

# **Making A Smooth Transition to Next Season**

Ed McNeely

With the end of the fall rowing season, our attention turns to more mundane endeavors like raking leaves and getting ready for a long cold winter. It is a time to reflect on the good and bad of the past season and set some goals for the upcoming racing season. Most importantly it is still a time for training.

When you stop training your fitness level can begin to decrease in as little as seven days, sometimes less for lower fit individuals. The 2-3 months off following the racing season that is common to many rowers, particularly masters, means you start back at square one every year rather than building on your fitness from the previous year. In other words if you find that you aren't progressing as much as you would like or your performance is staying the same year after year, you may need to look at what you are doing immediately following the racing season during what is called the transition phase.

## **The Transition Phase**

The transition phase is the period of time between the last race of a season and the time you start training seriously the next. It is normally 2-6 weeks long depending on the length of the racing schedule and the level of the competitor. Some international competitors will take 4-5 months off following an Olympic games because of the huge volume of training and personal sacrifices they need to make. Regardless of your competitive level if you want to continue to improve you need to have a transition plan.

## **Transition Plan**

There are four components to a successful transition phase; rest, rehabilitation, pre-habilitation, and cross training.

### *Rest*

A period of rest immediately following the season is needed to provide both a physical and psychological break from the rigors of training and competition. I realize that many of you will have a transition phase longer than 2-6 weeks, to avoid losing all the fitness you worked for the previous year the rest period should not exceed two weeks. During this time you won't be engaged in any form of training. This is the time to catch up with family and friends, do some light yard work, and put your boat away for the winter.

### *Rehabilitation*

Aches and pains and injury are an accepted fact of sport or an active lifestyle. Some of them are acute, you know when they happened, while others tend to creep up over time because of overuse. Immediately following the rest period you should seek medical

attention for these aches and pains. While the rest may relieve many of the symptoms it doesn't correct the problem. A therapist can help you overcome chronic muscle spasm and relieve recurring pain.

### *Pre-Habilitation*

Pre-habilitation means taking care of injuries before they happen. Strength and flexibility imbalances are a leading cause of injury. Sweep rowers are particularly vulnerable to bilateral asymmetries, strength differences between the right and left sides of the body. Studies have reported significant differences in strength between oarside and non oarside legs as well as between the right and left erector spinae, the large muscles running parallel to the spine. If uncorrected they can result in chronic back pain or injury. The strength ratio between the quadriceps and hamstrings is an area of concern to sweep rowers and scullers. Rowers tend to have weak hamstrings relative to their quadriceps. This can change the mechanics of the pelvis during the stroke and cause back pain. Ideally, the strength of the hamstrings should be at least 66% that of the quadriceps.

While these imbalances are among the most common in rowers most people have unique patterns of muscle imbalance. An athletic or physiotherapist can help you to identify and correct your particular pattern of imbalance. Typically, imbalances are corrected by strengthening a weak muscle or working the opposite side of the body a little more, in the case of bilateral asymmetries.

### *Cross Training*

As soon as prehabilitation is started cross training can also begin. Your training volume for cross training should be 50-70% of your training volume during the rowing months. In other words if you train 6 hours a week during the year you need to do 3-4.2 hours of cross training per week during the transition. This will allow you to maintain your aerobic fitness and still get the recovery and regeneration needed between the seasons. Any activity you choose for cross training is fine but swimming is particularly good for maintaining endurance in the upper body.

The intensity is kept low during the transition. You should not feel fatigued after the session. If you can carry on a normal conversation while training you are at the right intensity.

## **A Final Word**

Most people take too much time off between training years, losing most of the fitness they worked so hard to build. However, there are some who don't take enough time. I have known athletes who have come off a hard racing season and then go on a month long adventure vacation canoeing, hiking, and mountain biking. The mental break and enjoyment they derive from the vacation is beneficial but the lack of physical recovery between seasons quickly leads to overtraining. Following the suggestions above will help

you keep your transition phase productive and let you build your fitness from year to year.