

Stakeboat Starts

Dear Captain/Coach/Competitor,

The North of England Sprint Rowing Championships is a three-lane event and unusually for the North-West Region events involves a stakeboat start; not unlike that experienced at Henley, Holme Pierrepont or Dorney Lake. We like to think this helps make the event fairer and tests skill that will be required in any rowing career.

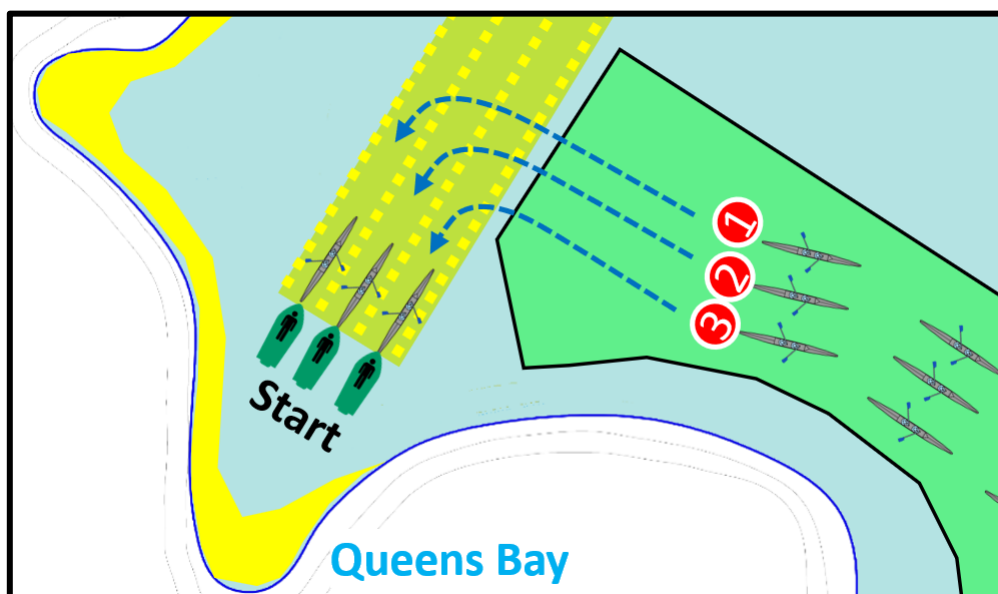
Maintaining regatta racing to programme is always a challenge and with three-minute time gaps between races we wish to avoid extended start delays through crews inability to attach to a stakeboat and get aligned. These are essential rowing skills which like any other require understanding, training and practice. In recent years we have had crews whose first sight of a stakeboat has been at the regatta. This has caused significant delays with significant repercussions for the running of the event.

This year we have introduced a local rule that makes explicit the discretion given to umpires to disqualify crews that are not able to manage these skills.

A stakeboat is a boat or pontoon that is used to hold the stern of each boat at the start in a side by side race. To get attached the aim is to place the stern of the boat at the end of the stakeboat to allow someone to safely hold it. You then have to maintain this position pointing in the right direction until the races starts.

We therefore require all competitors to understand all aspects of a stakeboat start and spend a little time practicing – one can use the coaching launch, a landing stage, a tree on the bank or just a notional point in the water to attach to. It is not unusual to have cross-winds, so keeping straight once attached is part of this skill set.

Please ensure that crews are aware how they should cross to their racing lane and spin in lane as close to the stakeboat as practical as shown below..



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In particular crews and coxes need to understand and capable in:

- Spinning the boat and centring in lane prior to attaching
- Backing a boat on to the stakeboat
- Attaching and understanding when the boat is straight
- Getting or maintaining alignment by:
 - Sculling with someone else's blade also called spiking (Picture 1.)
 - Tapping on



Picture 1. Showing how bow has passed his blade forward to 2 to enable the bows to be kept straight using short strokes close to the boat, a critical skill for use in crosswinds.

As part of this the crew needs to know the specific commands and for front loaders the cox needs to agree communications with the crew. The crew and cox need to understand the starters jobs and the start sequence, particularly in relation to their signalling whether they are ready and straight.

Rowers need to know what side they are on (Bow/Starboard/Green or Stroke/Port/Red). They should expect that race officials may use any of these terms. Know their position in the boat so that they can respond to instructions from any source.

Specific instructions that crews should be familiar with:

- Strokeside/Bowside spin
- Back it down with/without slides, stroke/bow/stern pair etc.
- Easy all
- Hold it hard/lightly/bowside/stokeside/three etc.
- Tap it bow/stroke/ bow bowside scull/ etc.
- Two paddle on with bow's blade/Three paddle on with two's blade etc.

To assist in training crews in how a start works we refer you to section 7.3 of the 2026 Rules of Racing available on the British Rowing website. <https://www.britishrowing.org/events/entering-competitions/rules-of-racing/> The most relevant section is reproduced below.



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7-3 The Start (Side-by-Side Racing)

7-3-1 Reporting at the Start

- a. Each crew is responsible for being at the Start and ready to race two minutes before the scheduled time of the race.
Should the starting station not be free at that time, the crew should follow the instructions of the start team, and or keep within hail until called forward to the starting station. Should the competition run late, an announcement may be made establishing a differential between competition time and normal time.
- b. The Starter shall 'call over' the crews by announcing the race, the competing crews, their stations and, where practicable, thereafter the time remaining to the start of the race, ideally at one-minute intervals, up to two minutes prior to the race time.
- c. The Starter shall then announce **'Two Minutes'**. At events where racing is over two or three lanes, and at the discretion of the Race Committee Chair, the Starter shall omit the words 'Two Minutes' and proceed with the start procedure given in 7-3-4c when all other conditions for racing are met. Regattas where the omission of the 'two minutes' wording has been approved by the Race Committee Chair, must publish this in the instructions to competitors. This shall then be consistently applied by the Starter.
- d. A crew that is not at the Start two minutes before the race time may be disqualified. If it is permitted to start in the race, it shall, at the discretion of the Starter, incur the penalty of one 'Official Warning'. A crew that is not at its starting station and ready to race by the scheduled time of the race may be excluded by the Starter. The start of a race may take place without reference to absentees.
- e. If all the competitors are in position and ready to race, and the Race Umpire and timing (where relevant) are ready, the Starter may start the race up to two minutes early (or earlier if agreed with the crews and the Race Committee Chair is advised accordingly, as provided at 7-3-4a). If, through circumstances beyond their control, or because of equipment failure before the start, a crew cannot reach the start in time, or cannot immediately race at race time once there, they may appeal for a delay, through any umpire. Such delay is at the discretion of the Programme Controller and Starter in consultation. They should consider any effect on the other competitors and the programme before granting such a delay, minor running repairs in the start area excepted.
- f. If the start of a race is delayed, the Starter may:
 - hold the crews in the start area while proceeding with the next race.
 - announce a new race time.
 - require crews to return to the boating area and await further announcements.
- g. If there is only one crew in a race other than a final, that crew may be exempted from rowing over the course.
The question of fair and equal conditions for other crews in the event should be considered before exempting a crew from rowing over.
- h. The Starter may introduce minor changes to the schedule of racing if they consider it necessary due to local conditions at the Start.
- i. The Starter or Race Umpire may change the allocation of lanes prior to the start of a race, if necessary, to preserve the principle of fair and equal conditions for racing or to change the separation between crews.
The order of the draw should be retained.



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7-3-2 Alignment

The purpose of alignment is to arrange for the bows of the competing crews to be aligned with the start line. There are no objections to a regatta declaring its course to be 'stern-on start, bows-on finish', and free starts can only be approximately aligned by the umpire. The following apply to other regattas:

- If a Judge at the Start is provided they shall proceed with aligning with the minimum of delay, as soon as any competitors are at their starting stations.
- When the Judge at the Start is satisfied with the alignment, they shall raise a white flag as a signal to the Starter.
- If the crews go out of alignment, the Judge at the Start shall lower the flag while realigning.
- If the start of the race is fair, the Judge at the Start should keep their flag raised for at least 10 seconds to signal a fair start from their perspective.
- If a separate Judge at the Start is not provided, the Race Umpire or Starter can act additionally as Judge at the Start, if practicable.

7-3-3 Crew Preparation

Competitors shall be attached (where relevant) and ready to race two minutes before race time.

The only delays on the start should be for alignment and for getting straight. Excess clothing should have been removed and adjustments made by two minutes before race time.

7-3-4 Start Procedure

- In the event that races are running ahead of time and with the approval of the Race Committee Chair, the Starter may start the race early by saying 'I propose to start this race early. If you would prefer to wait until race time, please indicate'. If all crews agree, the starter shall call 'Two minutes' (except when its omission has been approved as at 7-3-1c) and proceed with the start procedure given in 7-3-4b.

Crews shall actively get 'straight' and may indicate if they are not ready to go by a clearly raised hand from one of the crew members.

- At two minutes before race time or when all crews are at the start line (and attached where relevant) whichever is later, the Starter shall announce any 'Official Warnings' that have been given against any crews in the race, including any given by him for being late at the Start.

They shall ask for an acknowledgement from any crews so warned.

This announcement shall be of the form Name, Infringement, Penalty. e.g. XX Rowing Club, traffic violation, official warning, please acknowledge.

- The Starter shall then re-announce the race number, event, and the outcome (if appropriate). The aim here is that the competitors are sure of the outcome of the race and what result they have to achieve to continue in the event.
- When the Starter has omitted the words "Two minutes" in accordance with rule 7-3-1c the Starter shall first announce the race and then announce any 'Official Warnings'
- For Masters Handicap races the Starter shall then confirm the crews' age categories, tell them what the handicap is, and remind them of the start order:

"This is a Masters Handicap race. Crew(s) [...] you are Masters [...] and will start first, crew(s) [...] you are Masters [...] and will start second. Please confirm. The handicap is [x] seconds."

Each crew is required to acknowledge that the information is correct.

For the second and subsequent starts the starter shall use a stopwatch and count down aloud from [x-1] to 1 and then say 'Go' and drop the red flag. For example: Roll Call, 'Attention', 'Go' [x-1] ... 1, 'Go'.

If there are entries from 3 age categories in a race there will be two separate countdowns, for example Go-5-4-3-2-1-Go-4-3-2-1-Go for a six second handicap between crews A and B followed by a 5 second handicap between crews B and C."

In the event of a 'false start' by any crew, the normal 'false start' procedure shall apply.

A crew awarded a handicap in its favour may elect to start without advantage.



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- f. After a clear and distinct pause, the Starter shall then carry out the 'Roll Call', naming each crew in turn.
The purpose of this pause is so that there is a clear gap between the provision of race information and the start of the Roll Call so it is clear to crews that the Roll Call has started.
This identification should be simple and brief. The Start Procedure has now begun. Ideally the Roll Call will not begin until aligning is complete because competitors can expect the race to be started at any time after the end of the Roll Call.
- g. Each crew is responsible for being both straight and ready to race at the end of the Roll Call. The Starter may then take no further notice of any crew which then indicates that it is not ready or that it is not straight.
- h. After the last crew has been named in the Roll Call the Starter shall check that the Judge at the Start has the white flag raised, timing (where relevant) and Race Umpire are ready; and shall then say '**Attention**'.
- i. The Starter shall then **slowly and deliberately** raise a red flag. Where it is advised that competitors have a visual impairment, the Starter shall say the words '**Red Flag**' for all crews to hear whilst raising the flag.
- j. After a further distinct pause, the Starter shall give the start signal by saying: '**Go**', simultaneously dropping the red flag smartly to one side.
The pause between the raising of the flag and the start signal shall be variable.
Whenever possible the flag shall be held extended using both hands so that it is extended under tension and its release can be easily seen by competitors and officials alike.
- k. If, after the red flag has been raised, the Starter decides that the Start should not proceed directly, they shall say: '**As you were**' and slowly lower the red flag. When they are again ready to proceed, they will begin again from the word: '**Attention**'.
Notwithstanding "g" above, the Starter is responsible for the fairness of the Start, and they should watch that the crews continue to be in a position to start fairly during the final stages before the word 'Go'.
- l. In exceptional circumstances the Starter may omit the full 'Roll Call' having previously told the crews '**Quick Start**' and replacing the 'Roll Call' with '**All Crews**'.

A good video – albeit of US crews using some of their terminology -is useful for demonstrating some of the skills required. <https://www.row2k.com/video/Stakeboat-Skills--backing--sculling---tapping/18532/>