarsman instead of a conception of how to achieve them.<sup>5160</sup>

---

<sup>5159</sup> Stone, personal correspondence, 2008

<sup>5160</sup> Burnell, *Swing*, p. 35



## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

The vast majority of coaches and rowers who have considered Allen Rosenberg their mentor have never had the opportunity to study films of the 1964 Vesper eight frame-by-frame. Instead, they have analyzed Allen Rosenberg's words, often syllable-by-syllable.

**Ted Nash**, Allen's assistant in 1974: "Al was the first one in the United States to do truly segmented rowing,<sup>5161</sup> where you'd row a whole mile with only one part of the body, long-term segmented units, and then he'd string two together and then three, very patiently, to get the continuity. These were not rushed drills but actual portions of a stroke separated from all confusion.

"The difference is that Al knew how to bring you out of that and *put it all back together*, whereas most of the coaches who are rowing 'caricatures' of him today can't get it back together. They can do the individual segments, but they can't bring it together without the discontinuities.

"Today **Mike Teti**<sup>5162</sup> is one of the coaches who can also do it well."<sup>5163</sup>

**John Riley**, World Champion for Penn A.C. in 1986<sup>5164</sup> and now a coach: "Our downfall in rowing in America is we've lost the finesse on the front end. We hit it too *hard* on the toes. You're taught you've got to be long, *and* you've got to be leg-only, *and* you've got to hang on it.

"Across the country, I get athletes from juniors to wannabe elites, and all of them are taught to hang on it, and they're all taught to do it in a way that's *long* in their minds, and

the feeling of 'long' comes from their head being at about a 30° down angle and their chests being sloped over and their arms and shoulders reaching *way* out. Then they go leg-only off the toes, and the next thing you know, they're about to go through perpendicular in an upper body posture that couldn't lift [squat]. They're so jammed on their legs, and they're stuck there. They try to carry it past perpendicular, but they open up *after* the pin.

"I think the leg-only idea in America has gone *steroidally* out of control. You can only be on the front end up to a point. Before perpendicular your upper body has to tie in against it so that when you go through perpendicular your upper body is suspended or cantilevered against your legs, and *all* of your body peaking through the middle. But I'm afraid the leg-only is overdone in America."<sup>5165</sup>

North America is full of Allen's disciples, including in recent years second- and even third-generation disciples who may never have even heard his name. Allen's detailed descriptions of overlapping sequential pullthroughs have been passed down by word of mouth, but only in their most direct, literal and visual sense.

None of the nuances. None of the subtlety. Nothing of the rhythm and feel of Allen's championship crews, now many years in the past.

And all too often it has come out sequential *recruitment* of muscle groups.

It's also come out mutant segmented-force *Kernschlag!* The Philadelphia dippy-doodle.

This is definitely history repeating itself. Frank Muller's 1930 Penn A.C. Big Eight, a beautiful concurrent *Schubschlag* crew, yielded at least three members, **Joe Dougherty**, **Bear Curren** and **Jack Bratten**, who became highly influential

---

<sup>5161</sup> It appears that Allen was continuing a drill known in Philadelphia for at least thirty years, at least back to Jack Kelly, Sr. See Chapter 107.

However, Allen believes he developed the segmented rowing drill independent of historical precedent. "I have always been concerned with 'how things work' and what are the parts to achieve it." personal correspondence, 2007

<sup>5162</sup> See Chapters 155 and 156.

<sup>5163</sup> Nash, personal conversations, 2004, 2007

<sup>5164</sup> See Chapter 132.

---

<sup>5165</sup> Riley, personal conversation, 2009

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

sequential segmented-force *Kernschlag* Philadelphia coaches.

Allen Rosenberg's 1964 Vesper eight, a beautiful concurrent *Schubschlag* crew, yielded at least two members who became influential sequential segmented-force *Kernschlag* coaches.

After a stint at Columbia, former Vesper stroke-seat **Bill Stowe** found great success as coach of the Coast Guard Academy. His crews used explosive, sequential segmented-effort *Kernschlag* pullthroughs to dominate the Dad Vail Regatta year after year, but their approach was the opposite of the subtle technique that Allen Rosenberg had once coaxed from Bill Stowe, the oarsman.

**Kenneth Heisler**, one of Stowe's Columbia rowers: "You'll recall that back in the day, during the spring season *The New York Times* used to devote a whole page to rowing in the Sunday Sports Section. The Ivy coaches would often arrange to have a luncheon on Fridays before race day where they were joined by the press (all those bylines from William Wallace). As this one particular gathering was breaking up, the *insouciant* Bill Stowe approached Harry Parker with a question.

"Say Harry, how do you get those crews of yours to go so fast?"

"Parker laid a hand on Stowe's shoulder and replied, 'Well Bill . . . I tell them to pull really, REALLY, hard!'

"This became a watchword around the Columbia boathouse for quite some time afterwards. Bill absolutely had us 'attack the catch' with everything we had – I still do it to this day."<sup>5166</sup>

In 1975, Boston University coach and former Vesper 2-seat **Hugh Foley** described the Rosenberg pullthrough as follows: "At the conclusion of the drive, the arms and back work together to supplement the

diminishing leg power and hold the bend kicked into the oar shaft with the legs at the initial *explosion* of the catch. [my emphasis]

"This manner of finish takes the back and arms away from the 'active' role of 'motivators' and puts them into a more 'passive' role of 'connectors.'

"Thus we find a more relaxed finish motion due to the early completion of the leg drive and the 'passive' role of the back and arms."<sup>5167</sup>

This is mutant *Kernschlag* mentality! Even if it retains a few of Allen's own words quoted above, this was *not* Allen's position in 1964 or 1974, and it is not his position today.

Allen has always maintained that the draw into the finish ought to be "the hardest work in the stroke" in order to extend the steady pressure.<sup>5168</sup> Allen has *Schubschlag* mentality!

In 1964, the effort level of Clark, Budd, Knecht and Stowe during the last few inches of their pullthrough shown in Chapter 109 was most assuredly still in the "active" and not the "passive" category.

Rosenberg's cogent and persuasive descriptions of sequentiality are all that most of us have had to go by these last forty plus years, and they are accurate as far as they go, but they are subject to gross misinterpretation. If one focuses on the end result, namely the sequential motion, it is easy to miss the proper means to achieving that end, namely the concurrent recruitment of muscle groups.

It is ironic that the Rosenberg Style quickly devolved for so many people into bedrock dysfunctional segmented-effort *Kernschlag*, whereas the 1964 and 1974

---

<sup>5167</sup> Qtd. by Ferris, p. 29

<sup>5168</sup> Rosenberg, USRA Clinic, Chula Vista, CA, Sept 11-2, 2004

---

<sup>5166</sup> Heisler, personal correspondence, 2011

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

Rosenberg eights had been classic *Schubschlag* crews!

There is no clear demarcation line between *Kernschlag* and *Schubschlag*. They blend into one another on a continuum, but when it comes to **Modern Orthodoxy**, the technique which has evolved from the *literal*

interpretation of Allen Rosenberg's words, there is one extremely subtle but hugely significant distinction which has been lost:

The personality of a boat depends on force application, and segmented *Kernschlag* is the antithesis of *Schubschlag*.

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 114. Decline

### 1975 – 1976 – *The Mutiny*

Ironically, after being appointed National Technical Director, even Allen's own coaching began to follow more closely the literal interpretation of his own writings. He began applying Modern Orthodoxy with ever greater rigidity, and force application soon crossed the line to segmented-force *Kernschlag*.

After winning the World Championship in 1974, Allen's National Eight came in only fifth in 1975 and fell to an incredible ninth in 1976.

**Hugh Stevenson:** "What a pity that the 'dream season' of '74 is still so attached to the subsequent debacles that were '75 and '76 . . . They are, of course, mutually exclusive, each season 'of a piece,' in my opinion. What matters was the original achievement in '74 . . . and it was 'approaching technical perfection,' as Mick has stated so well.

"What a very real shame that we could not catch the lightning again. The world would have seen (should have seen) three years of truly awesome dominance. We had that touch! We coulda beena *contenda!*"<sup>5169</sup>



FISA 1975 Video

#### 1975 United States Camp Heavyweight Men's Eight Holme Pierrepont

Impressionistic video frame taken during the repêchage.

**Alan Shealy** (foreground) shooting his tail.  
The finger-to-toe connection had been lost.

**Dick Cashin:** "1974 would seem to set the stage for a strong performance the following year, but 'twas not to be. Though some blamed it on the absence of **Mark Norelius**, who went back to the Air Force, the reality was that we just didn't produce the magic again.

"Same coach, basically the same crew, same technique, but we didn't gel, and it showed well before the final."<sup>5170</sup>

<sup>5169</sup> Stevenson, personal correspondence, 2007

<sup>5170</sup> Cashin, personal correspondence, 2005

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

In one year, superficially the boat had hardly changed, only one new oarsman, the same meticulous coaching, but it was obvious that something was amiss.

**Mickelson:** “In ‘74, we knew we had to work hard at it, but it was fun.

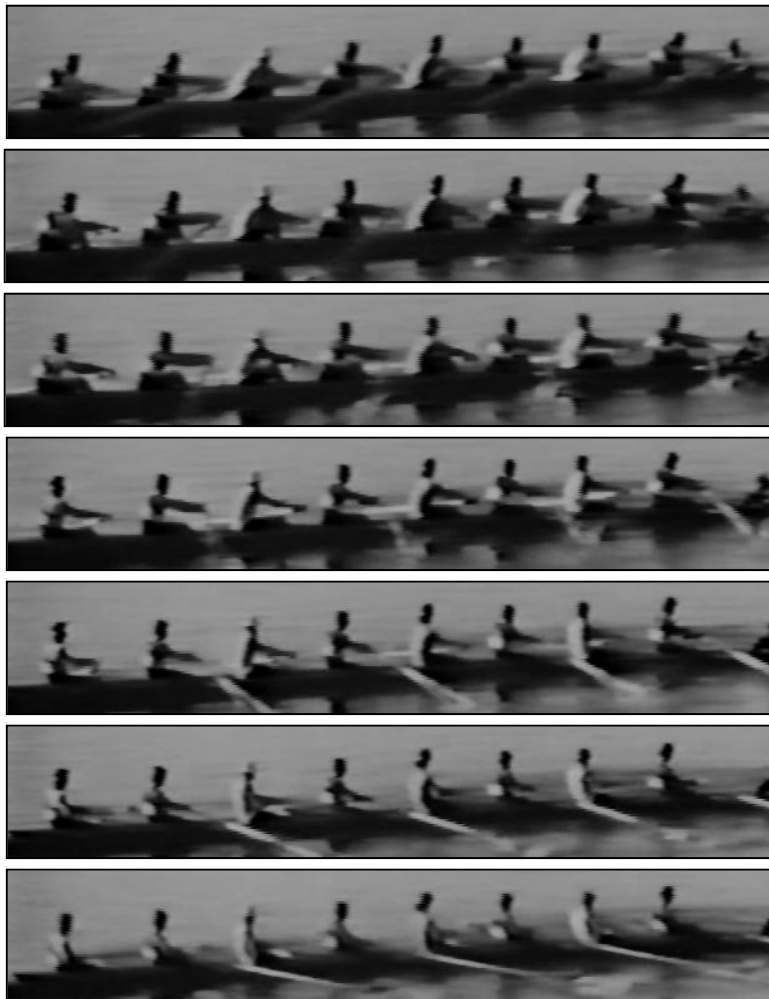
“It was the opposite in ‘75. It felt slow. What were we going to do to get faster? When something’s not going right, usually you make some changes, but there were no changes made.”<sup>5171</sup>

Northeastern grad **Larry Gluckman:** “In Al’s defense, in ‘74 when he was so successful, he had a cadre of coaches: **Hugh Foley, Tony Johnson, Bill Stowe** and **Ted Nash!** I was in the Peace Corps in the northeast of Brazil in ‘74, and I would get letters from guys about how fast they were and about special workouts.

“I heard the things that Al was doing, and there wasn’t any fluff. It was all just work. It was technique and work.

“And then in ‘75 he had less support, although Tony was with him and he had to replace Norelius, but he brought in the *tai chi* and the yoga and some other stuff, and guys began to feel that they were not doing as much of the same good stuff as ‘74.”<sup>5172</sup>

**Mickelson:** “In ‘75, we didn’t get a lot of fresh talent



Alan Shealy

### United States Camp Heavyweight Men’s Eight

1975 World Fifth Place, Holme Pierrepont

Bow **Tim Mickelson** 6’3” 191cm 187lb. 85kg,

2 **Ken Brown** 6’2” 188cm 195lb. 88kg,

3 **Mark Umlauf,**

4 **Mike Vespoli** 6’5” 196cm 198lb. 90kg,

5 **John Everett** 6’4” 193cm 205lb. 93kg,

6 **Dick Cashin** 6’4” 193cm 205lb. 93kg,

7 **Hugh Stevenson** 6’4” 193cm 201lb. 91kg,

Stroke **Al Shealy** 6’3” 191cm 198lb. 90kg,

Coxswain **Dave Weinberg**

0°, +25° to -25°, motion: 0-6, 0-8, 5-10 Modern Orthodox

to make the boat faster because people knew that everybody was coming back, and as a result the camp wasn’t as competitive. We

<sup>5171</sup> Mickelson, personal conversation, 2005

<sup>5172</sup> Gluckman, personal conversation, 2007

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

had more people cutting themselves, saying, 'Hey, the boat is set. I'm not going to bother sticking around when I can jump into a small boat.'

"Unfortunately, we also got some guys coming back who hadn't done their homework, and that's where Al needed a Ted Nash to run the seat races and flush out the guys who shouldn't have been there.

"Mike Teti has learned this with the current National Team. When you've got really talented guys and lots of them, you've got to keep challenging them and make sure you've got the cream still rising to the top.

"I don't think we had that in '75 or in '76.

### 1975 Technique

**Mickelson:** "As for technique, Shealy wasn't a classical, 'hammer it at the catch' guy, but with the Rosenberg Stroke, you've got to row it high.

"We rowed a bit higher in '74 than we had for Harry in '72, when it was a different type of stroke, probably a little steeper acceleration curve at the catch with Harry.

"With Allen, when you get it up to like 37 and above, it all falls into place. You don't have to speed the boat up as much at the catch. You're just ticking it along, and that's what made it really feel effortless even though we were flying. It didn't feel as if you had to put as much effort into it. The higher you did it, the faster you went, and the easier it became.

"But if the boat slows down, *boy* it gets heavy fast! You start forcing the catch, shooting your tail, and then it gets really heavy and sloppy at the finish.

"It comes apart, and that's what happened in '75. The really heavy catch doesn't buy you anything. You start ding-donging too much."<sup>5173</sup>

---

<sup>5173</sup> Mickelson, op. cit.

A respected American coach remembers those years of decline with sadness for Allen and for his athletes. "Our observation was that he overdid the sequential aspect. The technique became the end instead of the means to an end. He lost it.

"Initially they were moving the boat, but then the connection was lost, and it stopped working."<sup>5174</sup>

**Buzz Congram,** former Northeastern coach: "I looked askance at the extreme nature of what Rosenberg was coaching, and I thought it was gradually becoming more extreme."<sup>5175</sup>

The differences were extremely subtle and are very hard to detect from the film frame sequences in this book, but they indeed involved Allen's preferred sequentiality. In 1975, the legs were being aggressively pushed flat at the 60% point of the stroke. In 1964 and 1974, it had been closer to 90%. This is a huge difference but hard to detect until it is pointed out.

In addition, Allen had reduced their layback from 25° to around 15°, so Shealy was no longer able to swing his back into the finish. With the stronger legs and reduced layback, the rhythm of the boat naturally devolved more toward the technique rowed by Hugh Stevenson in 1974: front-half emphasis, now completely dominated by legs, and with a force discontinuity before the second-half.

At full speed, films clearly show a mutant *Kernschlag* double stroke, a two-part pullthrough, a Philadelphia dipsy-doodle. The disconnect came when the back swing was inadequate to bridge the gap between the ever stronger initial leg drive and the time when the arms could take full effect.

In addition, Al Shealy's personality was no longer able to assert itself in the boat as it had in 1974.

---

<sup>5174</sup> personal conversation, 2005

<sup>5175</sup> Congram, personal conversation, 2004

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

**Shealy:** “Personally, in 1975, my collegiate season was a long one, ending with four very intense and draining races at Nottingham and Henley.<sup>5176</sup> Although I didn’t really realize it and felt as if I was attacking the workouts at the camp with the same verve as in ‘74, I know now that my season at Harvard had really taken its physical toll. To come down off a season like that, retrain myself at a different pace and technique and peak again in such a short amount of time was extremely difficult.”<sup>5177</sup>

**Rosenberg:** “In 1975, Parker continued to occlude the National Team effort by prolonging the Harvard season, thereby keeping key rowers from training in my practices. As a result, they were burned out before we began.

“As it worked out, with the Pan American Games at altitude in Mexico City<sup>5178</sup> and the need to train there for a month before races began, the mood in the camp was grim.”<sup>5179</sup>

**Shealy:** “The time factor was critical, and you can’t expect to beat East Germany and the Russians with only five weeks of preparation, especially after having come off intense collegiate preparation training and the grind of selection, although some will say it was pre-conceived selection. For others in the boat, I think they were equally ‘burned out’ by the enervating June and July racing and the hazards of rushed preparation for the Worlds.”<sup>5180</sup>

**Dave Weinberg,** 1974-1976 coxswain: “We quickly learned that the rowing community owed us nothing for our 1974 performance and also that we were foolish to expect that any sort of awe or submission would compensate for lack of preparation.”<sup>5181</sup>

**Shealy:** “Basking in glory alone won’t win races. It takes much more hunger and much more effort to prepare for a repeat victory, especially when there are six volatile crews in the final that are essentially equal in potential.”<sup>5182</sup>

### 1975 World Championships

Before the race in Nottingham, Rosenberg evaluated the field: “The Russians are quick. They know that New Zealand will go like hell for the first 1,000. The Russians will try to stay with them. The East Germans are the boat that can threaten us. They have frightening consistency. They’ll test us all the way down the course: in the first 500, again in the second and in the last 250. They’ll come again and again . . .”<sup>5183</sup>

**Weinberg** characterized 1975 as a disaster for the entire U.S. men’s team. “Of eight heavyweight entries, only two qualified for the finals, both finishing fifth. A Silver Medal sculler<sup>5184</sup> failed to qualify for the finals, a Gold Medal eight with seven returning oarsmen finished fifth. The coxed-four, sixth in 1974, finished tenth.”<sup>5185</sup>

**Weinberg** recounted the **qualifying heat** for the eight: “A quick New Zealand blitzed the field, leaving our eight fully three seconds back at the 500 meter mark. The rest of the race was lackluster. With NZ in command and moving away, a surprised U.S. eight cruised through the middle thousand, finishing an astonishing third behind New Zealand and the Czechs. The margin of victory? Almost eight seconds.”<sup>5186</sup>

---

<sup>5176</sup> See Chapter 104.

<sup>5177</sup> Shealy, p. 40

<sup>5178</sup> They won.

<sup>5179</sup> Rosenberg, personal correspondence, 2007

<sup>5180</sup> Shealy, p. 40

<sup>5181</sup> Weinberg, p. 17

---

<sup>5182</sup> Shealy, p. 40

<sup>5183</sup> Rosenberg, qtd. by Weinberg, p. 17

<sup>5184</sup> Jim Dietz. See Chapter 131.

<sup>5185</sup> Weinberg, p. 16

<sup>5186</sup> Ibid, p. 18

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

The **repêchage** was also troubling.

**Weinberg:** “The United States eight sizzled off the line at 45, taking a three-second lead over Australia in the first 500. By the 1,000, the U.S had opened their lead to fully 4½ seconds.

“Then Australia began to move, coming slowly through the third 500, picking up momentum and hauling down the U.S. in the final 250 in a photo finish. Australia took first with a new course record of 5:39.27. The U.S. was 13/100ths of a second back.”<sup>5187</sup>

The **final** was more of the same.

**Weinberg:** “As we kick off from the dock, a lonely Allen Rosenberg stands with his hand poised in a thumbs-up gesture. The warm up goes well. The boat feels fast. One last thirty stroke piece, ten at 45, ten at 42, ten at 39.

“We back into the start. New Zealand is on our right, the Easties on our left. We are ready.

“The starter begins the commands. The East Germans go. They have jumped the start. They’re out by two, maybe three seats. New Zealand has moved out by the same margin.

“Four hundred gone. We’re down on NZ by half a length. The East now has almost a full length. We go for a ten and begin to drive back on New Zealand. We close to 5 seats, 4 seats, 3 seats.

“The New Zealand stroke looks up for the first time. They go for 10. They slip away. We’ve lost them.

“We pass the 1,250 meter mark: the race is over. The Easties beat the Russians by two seconds. New Zealand is third. We are seven seconds out.

“In the twilight, we watch the East Germans raise their arms to a clapping crowd. Depression seeps in.”<sup>5188</sup>

---

<sup>5187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5188</sup> Ibid, p. 20

### 1976: Hitting Bottom



[www.rudergott.de](http://www.rudergott.de)

#### 1976 Olympic Games, Montréal

In retrospect, 1976 was doomed from the start. First, there were two camps, one for the eight under **Rosenberg** and a separate one for the coxless-four at Vesper under **Dietrich Rose**. The coxed-four and both pairs would be selected through Trials.

With the general assumption that everybody was coming back from the 1975 eight and all the other options also available, too few new candidates chose to even try out for the eight. The result was there was even less competition to make the eight in 1976 than there had been in 1975.

Second, Allen was forced into an ambitious travel schedule, relying on the kindness of various hosts: two weeks in **Tampa, Florida** in January followed by the month of April rowing out of **Conibear Shellhouse** in Seattle, two weeks in May



## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

rowing out of the **Wisconsin** boathouse in Madison, ending the odyssey at **Dartmouth** in Hanover, New Hampshire until it was time to go to Montréal.

**Rosenberg:** “We traveled because we had *no equipment to use!* We had no place to sleep. Unlike ‘74, when we had great training table at Princeton, we ate training meals from vending machines. We slept cheek by jowl in the attic of the old gymnasium at Dartmouth.

“The whole effort was horribly underfunded with *no spares* in camp before the Games began, no manager, no assistant coaches, no boatman, no launch assistant, no other set of eyes as we went along. You don’t go to war or to a World Championship without quartermaster and logistical support, yet we were forced to do precisely that.

“The decline in performance was due as much to nonsupport and neglect as it was to changes in the crew. At times I was exhausted with eroding group cohesiveness and intrusions.

“What that also meant was that I was away from my family of six children and a demanding wife who eventually divorced me.”<sup>5189</sup>

**Cashin:** “In 1976, the bottom fell out. Allen was having personal and family problems, and in the best of times, he had never been a person who could run a camp by himself.

“When Allen had to make personnel decisions in ‘76, he couldn’t. He always thought the world was against him. We were sitting on a bench at some boathouse, and a bird dropping hit him on the knee. He looked up, sighed, and said with a hang-dog look, ‘For some, the birds sing.’

“You got to know that you couldn’t take anything at face value. He was making it up as he went along. He’d call out stroke ratings – 33, 33½, 33 – and afterward we’d

see he didn’t have a watch, and we knew we were closer to 35-36.

“He was great when things fell into place and hopeless when they didn’t. He had a magic feel about him when things were going well, but it was brittle, witness what happened in 1976.

“Al’s a very gentle and likeable man, and you don’t get the sense that he’s got much meanness at all in him. Between 1974 and 1976, I saw the best and worst of Allen Rosenberg.”<sup>5190</sup>

**Mickelson:** “Al would not be there for days, sometimes more than a week at a time, and then he’d show up, and he’d be exhausted.

“With the lack of somebody to run practices, sometimes we had to run our own workouts, and how can you be objective about your own workout?”<sup>5191</sup>

**Rosenberg:** “I am infuriated that Mickelson would write that I missed huge chunks of time in camp. I do not apologize for my efforts at any time.”<sup>5192</sup>

**Larry Gluckman, 6’1” 185cm 200lb. 91kg:** “After the seat racing in Seattle, everyone pretty much knew where they stood, and the eight was pretty well defined. There were twelve people left, and the intention had always been to boat an eight and send a coxed-four to the Trials.

“We went out and rowed as an eight for a few days and set the course record in Seattle on Opening Day. We left soon after that and went to Madison.

“The guys in the eight were thinking, ‘Wow! We’ve got something here,’ and the guys who weren’t going to make the eight still had to go to the coxed-four Trials to qualify for Montréal, so there was this nervousness going on with those guys saying, ‘Okay, the eight is safe, but if we keep on with this, we’re going to be sitting

---

<sup>5189</sup> Rosenberg, personal correspondence, 2007

---

<sup>5190</sup> Cashin, op. cit.

<sup>5191</sup> Mickelson, personal correspondence, 2005

<sup>5192</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

ducks for all the guys who went to Vesper or Potomac or Penn Elite Center a long time ago and were busy training in their boats. The longer we stay out and mess around here, the less prepared we'll be.'

"All of a sudden, the exact same seat races came up, and the guys went to Al and said, 'We've already done this. Let's move on. We're tired of racing against ourselves. Let's start putting crews together that are going to compete against the other people.'

"But we didn't go back in the eight when we got to Madison. We stayed in fours.

"Two weeks after that, we went to Hanover, and then we had the Memorial Day Massacre."<sup>5193</sup>

### The Mutiny

Three decades later, the subject of the 1976 mutiny still elicits sadness and hard feelings in equal measure.

**Gluckman:** "It started with a very innocent request by Al, but it tipped the scale. He wanted our birth dates to check biorhythms. He wanted to know who was going to be in the right phase during the week of the regatta, and I think that just about put Vespoli and Mickelson over the edge."<sup>5194</sup>

Essentially, what happened was that by Memorial Day, **Ken Brown**, **Tim Mickelson** and **Mike Vespoli** had concluded that the selection process was stalled, the camp was going nowhere, and they wanted to explore the possibility of rowing a four. They made their intentions known to others, looking for a fourth man to fill their boat.

Rosenberg was told what was in the wind. He immediately called a team meeting. Ken Brown was the only

"conspirator" present. The others were on the telephone.

Coxswain candidate **Bob Jaugstetter:** "Brown was backed into a corner. Unwilling to speak for the others, he finally had to answer what he considered a direct challenge. Speaking for himself, he outlined some of the major reasons for his dissatisfaction, especially that he had lost confidence in the handling and direction of the camp.

"Rosenberg's answer was quick and unequivocal. Anyone who had lost confidence in him was no longer welcome to participate in the camp for the eight."<sup>5195</sup>

That was that. The three had to leave.

**Mike Vespoli:** "The idea was to get all the oarsmen together and see what we could do about the situation in general. It was pushed to a confrontation too soon, while most people didn't yet know what was really going on. Al overreacted and made it impossible for us to stay in the group."<sup>5196</sup>

**Mickelson:** "Those of us who ended up leaving didn't leave voluntarily. We were actually on the phone with Tony Johnson trying to get Al some help when Al called a team meeting and we weren't there.

"We weren't there. We weren't on the team any more . . . but that's all water over the dam now."<sup>5197</sup>

**Rosenberg:** "I do not place any credence at all in sour-grapes comments of Tim Mickelson, an insurrectionist, albeit a superb rower, who gave me every reason to dismiss him from the team."<sup>5198</sup>

**Gluckman:** "I was not initially part of the mutiny. I wasn't quite sure about it. I was still loyal to the National Team and loyal to Al, but I *was* getting nervous in my thirtieth year and in my last weeks of rowing

---

<sup>5193</sup> Gluckman, op. cit.

<sup>5194</sup> Gluckman, personal correspondence, 2007

---

<sup>5195</sup> Bob Jaugstetter, *A Review of the 1976 Olympic Men's Rowing Effort, The Oarsman*, November/December 1976, p. 44

<sup>5196</sup> Qtd. by Jaugstetter, op. cit.

<sup>5197</sup> Mickelson, op. cit.

<sup>5198</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

that things would fall apart, and ultimately they did.

“The next morning Al calls everybody together and says, ‘Well, Ken and Michael and Tim have left, and I need to decide on another starboard to go,’ and he interviewed myself and [6’5” 195cm 196lb. 89kg] **Chip Lubsen** separately.

“I remember this clearly. He pulled me over to the side at the old Dartmouth boathouse against the hill where they keep singles now. In this very narrow place, his back was against the hill, and I was leaning against the boathouse, and he asked me, ‘If you leave the Camp, would you join those guys?’

“I said, ‘What difference does it make, Al?’

“‘I just want to know if you’re with them or you’re with me.’

“I said, ‘Well, if you put it that way, if I get cut today, we have about two weeks, and all the boats at all the other boat clubs are filled. No one is going to pick me up. I will probably go and join those guys.’

“That’s what *I* said. I don’t know what Chip said to him.

“Before practice that morning, Al said to me, ‘Larry, you’ll start in the launch first,’ and we warmed up and did a 500 with Lubsen and then did another 500 with me. Then we came in, he announced that Chip would be in the eight and that I had to clear out by noon.

“I called the boys and said, ‘I’m with you.’

“We then contacted the NAAO and asked to use a camp boat, promising to row in off hours so that we’d never see the other athletes. Initially, they said yes, but in two days, Jack Frailey came up from Boston and told us that we could no longer use the boat, and he suggested that we leave Hanover.

“That’s when we called Tony Johnson at Yale.

“Tony was caught in a real dilemma. He said, ‘I’ll let you use a boat, but because you left Al, don’t count on me coaching.’

“He was a loyal follower of Al, and it was just an ugly, ugly thing.

“At the Trials, we and Penn Elite Center both kind of squeezed early off the start and got a little bit of a lead on the field, but it got called back because a third boat had also jumped, and they were the one they assigned the penalty to. When we did it again, it wasn’t quite as good. We raced hard, but we came up half a length short, and that was that.

“Close racing. The Penn boat was better that day. They were a good, young boat, and they rowed great. Bingo! End of season.”<sup>5199</sup>

**Vespoli:** “I wind up losing the coxed-four in the Olympic Trials, and that ended my competitive international career. So we had a high moment [in 1974] and then it went away, and I learned some pretty good lessons that have stuck with me.”<sup>5200</sup>

**Shealy:** “To make matters worse, I contracted mononucleosis just a few weeks before the Games and wasn’t anywhere near par. In hindsight, I probably should have relinquished my seat, but instead I tried gamely to produce and hammered it out while our crew failed to make the Olympic final for the first time in history.

“Bad times.”<sup>5201</sup>

**Rosenberg:** “Shealy contracted mono the day we broke camp at Hanover. He was so weak he was of no value on the water, and I eventually moved him to 4 and had Mike Hess stroke.”<sup>5202</sup>

**Gluckman:** “After losing the Trials, I went home, and then I get a call from Al.

---

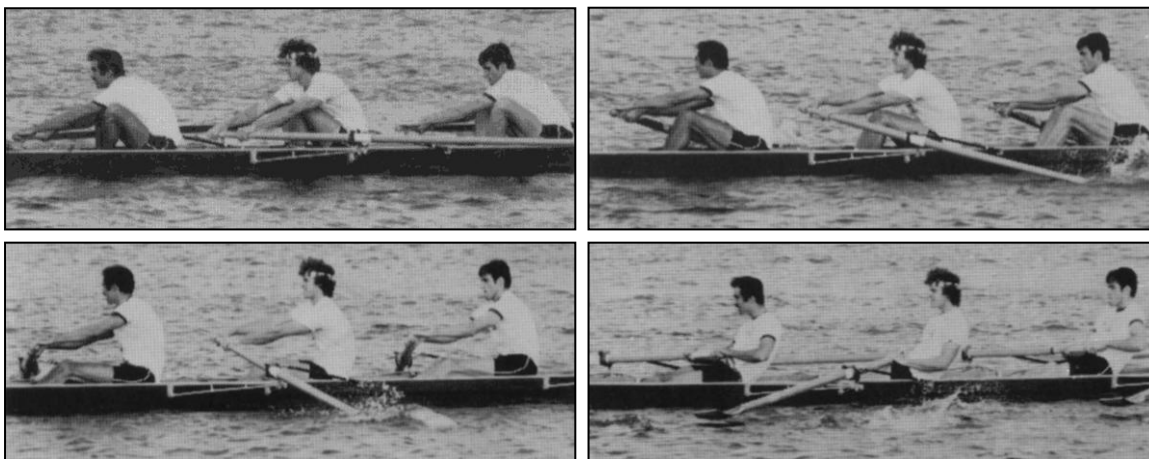
<sup>5199</sup> Gluckman, personal conversation, 2007

<sup>5200</sup> Jeff Moag, *The Rowing News Q&A: Mike Vespoli*, *Rowing News*, December 2009, p. 49

<sup>5201</sup> Shealy, personal correspondence, 2005

<sup>5202</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

## THE SPORT OF ROWING



Peter Klavora

### United States Camp Heavyweight Men's Eight

1976 Olympic Ninth Place, Île Notre Dame

Stroke **Al Shealy** 6'3" 191cm 198lb. 90kg, 7 **John Everett** 6'4" 193cm 205lb. 93kg,

6 **Dick Cashin** 6'4" 193cm 205lb. 93kg

0°, +35° to -25°, 0-6, 0-8, 0-10, *Kernschlag*

'The guys in the eight want you to be the starboard spare.'

"Immediately, I called each guy in the four and said, 'I'm not going unless I have your permission. We've been through a hell of a lot together,' and to a man, to a *man*, they said, 'Absolutely, you should go. You need to support the guys, and it's a worthwhile experience.'

"It was my last year of rowing, and so I went . . . and partly because of my wife. I had been away from her from late March all the way through to the Olympics, and it meant a lot for her to be able to go to the stadium and see me march in.

"The spares were on our own schedule. I rowed with [6'4" 193cm 209lb. 95kg] **Robert Espeseth**<sup>5203</sup> from the University of Wisconsin.<sup>5204</sup> This was his coming out. We trained in Hanover, but we were very seldom with the men's eight. It was Allen's wish that we not hang with them. We

trained with the women's crews and the double and the four-with.

"We were there to support the eight in case something happened, which it *did*, but he never used Espeseth, never took one of the most successful collegiate rowers of all time with four IRA championships, never put him in the boat for Shealy after his illness. It started in Hanover, and he should have rested him, but he didn't. He stayed with Shealy with mono all through to the end of the regatta.

"At that point, I think he was *so* alone, so crippled, looking over his shoulder all the time, and the bitterness coursed through the entire camp."<sup>5205</sup>

### 1976 Technique

Everything that could go wrong *did* go wrong before the Montréal Olympics.

As has been related, the longer camp only increased the tensions. Technique was by no means the only factor in play, but the

<sup>5203</sup> See Chapter 132.

<sup>5204</sup> See Chapter 106.

<sup>5205</sup> Gluckman, op. cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING



FISA 1976 Video

### United States Camp Heavyweight Men's Eight

1976 Olympic Ninth Place, Île Notre Dame

Bow **Chip Lubsen** 6'5" 195cm 196lb. 89kg, 2 **Steve Christensen** 6'5" 196cm 205lb. 93kg,

3 **Dave Fellows** 6'3" 191cm 196lb. 89kg

Force application was *Kernschlag*

Christensen: 0°, +30° to -15°, motion: 0-6, 4-9, 5-10 Modern Orthodox Technique

Fellows: 0°, +20° to -30°, motion: 0-7, 0-9, 5-10 Classical Technique

harder they worked and the closer the crew came to Rosenberg's overlapping sequential ideal, the slower they went.

With four new men to blend in, some of the previous cohesion was lacking. For instance, note the contrast between 2-seat 6'5" 196cm 205lb. 93kg **Steve Christensen** on the one hand and 6'5" 195cm 196lb. 89kg **Chip Lubsen** and 6'3" 191cm 196lb.

89kg **Dave Fellows** in bow and 3 in the film frames on the following page, the former rowing the perfect overlapping-sequential Modern Orthodox stroke still seen today, the latter two rowing closer to the Classical Technique of the 1974 crew.

This variation in technique was much more extreme than any differences between Stevenson and Shealy in 1974 and is

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

indicative of less success by Rosenberg in bringing into harmony the various techniques he inherited in 1976.

History was repeating itself again. Just as had happened with the 1964 Ratzeburg crew,<sup>5206</sup> a World's best crew was losing its edge as the Olympics approached.

And just as had happened with English Orthodoxy, Fairbairnism, 1<sup>st</sup> Generation Conibear, and the followers of George Pocock and Frank Muller, the main technical characteristic of the 1976 crew had become its segmented-force application: hit the catch and then pull through in a strong second effort.

As in 1975, the crew would tend to get off the line well and then fade off the pace of the crews rowing more economically and continuously through the water.

### Post Mortem

There have been many theories advanced about the several factors which together conspired to finally bring down the magnificent edifice that Allen Rosenberg had built in 1974.

**Tiff Wood:** "I know Allen can be very likable. And funny! He tried new things – in '75, we did tai chi as part of our warm-up – I loved it.

"And he had us do carbo-loading for the PanAms in Mexico City that year.

"And I think he was the one I first heard about hypoxic training from.

"He was always thinking."<sup>5207</sup>

**Rosenberg:** "I, along with others, consider myself as an innovator twenty years ahead of the curve. I was amused to read in a recent Sports Section of *The New York Times* that a hot item now is the use and reliance upon yoga and meditative

experts in the training of young baseball pitchers."<sup>5208</sup>

**Wood:** "Allen could talk a great game, and he was filled with certainty and confidence, and he was really good at the mental side, and in both '64 and '74 he took great material and acted as their 'finishing coach.'

"Yeah, his approach of driving the legs before everything else . . . I have a theory that it's good for rowers to change techniques every once in a while, just for the sake of a change, and for people raised on the Harry model of the '60s, a little shift toward the Rosenberg approach allowed them to find some more run – but when they got too good at his technique, they actually went slower. It's kind of too much of a good thing.

"And if you start with a group of rowers who have so far concentrated on just pulling their butts off, and they go to a camp with someone who is known as Mr. Style, so they now focus like they never have before in their lives on just rowing *perfectly*, it sets up a scenario wherein they can find the extra five seconds they need to win the World Championships.

"Bravo, Allen!

"But if they spend the *next* two years under his influence, they lose it, because they lose the humping hard work they had done before meeting him in the first place, which had given them the base from which to get the great speed, plus there is a difference between doing exactly what he says and *trying* to do what he says but getting only part of the way there.

"With extended exposure to him, crews just could not continue to perform.

"In 1976, it was evident he went a little crazy under the pressure. USRA gave him no logistical support but everything he asked for in terms of responsibility – as one person

---

<sup>5206</sup> See Chapter 99.

<sup>5207</sup> Wood, personal correspondence, 2005

---

<sup>5208</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

put it, made sure they gave him all the rope he needed to hang himself.”<sup>5209</sup>

**Vespoli:** “Many of us in the ‘74 boat had also been in the U.S. eight in 1973. Steve Gladstone put that boat together, and we had *real* speed, but everything went wrong for us during the ‘73 race in Moscow.”<sup>5210</sup> We were all pretty frustrated and had something to prove the next year.

“We didn’t pay a great deal of attention to Allen’s technical coaching during his first year. We already knew how to move boats.

“In the second and third years under Allen, we inevitably adapted closer and closer to his teaching . . . and we got slower and slower.”<sup>5211</sup>

**Allen Rosenberg** himself attributes the slowness to factors other than technique: “In 1976, **Ken Brown** had spent the year studying in England, and **Mark Umlauf** was one year too early to fill Norelius’ seat. He was bullied and ostracized and eventually performed well below his capabilities. **Mike Vespoli** never performed as well as he did in 1974. Truth be told, there was a lot of second guessing because many of the guys believed they knew exactly what they needed and wanted to do so on their own.

“The lack of cohesiveness in ‘76 was caused in large part by having to race with four spares and replacements after the mutiny, but it is *not* true that were going slower. Despite everything, when Shealy was well and at stroke, we were fast enough to make the top four.

“I sought out **Dr. Gideon Ariel**<sup>5212</sup> to do high-speed camera work for isolating body

movements, as he had done with international shot-put and discus men, but I could not proceed without paying him. Finally, I was able to have a professor at Brockport (NY) State Teachers College stay with us at Hanover in May, 1976 to film the crews at ultra high-speed and correlate that footage with speed markings. It showed that the eight with a healthy Shealy stroking was moving at better than 5:30 speed.”<sup>5213</sup>

**Shealy:** “I don’t recall any conscious change in Allen’s technique during those years. His off-the-water stuff got more bizarre, like the tai chi, the Washington Redskins trainer whose mantra, ‘It’s the muscles that do the work,’ to this day provokes endless howls, and rolling an orange across a table and snatching it just before it fell off to simulate the quick-catch hand movement.

“He was a wreck that year and it took its toll on morale.”<sup>5214</sup>

**Rosenberg:** “*Non-coaching* factors dominated the 1976 effort. We had no financial or logistical support from the USOC, and the rowing political power was in Cambridge<sup>5215</sup> at that time.”<sup>5216</sup>

**Vespoli:** “We [the four that left the camp] couldn’t win the Trials, and the eight didn’t make the final at the Olympics. Something very basic had to be wrong. Whatever it was, how we rowed technically, motivation, the lack of competition in the group, or something else, there was a good reason neither boat did well.”<sup>5217</sup>

---

<sup>5209</sup> Wood, op. cit.

<sup>5210</sup> See Chapter 111.

<sup>5211</sup> Vespoli, personal conversation, 1999

<sup>5212</sup> Former Israeli Olympic discus thrower and world-renowned authority in biomechanics.

According to the article Gideon Ariel and His Magic Machine, *Sports Illustrated*, August 22, 1977, “If you want to run faster, throw farther or jump higher, call on this electronic mastermind,

---

who will photograph you in action, digitize the moving parts of your body and feed the data into a computer, which will turn out reams of athletic advice no human authority can provide.”

<sup>5213</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

<sup>5214</sup> Shealy, personal correspondence, 2005

<sup>5215</sup> a thinly-veiled reference to Harry Parker and NAAO President Jack Frailey.

<sup>5216</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

<sup>5217</sup> Qtd. by Jaugstetter, op. cit., p. 45

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

**Rosenberg:** “Without any aid from the USOC, I also incorporated the services and opinion of a world-renowned sports psychologist from Wisconsin, Dr. **Bill Morgan**. In a personal letter to me, he compared me to icon swimming coach Jim Counselman. Both of us, he wrote, combined the science and art of our respective sports.”<sup>5218</sup>

**Gluckman:** “After coming back from Nottingham in ‘75, I had gone to the University of Wisconsin to earn a doctorate in physical education for handicapped kids. The program brought together exercise physiology and special education, and I hooked up with a guy named **Bill Morgan**, one of the early sports psychologists.

“In ‘72, Morgan had tested the top four participants in each weight class for the U.S. Olympic Wrestling Team. He measured mental fatigue, goal-setting, trust, whether or not you thought that what you were doing would lead to a successful outcome, you name it. He didn’t tell the athletes or the coaches the results until after the Olympic Trials, but he had picked nine winners of the twelve weight classes. He became very famous for this.

“When our team stopped in Madison for its two-week period stopover in April, ‘76, Morgan persuaded Allen, based on his results in ‘72, to allow him to test our team. The deal was that *after* Allen selected the eight, Morgan would share his results with him.

“He told Al, ‘I don’t want you to use this test to pick your crew. I’m not sure that it has validity in an endurance sport with high technique and so much teamwork,’ but what he *did* immediately share with Al was a concern about the level of confusion he discovered amongst the athletes at that point.

“Bill also shared his concerns with me!

“When I went back to graduate school after the Olympics, Morgan told me, ‘Larry, I’ve been following the story, and it doesn’t surprise me. Here’s the rest of the results by name.’

“From Shealy on back, there had been just general confusion, not sure that what we were doing was going to lead to success, questioning authority and constant mental fatigue. These were all the things that the other coaches who were working with Al in ‘74 had *prevented* from happening.”<sup>5219</sup>

There is no question that 1976 represented a perfect storm of factors that led to the inevitable downfall of the squad. Lack of management support seems to have been the ultimate culprit, but it is the opinion of many participants and other observers that devolution of rowing technique also played a not insignificant factor.

### Allen Rosenberg and Late-20<sup>th</sup> Century American Rowing

American rowing of the last half century can be split into two eras: the **Harry Parker** years and then **Allen Rosenberg**.

During the decade after Karl Adam’s 1963 trip to the Eastern Sprints, Harry’s Harvard crews dominated collegiate rowing, and American rowing experienced a love affair with the so-called Ratzeburg Style.

The Harvard Style was imperfectly reverse engineered by almost everyone, and crews from Maine to California began growing their hair long, wearing bandannas, accelerating their slides and pounding their catches.

Ratzeburg Mania invaded our shores like a virus, infecting everything and everyone, and, just as George and Stan Pocock had predicted,<sup>5220</sup> all traces of the

---

<sup>5218</sup> Rosenberg, op. cit.

---

<sup>5219</sup> Gluckman, op. cit.

<sup>5220</sup> See Chapter 98.



## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

wisdom of Courtney and Conibear and Ebright and Ulbrickson and so many others, all the experience that had made up the Golden Age of American Rowing, were erased from our collective memory.

Imagine that!

Giants like Ten Eyck and Callow became mere names on a plaque, pictures on a boathouse wall.

By the mid-1970s, when the Ratzeburg virus had run its course and America was waking up with a hangover and lowered resistance, this was when American rowing suffered its mortal wound.

Into the void left at the end of the Ratzeburg era rushed the mutant strain of the Rosenberg approach, **Modern Orthodoxy**, and it was as if the Conibear Stroke had never existed.

American rowing was plunged into a Dark Age.

In the forty years between 1964 and 2004, as we shall discuss, there have been great individual stories, Joan Lind, Bill Belden, the 1972 and '74 men's heavyweight eights, the 1975 Red Rose Crew, Scott Roop, the 1984 Olympic Champion men's double and women's eight, Andy Sudduth, a decade of Penn A.C. men's coxless-fours, Jamie Koven, several men's and women's eights during the 1980s and '90s and a gaggle of lightweight women, rowers and scullers.

These lights burned much the brighter, for they were surrounded by darkness and disappointment. They had become the exceptions and not the rule.

### Rosenberg the Man

To this day, Allen Rosenberg remains a man with an immense following in the American rowing community. He is generous with his time and maintains an

enthusiasm for rowing and the rowers who strive every day to get a little better.

Allen Rosenberg is a gentleman. He is a man readying himself to look upon his complicated rowing past with the perspective of passing time. He tells me he is considering writing a book. I say bravo!

Here is a short anecdote that captures some of the charm of Allen Rosenberg:

**Steve Johnson**, stroke of the 1964 University of California Varsity Crew: "Our coach was **Jim Lemmon**, and he had just missed the Olympics in 1960. We were undefeated, a fabulous crew, and had won the IRA by a couple of lengths of open water. We thought we had a lock on the Olympics in 1964 (which was a mistake!).

"Cornell had been completely beaten in Syracuse, but Stork Sanford was fabulous. He gave up [his Olympic ambitions] and gave us his whole pre-Olympic training program at Ithaca, so we went up there to train before the Trials, and sailed through the Trials until the finals.

"We were in the outside lane, and the story is that a press boat picked up and waked us. We had three guys with full crabs at the start. The coxswain had his hand up the entire first 500 meters, but they never called it back. Vesper ended up beating us and went on to win the Gold Medal. More power to them.

"When the Vesper crew came back to the dock, everybody else was gone. We were waiting for them, greeted them, helped them out of their boat, gave them our shirts.

"Later we got this lovely letter from Allen Rosenberg, their coach, saying that there had been many *competitors* at the Olympic Trials, but there was only one crew of *sportsmen*, and that was us.

"Very, very nice. I've never forgotten it."<sup>5221</sup>

---

<sup>5221</sup> Johnson, personal conversation, 2009

# THE SPORT OF ROWING

## 115. The Continuing Impact of Modern Orthodox Technique

### *Books, Periodicals and Manuals Worldwide – FISA Manuals*

How pervasive has the Rosenberg Style in its mutated *Kernschlag* form become? Does it truly deserve the name Modern Orthodox Technique?

Pick up virtually any “how-to” book written in the last forty years, any one you like. It makes no difference. They all present some form of Modern Orthodoxy.

For instance, *Rowing, Power and Endurance*, “Endorsed by the U.S. Rowing Association” no less:

**The drive/legs:** Seventy-five percent of the power of the stroke is provided by your legs, which begin the drive.

- Drive against the stretchers with your legs.
- Do not change your upper-body position. Keep your arms straight and fully extended.
- Let your legs do all the work during this stage. Keep the rest of your body fixed to transmit the power of your legs to the oars efficiently.

**The drive/back:** When your legs are almost fully extended, your back takes over.

- Keep your legs nearly straight.
- Lean back or “swing” into the bow.
- Keep your arms straight and transmit the power of your back drive into the oars.

**The drive/arms:**

- When your back has nearly completed its lean into the bow, bend your elbows and arms forcefully, and smoothly pull the handles into your body.

- Your back should be firm and provide a base for your arms to pull from.<sup>5222</sup>

Pick up any magazine. **Ed Winchester**, Assistant Editor of *Rowing News*: “Most coaches would agree the rowing stroke is initiated with the legs.”<sup>5223</sup>

Go to any American scholastic or junior-level regatta, and count the legs-back-arms crews exploding at the catch. Go to any NCAA Women’s regatta, any Dad Vail-level regatta. Go to the Pac 10s or the Eastern Sprints. Go to the IRA or the NCAAs. Go to a Masters regatta.

Go to the Canadian Scholastics or the Canadian Henley. Go to an annual Canadian Coaches’ Conference. Go to the USRA Convention.

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, up to 90% of North American crews were rowing overlapping-sequential, but most of the time nothing like the way Allen Rosenberg originally imagined and intended.

What is the most widely read description of rowing technique in the world today? Probably the Concept2 ergometer manual:

Begin the drive by pressing down your legs. Keep your arms straight and your back firm to transfer your leg power to the

---

<sup>5222</sup> Lezotte, p. 17

<sup>5223</sup> Ed Winchester, *Different Shades of the Same Color*, *Rowing News*, Sept. 27, 2002, p. 16

## THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING

handle. Gradually bend your arms and swing back with your upper body until you reach a slight backward lean at the finish. Pull handle all the way into your abdomen.<sup>5224</sup>

Is there an official U.S. Technique? The USRA website says:

- After the entry of the blade into the water, the body weight is transmitted to the footstretchers using the force of the legs.
- The muscles of the back, shoulders and arms just hold firmly, providing a good connection between the legs and the blade. There is no significant upper body lift (opening the angle between the chest and the thighs).
- It will appear as if the body swing “takes over” from the leg drive. Body weight hangs on straight arms. Both arms are straight and stretched.
- Legs and back finish their work almost simultaneously.
- Hands should continue the last inches of the draw with good support against the footstretchers.
- Keep the body in a tall position about 10° past vertical.<sup>5225</sup>

The USRA’s *Introduction to Sculling* says:

After the catch, the drive begins by using your legs to push your body toward the bow, and the stroke is completed with the arms and back.<sup>5226</sup>

This is not limited to books. The following quote is a voice-over narration of 2004 and 2008 Olympic Singles Champion **Olaf Tufte**<sup>5227</sup> rowing concurrently:

The drive and propulsion phase begins with the initial push of the legs after the

blade is entered into the water. The push of the legs drives the body back towards the bow of the boat while the strong core muscular system holds against the legs. The body, shoulders and arms act as a conduit to allow the power generated by the leg push to be transferred onto the handle and ultimately the blade.<sup>5228</sup>

Ironically, Olaf Tufte does not row anything like the above description.

This obsession with Modern Orthodox Technique is not a phenomenon limited to the Western Hemisphere. **Keith Maybery**, a well-known South African coach:

The full power of the legs is transferred to the oar handle. Keep a firm body with your arms outstretched . . .

The knees and legs are thrust downward in the leg drive while the arms remain outstretched. The body has no swing at this point and must remain ‘fixed’ in position. You should ‘hang on the oar handle’ as you continue to drive with your legs, keeping the body posture almost upright. At this point, the back and arms provide the connection between the drive of the legs and the oar handle.

As the legs straighten, your upper body posture remains firm, but you begin to lean back slightly, allowing only 15-20° of total body movement. Once your legs are completely straight, the pulling power of the arms takes over. At this point you draw the hands toward the solar plexus while opening your chest and shoulders.<sup>5229</sup>

Does FISA, the international rowing federation, recognize an official World Technique? According to their *coaching development program handbook Level 1*:

In relation to the muscular force, the first half of the drive relies primarily on the legs. Further in the drive, the back muscles enter

---

<sup>5224</sup> Concept 2, p. 12

<sup>5225</sup> Kris Korzeniowski, *USRowing Coaching Education – Level 1*, pp. 15-8,

[www.usrowing.org](http://www.usrowing.org)

<sup>5226</sup> *Before the Water – An Introduction to Sculling*, USRA

<sup>5227</sup> See Chapter 166.

---

<sup>5228</sup> CRC Sculling Camps, *Effective Sculling Technique*, DVD, 2005

<sup>5229</sup> Keith Maybery, *Rowing*, New Holland Publishers, London, p. 38

## THE SPORT OF ROWING

into action and, towards the end, the shoulders and the arms.<sup>5230</sup>

This is what the Rosenberg Style has mutated into worldwide, complete with segmented recruitment of muscle groups, and this FISA quote was authored by none other than **Thor S. Nilsen**,<sup>5231</sup> FISA's Development Director, who has won more than forty World and Olympic Golds for a host of nations including Spain, Italy, Spain,

Ireland and his native Norway.

I recently asked Allen about the satisfaction he must feel to see so many people around the world rowing some version of his technique today

**Rosenberg:** "It's only when people remind me that I think about it, because, to me, that's the only way to row."<sup>5232</sup>

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Allen". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

---

<sup>5230</sup> Nilsen, p. 53

<sup>5231</sup> See Chapter 123.

---

<sup>5232</sup> Rosenberg, personal conversation, 2004

# **THE LONG ECLIPSE OF AMERICAN ROWING**