

ADAPT YOUR COACHING



As adaptive rowing coach and coordinator at Marlow RC, **Bruce Lynn** loves inspiring his rowing squad. He gives his five top tips for coaches

Below: Bruce Lynn with Marlow rower, Ben Marsden, at last year's Great Ouse Marathon

1 – Accessibility

Don't underestimate the ability of adaptive athletes to cope with inadequate accessibility. I have heard many clubs shy away from offering adaptive rowing because they don't have an accessible clubhouse or an accessible bathroom or an accessible boating area. Adaptive rowers are used to coping with inaccessibility. This might slow or hinder them, but it will not stop them.

Rowing as part of a larger rowing club broadens that collection of perspectives available, as well as providing more people who can lend a hand with simple matters like carrying the boat and manoeuvring a wheelchair on an awkward-shaped pontoon.

Marlow PR1 rower Kingsley Ijomah explains, "Having the opportunity to join a community and take part in a sport such as rowing, despite my disability, is incredibly empowering to me.

"I have the chance to push myself to my limits in a sport and that's something that I never thought I would be able to do. Every little help from the coaches and volunteers at Marlow RC has made, and continues to make, this possible.

"Rowing is a beautiful sport and it can be a more inclusive sport with a little help."

2 – Communication

The second most common apprehension about integrating adaptive athletes is the concern that you might offend them. Adaptive athletes have heard it all before and are completely forgiving if, and when, people say something awkward. Don't worry too much about using the absolutely most politically correct words, as many in the disabled community

themselves often debate which terms and labels work best for them.

One of the simplest and most common concerns is how to phrase genuine offers of help. The best all-purpose way to offer assistance is to keep it simple, such as "If you need a hand, just let us know". It is not patronising or imposing, but just generally considerate – and it works well for able-bodied individuals too!

3 – Empowering the individual

There's a reason it's called 'adaptive' rowing. In team sports, one can tend to focus on the group – the team strategy, the team technique, etc – but the best coaches understand and respond to each individual; their strengths, their weaknesses, their personalities. This is even more true for adaptive athletes who also have to consider very individual impairments.

Even athletes with the 'same' disability can vary dramatically in presentation, severity and impact. This situation puts more onus on the coach to listen and observe the athlete, while also discovering what adaptations to technique and training are most effective for their individual progress and satisfaction. There is much more experimentation to see if an adjustment and adaptation helps or doesn't help.

But empowerment is not just about enabling people to do things they would otherwise not do, but also about doing things the way they want to do them.

As Ella Holloway, PR3 rower at Marlow, puts it: "Adaptive rowing makes me feel limitless rather than limited."

4 – Equipment

All coaches will know the basics of



rigging, slides and footplates. But adaptive rowing really benefits from a more extensive tinkering ability. If you feel less comfortable with such mechanical things, find a fellow club member who can help. While many boatmen get tired of being asked to do routine boat maintenance, they often relish a bit of problem-solving, demanding some engineering creativity and a workbench.

If your resources are limited, then why not investigate some of the charities set up specifically to provide volunteer handiwork for special adaptive needs, such as Dad in a

Shed at www.dadinashed.com or Remap at www.remap.org.uk

Two items that you absolutely must stock in your own kitbag are duct tape and all sorts of foam, with a serrated knife to cut it. You can get scraps from upholsterers and one of the most useful types are foam yoga blocks which can be picked up cheaply on eBay. Check out the equipment category of my website at www.adaptiverowinguk.com for posts about various adaptive rowing equipment options and modifications you can do.

5 – Be safe!

Don't underestimate safety precautions when it comes to capsizing. Any rower wearing straps (i.e. PR1 and PR2)

should also have safety pontoons on their riggers, as should anyone else who might have any difficulty in the water, in the event of capsizing.

But just because there are pontoons attached, don't think that your risk is averted. Equipment can fail (e.g. Pontoons can come off, even riggers can come off or break) and collisions can happen (e.g. a leisure motor yacht coming from nowhere and not paying attention). So make sure that adaptive boats are kept within eyesight and make sure you have quick access to adaptive rowers.

If in doubt about an individual's ability to cope with a capsize, then feel free to have the athlete use an inflatable lifejacket.

Read more adaptive rowing advice at www.bit.ly/bradaptiverowing



“ADAPTIVE ROWING MAKES ME FEEL LIMITLESS RATHER THAN LIMITED”