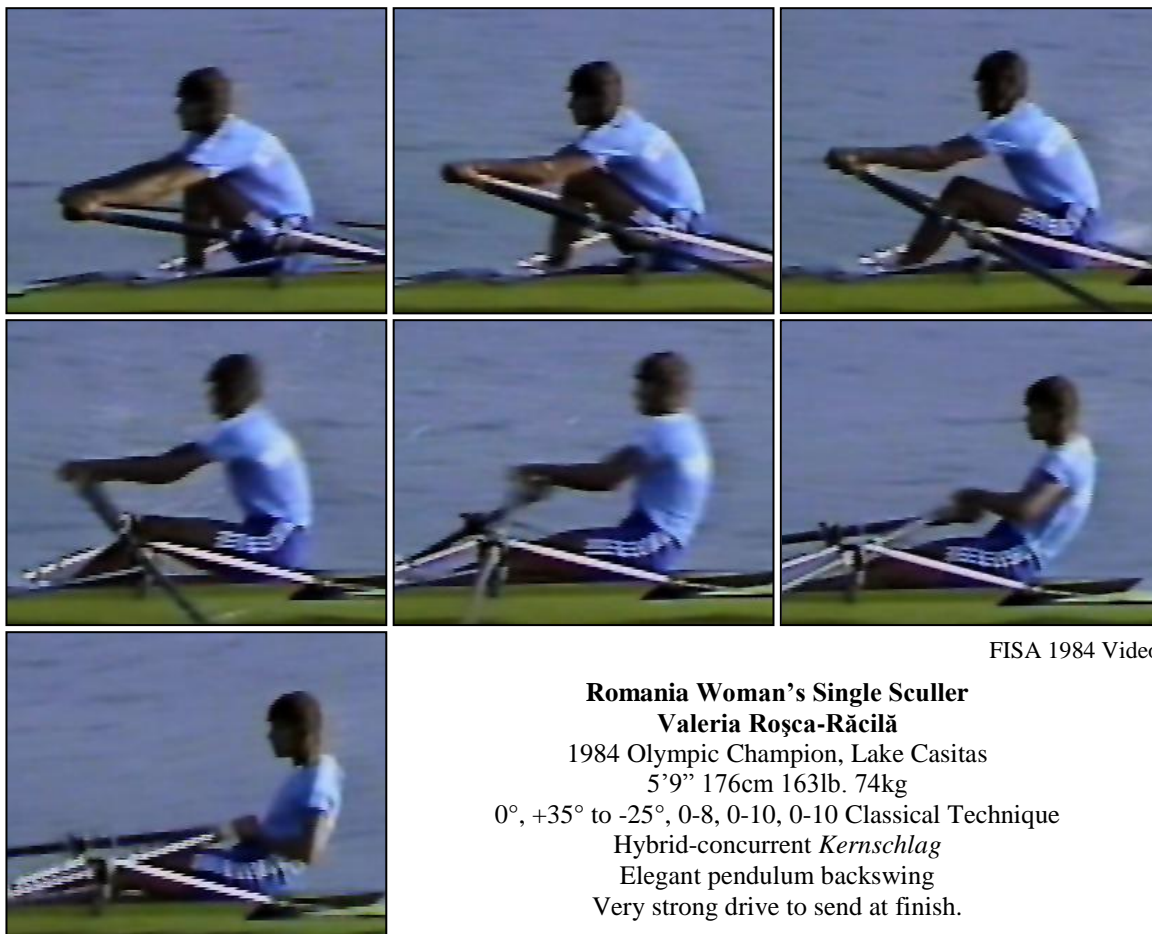


THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

148. Women in the 1980s

Romania – USA – 1984 Olympics



FISA 1984 Video

Romania Woman's Single Sculler

Valeria Roșca-Răcilă

1984 Olympic Champion, Lake Casitas

5'9" 176cm 163lb. 74kg

0°, +35° to -25°, 0-8, 0-10, 0-10 Classical Technique

Hybrid-concurrent *Kernschlag*

Elegant pendulum backswing

Very strong drive to send at finish.

During the 1980s, the polarization between the Classical Technique and Modern Orthodoxy also played itself out in women's rowing, with Eastern Bloc squads on the one hand and some but not all Western crews on the other.

The 1980 Olympics in Moscow had been cruelly undermined by a United States-led boycott which punished all athletes and

accomplished no political goal. The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics were then marred by a tit-for-tat Soviet boycott, equally pointless, equally hurtful to athletes on both sides.

The rowers most missed in L.A. were the GDR and the Soviet women, who between them had won seventeen of the eighteen Gold Medals awarded in the previous three years. However, the GDR

THE SPORT OF ROWING



FISA 1984 Video

Romania Women's Eight

1984 Olympic Silver Medal, Lake Casitas

Stroke **Lucia Sauca** 5'10" 179cm 172lb. 78kg

-5°, +45° to -15°, 0-8, 0-10, 4-10 Classical Technique

Hybrid-concurrent *Kernschlag*

Awkward catch position. Not pretty, just effective.

women's eight had lost to the United States both days in Lucerne earlier in the summer of 1984, substantially increasing the credibility of the results on Lake Casitas, in the hills east of Santa Barbara, California.

Romania

During the 1970s, frustrated at perennially finishing behind the Soviets and GDR in international sport, the Romanian Government instituted a well-funded program to create world-class athletes, including a major effort in women's rowing. The level of government commitment was similar to that of the GDR Sports System during the same period.⁷⁵⁶⁹

By the end of the decade, at the 1979 World Rowing Championships in Bled,

Yugoslavia [now Slovenia], Romanian women medaled in five of the six women's events. In the three years leading up to the 1984 Los Angeles Games, they only missed two of eighteen finals, winning **eleven** medals, one Gold, three Silver and seven Bronze.

During that same period, GDR also won **eleven** medals, five Gold, four Silver and two Bronze, while the Soviets won an astonishing **sixteen** medals in eighteen events, an incredible twelve Gold, two Silver and two Bronze.⁷⁵⁷⁰

Perhaps it was continuing frustration that led the Romanians to defy the Soviet-led Olympic boycott and send their Olympic teams to Los Angeles.

⁷⁵⁶⁹ See Chapter 119.

⁷⁵⁷⁰ Between 1981 and 1983, U.S. women won six medals, four Silver and two Bronze.

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

The Romanian 1984 Olympic squad was led by single sculler **Valeria Roșca-Răcilă**, 5'9" 176lb. 163lb. 74kg, a worthy successor to 5'9" 176cm 165lb. 75kg Romanian **Sanda Toma**, World and Olympic Champion from 1979 through 1981.

Roșca-Răcilă had won double sculls Bronze in 1979 and 1980 with partner **Olga Bularda-Homeghi** 5'9" 174cm 161lb. 73kg, stroke of the 1984 Olympic Gold Medal coxed-four, and then switched to the single in 1982 when Toma retired. She placed second by one inch at the Worlds in 1982 and then failed to finish the 1983 final when her oarlock broke.

On Lake Casitas in 1984 Roșca-Răcilă won by open water. In 1985, she won Silver and then retired to join her husband, Dutch canoeist Steven van Groningen.

Romanian training was founded on mileage, as many as three sessions a day of "long slow distance" or LSD training which originated in GDR.⁷⁵⁷¹

Kelly Mitchell, coxswain of the 1984 U.S. women's coxed-quad: "We would row a heat, then go back down for ten or fifteen minutes and come in. We noticed that the Romanians would go out for another hour of rowing. They had a really long warm up and a really long warm down, noticeably different from any other team there."⁷⁵⁷²

Their race tactics were also similar to GDR: set a withering pace in the first 500, and pull away as others wilted during the second 500.

Valeria Roșca-Răcilă sculled in the Classical Technique with strong legs and an elegant pendulum backswing.

The Romanian women's double and quad showed the same level of finesse as they also captured Olympic Gold in 1984. With no long-standing tradition in sweep

rowing, development and training of Romanian athletes was based on sculling, and so it was no surprise that they excelled in the sculling events on Lake Casitas.

Romanian athletes also brought their training and discipline and their sculling-trained athletes to sweep events, but their body movements as sweep rowers tended to be a bit less elegant, a characteristic which has persisted into the 21st Century.

The Romanian four and eight rowed with impeccable bladework, sometimes awkward posture but very effective leg drive and body swing and send to the boat.

1984 U.S. Sweep Rowers

American woman sweep rowers represented the other side of the Classical-Modern Orthodox divide. When American legislation popularly known as Title IX was passed requiring parity of funding between male and female athletes on university campuses, colleges began turning out increasing numbers of talented female athletes.

Kris Korzeniowski had left the U.S. in 1981 after coaching the National Women's Team for four years, Kris's influence continued in the person of University of Washington coach **Bob Ernst**.

Bob had begun his coaching career with the men at the University of California at Irvine. In 1974, his varsity nearly upset the Washington Huskies in the Western Sprint Championships. Shortly thereafter, Bob was hired as freshman coach at the UW.

After Title IX, Bob became the Washington Women's Coach, and what followed were six championships for the Husky women. "It would have been seven, but those darn **Wisconsin** women snuck in one year! They were sensational, and I

⁷⁵⁷¹ See Chapter 119.

⁷⁵⁷² Mitchell, personal conversation, 2006

THE SPORT OF ROWING



Bob Ernst

1984 United States Women's Eight

3 Carol Bower 5'8" 172cm 163lb. 74kg

at low stroke, steady state

Hanover, New Hampshire

-5°, +40° to -30°, 0-6, 0-9, 4-10

Modern Orthodox Technique, *Schubschlag*

In practice, Coach Ernst had them working on exaggerated back swing and acceleration to the finish in order to eliminate front-end *Kernschlag*.

ended up wanting them all on my National Teams."⁷⁵⁷³

Curtis Jordan, Princeton women's coach for seven years and men's coach for nineteen: "Bob is one of those kinds of guys who understood what Korzeniewski was teaching, was able to develop and actually made a system out of it. **Lori Dauphiny** rowed for Bob at the UW, and when she started coaching the women here at Princeton, she had a very particular way of teaching people how to row with long layback. It was very clear when you saw one of Laurie's crews. You could see it, and

there was a genesis that went right back to Korzeniewski!"⁷⁵⁷⁴

Force Application

Much as it had been for Harry Parker at the National Women's Selection Camps of 1975 and 1976, the approach to force application for the athletes who greeted the U.S. National Coaches was Modern Orthodox *Kernschlag*, the American norm.

As had been the case for a decade, the athlete pool in the run-up to 1984 contained a healthy dose of **Wisconsin Badger** blood.

⁷⁵⁷³ Ernst, personal conversation, 2005

⁷⁵⁷⁴ Jordan, personal conversation, 2006

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

Wisconsin crews of the era, both men and women, were especially well known for Rosenberg sequentiality and post-Rosenberg explosive *Kernschlag*, and given their severe climate, they made up for lack of water time with pure determination.

As had Bob's mentor and predecessor, Kris Korzeniowski, Bob quickly set out to break their *Kernschlag* force application habit and replace it with *Schubschlag*.

Kelly Mitchell, 1980 Olympic quad coxswain: "1980 was Bob Ernst's year with the quad, and his whole thing was fast hands away, fast hands away. I remember one day Nancy Vespoli switched places. She coxed, and I went to the bow of the quad and had to do what they were doing. I spent so much energy trying to get the hands away fast that I had no energy left for the stroke. I wonder what they think about that now."⁷⁵⁷⁵

1981

In Korzeniowski's last year coaching the American women, he coached the U.S. Women's eight to Silver while Bob coached the women's coxed-four to Bronze. Seven of the eight who would end up in the 1984 Olympic crew were already on board.

1982

In 1982, the priority boat was supposed to be the pair, but Carol Bower and Kathy Keeler won the Trials and declared they weren't interested.

The priority boat then became the coxed-four under Northeastern men's coach **Buzz Congram**, while Ernst coached the eight.

Ernst: "That worked out great for me. Buzz got all the skill people, while I got the next sixteen and could just row them to

death working on technique, waiting to see who Buzz would eventually cut."⁷⁵⁷⁶

The 1982 U.S. sweep women won Silver in both the four and the eight.

1983

In 1983, when Bob took over as head U.S. women's coach, he inherited a group of international medalists. One, Wisconsin's **Carie Graves**, had actually hung in since the Silver Medalist Red Rose Crew of 1975,⁷⁵⁷⁷ hoping to finally gain the Gold Medal that had eluded the U.S. in the intervening years.

Kris Thorsness, 1984 7-seat: "I was one of those pesky Wisco women about whom Bob loves to (affectionately) complain.

"In 1982, my first summer on the U.S. Team, he stopped practice once and found himself at a loss for words to describe the way I was rowing. Or wasn't rowing. I'm sure I deserved it.

"That summer, I kept my toenails painted Wisco red with a white 'W' on my big toes just to tweak him. I *think* . . . he loved it . . .

"He yelled at me a lot. He yelled at everyone a lot back then. I figured that I deserved it about 98% of the time, and I was willing to let the rest slide.

"As you can probably tell, I have deep respect and affection for Bob. You could not find a more dedicated and focused coach, and that caused some friction with other boats, whose coaches were perhaps not as assertive on their behalf.

"It's a darn shame that he didn't get a medal in '84, too."⁷⁵⁷⁸

⁷⁵⁷⁵ Mitchell, op cit.

⁷⁵⁷⁶ Ernst, op cit, 2006

⁷⁵⁷⁷ See Chapter 126.

⁷⁵⁷⁸ Thorsness, personal correspondence, 2006

THE SPORT OF ROWING



FISA 1984 Video

United States Women's Eight

1984 Olympic Champion, Lake Casitas

Pulling away from Romania in the last 200 meters

Coxswain **Elizabeth Beard**,

Stroke **Kathy Keeler** 5'9" 175cm 165lb. 75kg, 7 **Kris Thorsness** 5'9" 175cm 152lb. 69kg,
6 **Kristi Norelius** 6'1" 185cm 168lb. 76kg, 5 **Jeanne Flanagan** 5'10" 177cm 179lb. 81kg,
4 **Carie Graves** 6'1" 186cm 170lb. 77kg, 3 **Carol Bower** 5'8" 172cm 163lb. 74kg,
2 **Holly Metcalf** 5'8" 172cm 163lb. 74kg, Bow **Shyrl O'Steen** 5'9" 176cm 148lb. 67kg

Bob Ernst: "What you try to do just work on execution, rehearsal, rehearsal, execution, to make the boat go as fast as possible, and we always had the attitude that if somebody beats us, they're just faster than us."⁷⁵⁷⁹

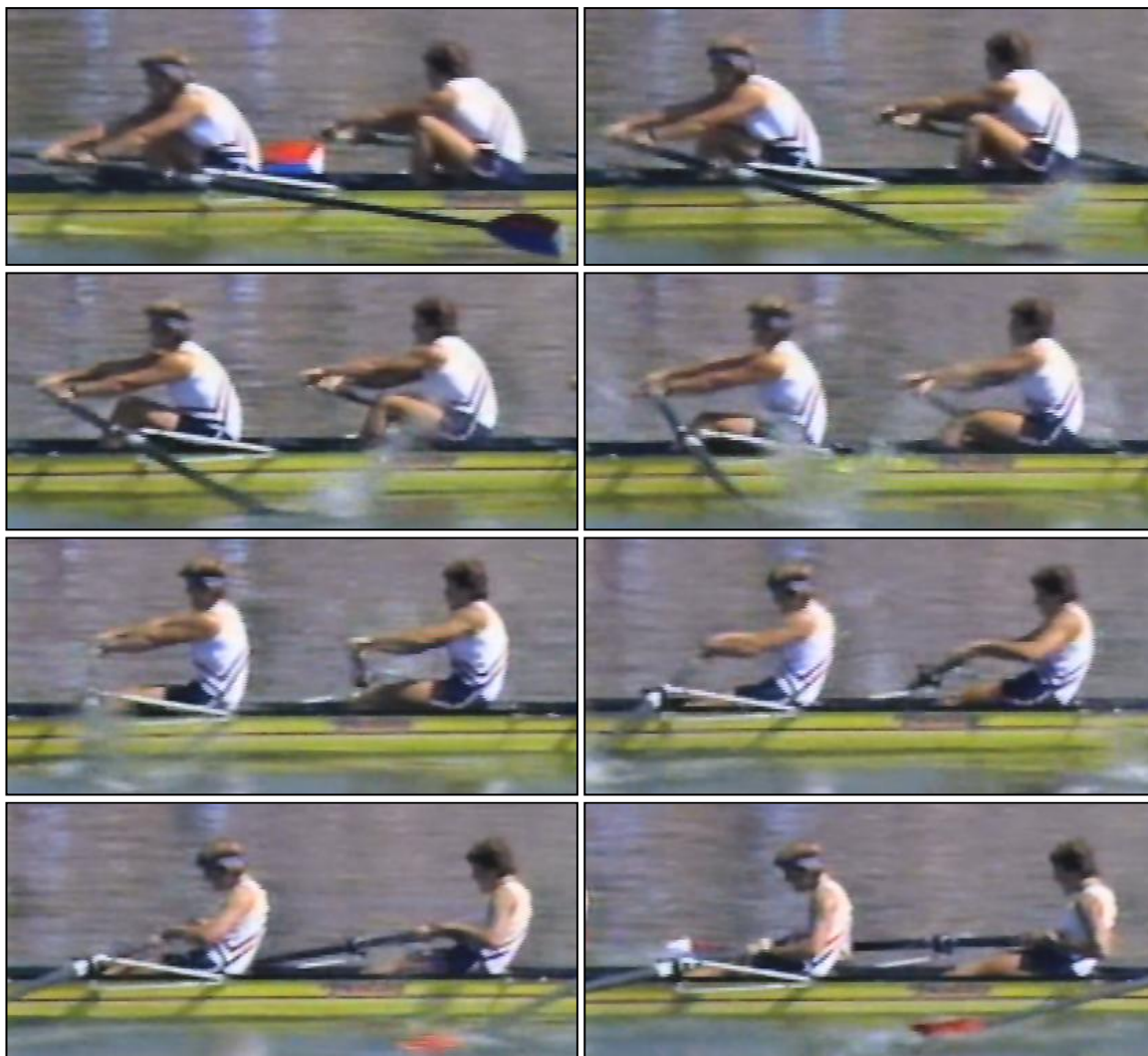
The training that Bob gave his crews in the two years leading up to the Los Angeles Games included frequent full-pressure rows at 18 strokes per minute. As has occurred repeatedly throughout history, crews forced to row full pressure at a low stroke tend to draw the stroke out, emphasizing layback and surge to the finish in order to get the most run out of each stroke.

Thorsness: "We did a lot of '3/2/1,' which was three minutes at 18spm at full pressure (emphasizing matching, control and synchronized power application), two minutes at 30-32spm at 80% pressure (emphasizing smoothness and relaxation), one minute at 36-38spm at 90% pressure (emphasizing quickness), then right back into three minutes at 18 full pressure, and the cycle repeats. When I do 3/2/1s in my single nowadays, I can still hear Bob talking about power, control and relaxation.

"Complete effort and concentration was absolutely required on every stroke of every piece of every practice. Even a momentary lapse could result in a brutal tongue-lashing

⁷⁵⁷⁹ ABC Television Olympic commentary

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION



FISA 1984 Video

United States Women's Eight

1984 Olympic Champion, Lake Casitas

3 **Carol Bower**, 2 **Holly Metcalf**

-5°, +40° to -15°, 0-7, 0-9, 4-10

Modern Orthodox, Hybrid Concurrent, *Schubschlag*

Strong legs, then emphasis on back swing to ferryman's finish

from Bob, while the rest of the team listened and watched.

"Years later, I asked him why he was so hard on us, to which he responded that he wanted to make sure that when we found ourselves on the starting line with the Russians on one side and the Easties on the

other, each one of us would think, 'This isn't so bad. That SOB Ernst isn't here yelling at us.'

THE SPORT OF ROWING

“Perhaps more than anyone, he realized what it would take to beat the Eastern Bloc crews.”⁷⁵⁸⁰

At the 1983 Worlds in Duisburg, West Germany, Bob’s crews won a third consecutive Silver in the eight and came in fifth in the coxed-four.

Technique

The 1984 crew called themselves “fast and ugly,” but this was only half-true. They were actually a beautiful crew that was indeed fast enough to beat GDR twice in Lucerne before returning to the States for the Olympics.

Their technique was Modern Orthodox, showing hybrid-concurrent use of the legs and back, with the leg motion dominating early. The pullthrough as a whole took its rhythm from the high arc of the back swing, generating very strong surge to the finish.

Legs ended much earlier than with the Romanian crew, but the result was the same, *Kernschlag* with surge maintained to the release.

Thorsness: “Bob talked a lot about placing the blade in the water with a backing motion to maximize the length, and then leg drive and get a quick change of direction. He’d shout ‘*Cha Cha Cha*’ as we took our catches. The 1986 Eight later had this printed on shirts with Bob’s picture.

“There was also a big emphasis on hanging your weight on straight arms for the first phase of leg drive and accelerating the handle into and around the back end of the stroke with no rhythm breaks, like a bicycle chain going around the sprocket.

“Shins were to be perpendicular at the catch, and the body swung open in a ‘C’ shape rather than like a door.”⁷⁵⁸¹

⁷⁵⁸⁰ Thorsness, op cit.

⁷⁵⁸¹ Ibid.

The overall approach was very similar to the Modern Orthodox Technique of Thor Nilsen, Kris Korzeniowski and **Giuseppe la Mura**, coach of the Abbagnale brothers: strong initial leg drive, unifying back swing, late arm break, back and arms finishing together to produce strong, consistent acceleration all the way to the send at the finish.

Arms broke quite late and finished concurrently with the back to complete the surging pullthrough. This was done well and consistently by all members of the crew with the sole exception of **Carie Graves** in the 4-seat, the tallest, strongest and most experienced member, who omitted the backswing to the finish and completed her pullthrough with her arms only.

Carie Graves

In 1984, Carie Graves was a relatively new phenomenon in American women’s rowing. Throughout history, most U.S. rowers had ended their competitive careers when they graduated from college. This only began to change for the men after World War II.

The **1948 Washington Olympic Coxed-Four** tried to come back after graduation in 1952 but fell just short.⁷⁵⁸² Logg and Price, the **1952 Rutgers Olympic Champion Coxless-Pair**,⁷⁵⁸³ and the **1952 Navy Olympic Champion eight**⁷⁵⁸⁴ got back together after a couple of years and fell just short at the 1956 Olympic Trials. Fifer and Hecht, the **1952 Stanford Olympic Coxed-Pair**,⁷⁵⁸⁵ got back together after three years and won Olympic Gold in the coxless-pairs in 1956.

In the United States, serious women’s National Team rowing only began in **1975**,

⁷⁵⁸² See Chapter 61.

⁷⁵⁸³ See Chapter 81.

⁷⁵⁸⁴ See Chapter 64.

⁷⁵⁸⁵ See Chapter 81.

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

and Carie, a junior at Wisconsin, had been the stroke of the first National Camp Eight, the World Silver Medal Red Rose Crew. In **1976**, she was 6 in the Olympic Bronze Medal Camp Eight.⁷⁵⁸⁶

After she graduated from Wisconsin, she kept on competing. In **1979**, she stroked the World Fifth-Place Coxless-Pair with fellow-Badger and '76 U.S. teammate Peggy McCarthy. In **1980**, Carie was again 6-seat in the U.S. Camp Eight, made up mostly of a new generation of woman athletes. They were denied the opportunity to compete in Moscow by the U.S. Olympic boycott.

After 1980, Carie was one of only a handful of American women who dedicated themselves to train for a third Olympics, but training was not her only pursuit. She had also been coaching the Radcliffe crew since 1977 and would receive her Master's of Education in Administration, Planning and Social Policy from Harvard in 1985.

In **1981** and **1983**, Carie and her teammates in the U.S. Eight won Silver to go along with her Silver Medal from 1975. She was the only member left of the Red Rose Crew, and by 1984 the years were beginning to take their toll.

Carie: "By that Olympic summer, I felt as if I was no longer on top of it and couldn't get there anymore. The harder I tried and the harder I rowed, the worse I got, and let me make this clear – I did *not* have this experience for my other two Olympic eights.

"In '84, I felt old and worn out and was not recovering enough between workouts prior to boat selection. Jeanne Flanagan (5-seat) and I had come *dead last* (way back) in the pair racing at Princeton prior to selection, so it was clear to me that it wasn't going well for me.

"I felt that Bob wanted me in there, but for the first time in my rowing career I felt guilty and undeserving that I was in the

boat. I wasn't given the chance to prove myself, but I felt that if I *had* been given the chance, I wouldn't have won my seat races and would *not* have been in the eight.

"I certainly welcomed the long taper prior the Games!

"At our 20th Reunion in Seattle a couple of years ago, we were all sitting in the Pocock Boathouse at a big round table, and I shared this memory with the team. I was very honest and got it off my chest. After I finished, they sat there and stared at me with jaws agape, shocked. Apparently no one else had felt that way!"⁷⁵⁸⁷

Thorsness: "I recall that Carie was so inflexible at the beginning of that summer that she could not touch her knees, let alone her toes. Bob made us all do this pre-practice stretching routine, and by the end of the summer, Carie could touch her toes (just barely).

"We didn't care. Even half of Carie's stroke was a whole lot of power."⁷⁵⁸⁸



The Race

Ernst said there was little strategy to the Olympic final: "The women race 1,000 meters in international competition."⁷⁵⁸⁹ We're not going to make any tactical error because we don't have any tactics. There's no such thing as playing defense in a 1,000 meter race. It's all straight offence. The only kind of strategy that you can possibly have in 1,000 meter races is to get from the

⁷⁵⁸⁶ See Chapter 126.

⁷⁵⁸⁷ Graves, personal correspondence, 2006

⁷⁵⁸⁸ Thorsness, op cit.

⁷⁵⁸⁹ It was increased to 2,000 meters in 1985.

THE SPORT OF ROWING

start to the finish as quick as you possibly can.⁷⁵⁹⁰

Coxswain **Betsy Beard**: “Our strategy was to go faster, faster and faster.”⁷⁵⁹¹

Thorsness: “Our race was delayed, and it was hot that day. When we finally got to the starting line on Lake Casitas, we were tight, tight, tight. We sat for what felt like forever on the line, and once underway, we stayed tight and a bit short, perhaps too aware of the Romanians.”⁷⁵⁹²

The U.S. eight came off the line at 47 to the Romanians’ 45, and soon both crews had a deck on the field.

American stroke **Kathy Keeler** settled her crew to 42 after 250 meters, and that was the lowest they ever got.

After falling behind a couple of feet at 300 meters, the Romanians crossed the 500 meter mark a couple of feet ahead of the U.S., with the rest of the field half a length down.

Thorsness: “With about 300 meters to go, Betsy said something like ‘We’re going to go, and we’re going to go *now!*’ which focused us back in our boat and caused the move that left the Romanians behind for good.”⁷⁵⁹³

Graves, 4-seat: “I remember looking over at the Romanians when we were still behind with about 250 meters to go and thinking, ‘[Bleep] this! We are NOT going to lose this race’”⁷⁵⁹⁴

At 800 meters, it was the U.S. moving through and away as Keeler had them back up to 44. The final margin was a third of a length, with the Dutch in third, a full length behind.

Thorsness: “I really credit **Betsy Beard** with that win. Of course, everyone in that boat had enormous reserves of physical and

mental strength that they brought to bear in their own way.

“Kathy was pure focus and intensity during a race. She absolutely hated to lose and was the perfect stroke of an extremely headstrong crew. She and I had rowed a pair that year, which gave me invaluable experience and prepared me to sit behind her at 7.

“**Kristi Norelius**, **Carie Graves** and **Jeanne Flannagan** were the power core and made it feel like you were riding a rocket off the line. Wonderful women, but lord, what beasts!

“That’s not to say that **Carol Bower** and **Holly Metcalf** weren’t powerhouses themselves. Relatively short of stature, yes, but so strong technically and absolutely driven.

“**Shyrl O’Steen**, up in the bow, was smoothness personified.

“To finish the package, Bob Ernst was relentless and meticulous, which made us Olympic Champions. I’ve always been in awe of them all and am so acutely aware of the great honor it was to row with them.”⁷⁵⁹⁵

“The Gold Medal was not only the first ever for U.S. women but the first in World or Olympic competition for any non-communist country”⁷⁵⁹⁶ in **any** women’s event. Add in the European Championships going back to 1954, and only five Golds in twenty-nine years had *ever* gone to crews not part of the Eastern Bloc, a truly astounding statistic!

Postscript

Carol Bower has made a career of coaching crew and is presently the head coach of the Bryn Mawr College.

After stints as head coach at Radcliffe College and Northeastern University, **Carie**

⁷⁵⁹⁰ ABC Television, op. cit.

⁷⁵⁹¹ Qtd. by Kathryn Reith, *Sunrise over Casitas*, *Rowing USA* October/November 1984, p. 29

⁷⁵⁹² Thorsness, op cit.

⁷⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁷⁵⁹⁴ Graves, op cit.

⁷⁵⁹⁵ Thorsness, op cit.

⁷⁵⁹⁶ Reith, op cit, p. 34

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

Graves is now head coach at the University of Texas. Among a basket-full of awards, she has twice been inducted into the National Rowing Foundation Hall of Fame.

So much for not deserving a place in the 1984 eight.

United States Scullers

After a decade of work by coaches around the country, but mostly by **Tom McKibbin** and **John Van Blom** at Long Beach Rowing Association, the 1984 U.S. women's sculling squad was also deep in experienced international talent, but they tended to row a different technique from their sweep sisters, tending to row a variant of Classical Technique as opposed to Modern Orthodoxy.

The 1984 Single

Judy Geer had been Dartmouth College's first captain of the Women's crew. She made her first National Team appearance as a sweep rower in 1976 and had been a National Team sculler since 1977. By the 1980s, along with Joan Lind she was the last of the 1970s generation of U.S. international woman scullers to still compete. In 1981, Judy came in fifth at the Munich World Championships in the double with her younger sister, **Carlie Geer**.

Carlie then rowed as a member of the 1982 fourth-place and the 1983 fifth-place National Camp quads, the latter stroked by Judy.

When Carlie won the 1984 Olympic Singles Trials, it was a bit of an upset. Among her competition were **Joan Lind**, 1976 Olympic Singles Silver Medalist, and **Ann Marden**, granddaughter of 1914 Harvard Henley stroke Charles Lund, National Team member since 1978, who had won the 1981 U.S. Singles Championship and was destined to win World Singles Bronze in 1985, World Doubles Bronze in

1987 and the 1988 Olympic Singles Silver Medal.

But the favorite in '84 had been 1983 World Singles Bronze Medalist **Ginny Gilder** until she suffered an injury only a month before the Trials.

After losing to Carlie, Lind, Marden and Gilder plus converted National sweep rower **Lisa Rohde**, stroke of the 1977 seventh-place U.S. Eight, ended up in an extremely strong 1984 U.S. Olympic Coxed-Quad put together by Van Blom. Steering was **Kelly Rickon**, now Mitchell, in high school the former ZLAC Rowing Club teammate of Lynn Silliman, coxswain of the Red Rose Crew.⁷⁵⁹⁷

Marden and Rohde had already been training with Joan for a year in Long Beach. "Lisa felt they had already built a lot of respect for each other by training and racing in their singles every day.

"We looked at putting the quad together as a challenge."⁷⁵⁹⁸

Carlie's Technique

In her single, Carlie Geer's position at the entry showed a mix of less than normal leg compression and greater than normal body angle forward with her head low, something she shared with other American scullers of the era, including **Gregg Stone**⁷⁵⁹⁹ from the 1970s and **Anne Marden** in the '84 quad.

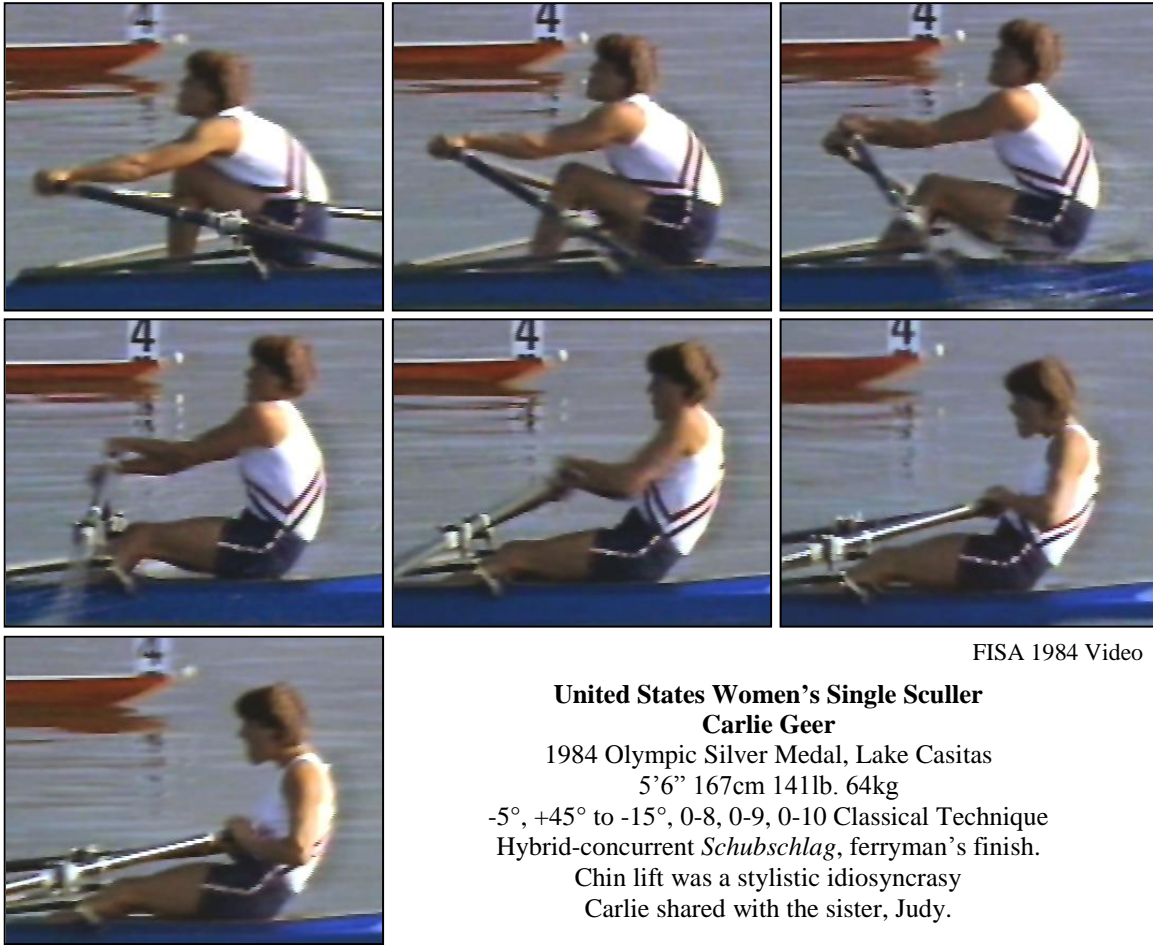
Quad coxswain **Kelly Rickon Mitchell**: "One thing that Carlie did really well that we were trying to do in our own boat was to break her arms right at the catch. You'd catch with arms straight, and you were driving with your legs, but you were trying to get your arms in right from the beginning,

⁷⁵⁹⁷ See Chapter 126.

⁷⁵⁹⁸ Reith, op cit, p. 29

⁷⁵⁹⁹ See Chapter 139.

THE SPORT OF ROWING



FISA 1984 Video

United States Women's Single Sculler Carlie Geer

1984 Olympic Silver Medal, Lake Casitas

5'6" 167cm 141lb. 64kg

-5°, +45° to -15°, 0-8, 0-9, 0-10 Classical Technique
Hybrid-concurrent *Schubschlag*, ferryman's finish.

Chin lift was a stylistic idiosyncrasy

Carlie shared with the sister, Judy.

rather than just thinking about the legs and
then your back and then your arms.⁷⁶⁰⁰

This was Classical Technique. From the entry to Carlie's ferryman's finish, there was fingers-to-toes commitment to concurrent *Schubschlag* acceleration.

In the Olympic final, the supremely talented Romanian **Valeria Roșca-Răcilă** came off the line at 43, rowing long while Carlie rowed shorter at 47. At 350 meters when she shifted down, the young American was already two lengths behind.

The difference between the two scullers appeared to be Roșca-Răcilă's size and

strength and her very effective send at the finish.

Outweighing Geer by 22lb. 10kg, she accelerated all the way to her -25° layback position. By contrast, Carlie's acceleration was terminated early because of her ferryman's finish, and she attempted to make up for that with her higher rating. Nevertheless, the race was basically over in the first minute.

Roșca-Răcilă's first 500 time was an extraordinary 1:44.01 in dead flat conditions. She cruised home with a 1:56.64 second 500, allowing Geer to actually close around one second by the end.

Carlie's Olympic Silver Medal matched **Joan Lind's** of 1976. In 1988, **Anne**

⁷⁶⁰⁰ Mitchell, op cit.

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION

Marden would join their very exclusive group. It would be another twenty-four year before another American woman⁷⁶⁰¹ medaled in an Olympics, and the last American men's single sculler to win an Olympic medal was **Jack Kelly, Jr.**'s Bronze in 1956!

The 1984 Quad

The technique of the U.S. quad at Lake Casitas demonstrated the challenge in choosing a composite crew of single scullers from all over the country in the few weeks before a championship regatta. Whereas the nucleus of the Romanian quad had already medaled in the World Championships two years earlier and showed a *very* commendable homogeneity of technique, the four Americans were a much less cohesive unit.

Entry timing was only fair by international standards, perhaps due to the fact that **Marden** was apparently nursing a sore back in the Olympic final.

The coach given the task of selecting and developing the U.S. quad was **John Van Blom** of Long Beach.

Mitchell: "**Joan Lind** is *fiercely* competitive, but you would never know that when you meet her because she is so gracious. **Ginny Gilder**



FISA 1984 Video

United States Women's Coxed-Quad

1984 Olympic Silver Medal, Lake Casitas

Stroke **Ginny Gilder** 5'7" 170cm 148lb. 67kg,

3 **Joan Lind** 5'9" 175cm 150lb. 68kg,

2 **Lisa Rohde** 5'9" 175cm 148lb. 67kg,

Bow **Anne Marden** 5'7" 170cm 150lb. 68kg,

Coxswain **Kelly Rickon Mitchell**

+40° to -30°, 0-8, 0-9, 0-10

Classical Technique, ferryman's finish

Schubschlag in stern-pair, *Kernschlag* in bow-pair.

Variations demonstrate challenge of uniting single scullers.

⁷⁶⁰¹ Michelle Guerette, Silver in 2008.

THE SPORT OF ROWING

was more up-front aggressive, but no match for Joan's quiet aggressiveness."⁷⁶⁰²

Leg compression at the entry in the 1984 boat spanned a range from minimal (**Anne Marden**, Princeton '81) to maximal (**Ginny Gilder**, Yale '79).

Mitchell: "Surge to the release. That's what we tried to do. We tried to accelerate through the drive, and that was a big change for Anne and Lisa in the bow-pair."⁷⁶⁰³

Lisa Rohde (Penn, '80) drove her legs down much faster than the others, even shooting her tail slightly, betraying her Modern Orthodox *Kernschlag* East Coast college roots. Both she and Marden hit the catch explosively in contrast to the *Schubschlag* force application pattern of Gilder and Lind in the stern-pair. This discrepancy was the crucial difference between Romania and the USA, between Olympic Gold and Silver.

Mitchell: "Poor Anne. She had the most trouble.

"She is an incredible athlete. In 1984 she could not sit still. She always got jobs wherever we were training. Everyone else would fall asleep during the day, take it easy, but not Anne. She'd get a retail job, standing on her feet all day."

"Today she's a VP for a brokerage house in London, incredibly smart, still incredibly driven.

Training

Mitchell: "One thing that John did that was kind of exciting, different from any other coach that I've ever had, is that he had us approach the 1,000 meters as a whole rather than as parts, you know, first 20, power 10s, last 20, etc.

"He also did **tempo training**. He figured out what he believed would be the winning pace for the whole race, and then he

broke it down into time for every 100 meters. We would do pieces as fast as we could, and he would time us each 100. As soon as we fell behind the pace and didn't hit the mark for that 100, he would have us stop.

"The first time we did it, we could only get 100 meters, but by the end we were doing 600 meters. I thought it was a really interesting training method."⁷⁶⁰⁴

These were four superb athletes, America's best and brightest. Frames 3 through 6 on the previous page clearly show the effectiveness of the middle of their pullthrough after the bow-pair's initial hit had dissipated, and this was what earned them their Olympic Silver.

Joan Lind, after the race: "We've all been single scullers. We've all been tops in the nation at some time, and it's been a real pleasure for us all to row together. We all respected each other and knew what we each could do.

"We're a real team and the work together has really paid off."⁷⁶⁰⁵

The Quad Sculls Final

Mitchell: "We had practiced jumping the start, which was customary back then, but they called us for a false start in the final. After they called everybody back, we had to actually wait for the next command, and when the race came off, we ended up *last* off the line."⁷⁶⁰⁶

All the crews got off the line at 40-plus, and West Germany quickly moved out to a deck-length lead, with Romania second and the U.S. at the tail of the still *very* closely-bunched field.

⁷⁶⁰² Mitchell, op cit.

⁷⁶⁰³ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰⁵ Lind, ABC Television Olympic coverage.

⁷⁶⁰⁶ Mitchell, op cit.

THE ERA OF POLARIZATION



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Judy Geer

By the 250 meter mark, France, Italy and Denmark were starting to slip back as the other three continued driving at 39.

By the 500, West Germany had a half-length on Romania and a length on the U.S. in third. The other crews were still less than a second behind the Americans.

At the 750, the West Germans were still a length over the Americans, but the Romanians had nearly caught them. Denmark was a deck behind the U.S. in fourth as the field drove for home.

By the 850, the Romanians had passed the West Germans, who had hit the wall. Meanwhile, the Americans and Danes were moving fast on both leaders. At the finish line it was Romania only half a length ahead of the Americans, who were two-thirds of a deck ahead of Denmark. West Germany had faded to fourth.

Mitchell: “We rowed our own race pace and really did row through all the competition. How interesting that the West Germans just died, going from first to fourth in twenty strokes.

“I think if that race had been longer, we would have won because we were gaining on the Romanians all the way up until the end.

“John also had us do something else very interesting. We really shortened up toward the end of the race, like we almost

went to a ‘start’ feeling in the last 20 strokes or so. We figured it was all about who had their blades in the water.

“We finished ahead of the third place crew by only a very small amount, and I think shortening propelled us to the Silver.

“I credit John with a lot of little strategies that worked for us.”⁷⁶⁰⁷

The Double

There was one more women’s sculling boat on the 1984 U.S. Olympic Team, the double, 5’9” 175cm 146lb. 66kg **Judy Geer** in bow with 5’11” 180cm 159lb. 72kg **Cathy Thaxton** of ZLAC Rowing Club and Stanford University in stroke.

“Thaxton had been out with a virus for much of May and June, making this boat a definite question mark.”⁷⁶⁰⁸

Mitchell: “Judy was an amazing person that got the shaft in 1984. Cathy got sick with some mysterious illness that no one could diagnose. Cathy couldn’t even practice, and their double was never a factor in the final.

“Poor Judy. It was her ninth National Team and her third and last Olympics.

“Judy Geer is such an icon of American women’s rowing, and after the 1980 boycott, this was going to be *her* Olympics.

“The quad was the priority boat, and Judy didn’t *quite* make it. It was just *incredibly* tough competition in 1984.

“The most fantastic row I had at the selection camp that year, and I can’t even tell you the lineup, but Joan was in there and Judy stroked it.

“I’ll never forget that day, and I will always be grateful to Judy for our shared experiences.”⁷⁶⁰⁹

⁷⁶⁰⁷ Mitchell, op cit.

⁷⁶⁰⁸ Reith, op cit, p. 25

⁷⁶⁰⁹ Mitchell, op cit.

THE SPORT OF ROWING

Judy Geer and her husband, Dick Dreissigacker,⁷⁶¹⁰ are principals in Concept2, the ergometer and oar maker.

Ann Marden works and lives in London with her husband, British rowing coach Bruce Grainger.⁷⁶¹¹

Joan Lind Van Blom is in charge of physical education for the Long Beach Unified School District. She and her husband, John Van Blom,⁷⁶¹² still compete and win internationally in shells and on ergs. In 2010, Joan was the CRASH-B World

Champion among lightweight women aged 55 to 59.

Kelly Rickon Mitchell works in development. She and her family still live in San Diego in the house she grew up in.

Many of these women have been close personal friends since the 1970s when I was a teammate of Joan in Long Beach and Kelly's first coach in San Diego. My sincere thanks to everyone who contributed to this chapter.

⁷⁶¹⁰ See Chapter 122.

⁷⁶¹¹ See Chapter 144.

⁷⁶¹² See Chapter 88.