

Competitive Rowing

7.1 Introduction

In Canada the first local regatta with adaptive events took place in Ontario in 2001 and the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta began including some adaptive events in 2003. The first designated adaptive category in the Canadian Indoor Rowing Championship (Ontario) was in 2005. At an international level, in 2002 the FISA World Championships, held in Seville, Spain, began including events for adaptive rowers. Nine countries were represented, which increased to 11 countries in the adaptive events at the 2003 World Championships in Milan. Rowing Canada Aviron formed its first National Adaptive Rowing Team in 2004 and competed against 13 other countries in the FISA World Rowing Championships in Banyoles, Spain in July, 2004.



It is anticipated that competitive adaptive rowing will progress rapidly, both in terms of number of participants and quality of racing. It is beginning to attract top athletes from other sports who recognize it as offering a great physical challenge and personal satisfaction.

As the sport evolves it is likely that the rules governing competition and the basis for athlete classification will change. The FISA website should be consulted for the most up to date

information in this regard. Relevant documents include, “FISA Guidelines for Adaptive Ergometer Rowing”, “Adaptive Water Rules”, and “2004 World Championships Classification Guidelines”.

7.2 Transition from Recreational to Competitive

Historically in Canada the sport of rowing has been a competitive activity. The desire to make boats go faster has driven the developments in equipment design and manufacture over the years as well as the advances in rowing technique.

However, since the early 1990's the demand for recreational rowing has grown rapidly and the need for the sport to become more inclusive of the general population became apparent. From this movement, adaptive rowing has developed. As adaptive rowing has matured, so there has been a demand for opportunities to compete.

The Paralympic Games movement has been a major force in promoting high performance and competition for people with disabilities in a wide range of sporting activities. This movement has been instrumental in making everyone aware that athletes with disabilities need to be recognized for their achievements on a par with able bodied athletes. Given its versatility, rowing is an ideal sport to allow people with disabilities to perform and excel at the highest levels and to deliver inspiring performances.

The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) announced in April 2005, that rowing has been accepted as a new sport on the Beijing 2008 Paralympic Games program. This represents a tremendous opportunity for rowers with a disability to compete at the highest level.

Adaptive rowing is an incredible thing.....

Getting our athletes kits was totally awesome. Nike and Rowing Canada had so kindly put them together for us, and it made the whole thing start to feel real. I worship that unit. I would put it on every night before we left. It says "CANADA" in big black letters along the side, and I love how the fabric is really heavy, because it lends the weight to what it represents. I could not have possibly been more nervous or excited.

Arriving at the course in Spain was incredible. "This is where they held the '92 Olympics... and we get to race here". The only other large regattas I'd been to until then were the Canadian Henley, Head of the Charles, and Head of the Fish, and none of them compared. Everyone here was the best. Since it was an Olympic year, the Jr, Sr, and Adaptive world championships were all being held at the same place. There was so much energy in the air, the whole place felt charged. It was a totally new atmosphere for me, and I loved it. It gets you hooked and gives you a greater drive to succeed, because you've had that one little taste of what it's like.

Genna Wood, 16 year old coxswain of the Canadian LTA 4+ entry in the 2004 FISA World Rowing Championships.

7.3 Classification of Athletes with Disabilities

In some cases competitions are exclusive to athletes with a specific disability (for example, those organized by Blind Sports Organizations). In other cases athletes with a disability compete against those without a disability, using equipment designed to accommodate the needs of those with the disability (for example, wheel chair basketball which welcomes individuals with a disability, as well as able bodied athletes). Rowing provides competitive opportunities for rowers with different disabilities at the same competition using adapted equipment where necessary (able bodied rowers do not compete against them in that equipment). This requires a method of distinguishing athletes with different functional abilities in order to provide for fair competition. Classification is a way of ensuring that competition between rowers is as fair as possible. For able bodied rowers, classifications are designated according to sex (men's and women's events), weight (lightweight or heavyweight) or age categories (e.g., under 23 or masters). For rowers with disabilities, there needs to be different classes depending on a participant's disability. The objective is to ensure fair competition but not equal competition. In an effective classification system, the best rowers in a particular category should win.



In this manual, two different approaches to classification for the sport of rowing are described, the FISA international classification used at the World Championship level, and the Bayada Regatta classification, a popular US adaptive regatta held annually in Philadelphia.



The application of any classification system to Canadian regattas should be with the intent of achieving fair competition as well as to encourage the growth of the sport in a local area. The focus should be on small boats as there may not be sufficient depth to the athlete pool to field a race of three crews of four, but there may be enough athletes to allow for races in doubles and singles.

FISA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

For adaptive rowing FISA has established a minimum level of disability where there is judged to be a definite disadvantage in terms of rowing technique. For example, a rower with a hearing impairment is not eligible for adaptive rowing competition since deafness is not considered to have an impact on rowing performance. FISA's classification of rowers with a disability is based on the impact of the impairment on rowing ability. For international competition (governed by FISA), three classes have been established to designate the level of rowing functionality or the impairment level of an adaptive rower.

“LTA” means the rower has functional use of legs, trunk and arms. Because they have use of their legs, rowers in this category use a conventional sliding seat.

“TA” means the rower has functional use of trunk and arms. Because they have no functional use of their legs, rowers in this category use a fixed seat.

“A” means the rower has functional use of arms only which is also a fixed seat category.

Adaptive rowers need to be assessed by experts in classification who are certified by international and national sporting organisations for the disabled. These experts are called Classifiers. The rowing system of classification is relatively straightforward and may be



performed by sport classifiers specializing in other sports. Rowers with visual impairments are classified under International Blind Sports Association (IBSA) guidelines. Rowers with intellectual disabilities are classified under psychological and sport assessment performance according to the International Sports Federation for Persons with Intellectual Disability (INAS-FID). By definition rowers with visual impairments or intellectual disabilities fall into the LTA class. Rowers with physical impairments are classified under a point system by classifiers with, as appropriate, a cerebral palsy classifier, wheelchair classifier or amputees' classifier with some experience. Judgment is required by any classification system and at the 2004 FISA World Rowing Championships some participants were determined to be ineligible for the events they had entered. For FISA sponsored events (i.e. World Rowing Championships and World Junior Rowing Championships) competitors must be in possession of an Eligibility Passport issued by FISA.

For local competitions, the classifications are more flexible and informal, but for international events, written classifications should be obtained from accredited classifiers

prior to event entry. Failing to do this, leaves the competitor open to being challenged by another competitor's national federation. With World Championship gold medals on the line, athlete classification is taken very seriously.

An adaptive rower may compete in a higher class level but not in a lower one, e.g. a TA athlete could compete in an LTA event, but not vice versa. However, because the athlete classifications represent different ranges of motion within the boat, it would be difficult for a crewed boat to accommodate an athlete with a lower classification and remain competitive.



The adaptive competition at international regattas comprises four event types, as follows:

- ❖ Class LTA: Coxed Four, mixed sexes
- ❖ Class TA: Double Scull fixed seat, mixed sexes
- ❖ Class SLTA: Single Scull, men and women
- ❖ Class A: Single Scull fixed seat (with pontoons), men and women

The FISA endorsed categories for boat classes are:

LTA Coxed Four
(mobility in Leg,
Trunk, and Arms)

Minimum disabilities
required:

- ❖ Blind: B3 according IBSA, 10% of vision in best eye with best correction (from visual acuity above 2/60 up to visual acuity of 6/60 and/or a visual field of more than 5% and less than 20%. In training and competition, all blind athletes must wear goggles that completely shield vision, from departure from the pontoon to arrival back at the pontoon. A checking

system maybe implemented prior to and after competition. FISA may standardize or approve specific models for competitors.

- ❖ Amputee
 - one single foot amputation
 - 3 fingers hand amputation
- ❖ Neurological impairment: causing loss of ankle flexion and extension
- ❖ Cerebral palsy: CP8 as defined in the Cerebral Palsy International Sport and Recreation Association (CP-ISRA) classes.
- ❖ Intellectual impairment: International Sports Federation for Persons with an Intellectual Disability (INAS) criteria.

TA Double Scull
(mobility in Trunk and Arms)

- ❖ Amputee: bilateral above knee
- ❖ Cerebral palsy: CP5 (diaplegia)

Minimum disabilities required:

- ❖ Neurological impairment: equivalent to a spinal cord of complete lesion of L4

A Only Fixed Seat Single Scull
(mobility in Arms Only)

- ❖ Cerebral palsy: CP4
- ❖ Neurological impairment: equivalent to a spinal cord of complete lesion of T10

Minimum disabilities required:

- ❖ Note: hands and abdomen strapping shall be allowed



It should be noted that the above classifications do not list all potential disabilities included in each category. If a disability is not listed, a sport classifier would be able to make a determination of the appropriate classification.

Important Note

Each rower may only race in one classification by season. A 1xA rower may not row in the 2xTA and 4+LTA. A 2xTA rower may not row in the 4+LTA class. If a rower has a border line classification allowing for two categories, only one boat category may be requested.

As noted above, the 4+LTA and 2xTA are combined sex classes. In these classes, the crew is 50:50 men and women. In the 1xA and 1xSLTA there are separate events for men and women. In theory, with a complete adaptive rowing program, there will be 6 events at international regattas (4+ LTA, 2xTA, 1xMA, 1xWA, 1xMSLTA, 1xWSLTA) with a total of 10 rowers (5 men + 5 women) plus one coxswain. It is FISA practice not to hold an event where there are less than four entries.

Each rowing class can accommodate rowers with a range of disabilities. So a 4+LTA crew may be formed, for example, with a combination of rowers who have visual impairments, who have cerebral palsy, or who have amputations. However, they would all need to be able to use the full sliding seat motion. For a coxswain in adaptive events, there is no limitation concerning age, sex or eligibility. The only eligibility criterion is a minimum weight limit of 55 kg, the same as for all competitive rowing.



Currently the race course length for Junior and Senior crews in international competition is 2,000 metres for LTA and TA events and 1,000 metres for the A events. For adaptive Masters the length is 1,000 metres and 500 metres, respectively. In local competitions, a distance of 500 metres is frequently used, at least for the arms only category.

BAYADA REGATTA CLASSIFICATION SYSTEM

The Bayada Regatta is sponsored and organized by the Bayada Nurses in the United States. It is a regatta exclusively for rowers with disabilities and takes place in Philadelphia in early September. The regatta features single and double sculls events only but caters for participants with a wide range of disabilities. It also has open events in which a rower with a disability can row in a double scull accompanied by an able bodied volunteer.

The Bayada Regatta has developed its own unique athlete classification system that aims to provide fair competition. The coach completes a simple questionnaire made up of seven questions that identify the functional characteristics of the athlete. By applying a points system to the answers, each athlete is assigned a total score that ranges from 6 to 35 (refer to table below). Based on these scores the athletes are assigned to one of 6 classes, designated as Class 1 to Class 5 and Class 5B. The race schedule is then made up by including people within the same class in the same race.



Class	Points	Comments
1	6 – 12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fixed seat ❖ Pontoons ❖ May need hands secured to oars
2	13 – 18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fixed seat with high back ❖ Moderate limitations and generally unable to feather
3	19 – 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Fixed seat with low back ❖ Mild to moderate limitations ❖ May be limited to the use of one arm
4	25 – 30	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ May be able to use their legs ❖ Includes double amputees and people with lower level spinal cord injury
5	31 – 35	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Use sliding seat ❖ Have good upper body control ❖ May experience some coordination or balance difficulties
5B		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Rowers with visual impairments

Bayada Regatta Rower Classification System

7.4 Equipment Used

The current trend for adaptive events at international regattas is for the regatta organizer to supply the boats for competition. In the past Alden Stars have been widely used. However, standardized boat designs were specifically developed at the request of FISA. Currently, these FISA-developed boats for international

competition are manufactured by the Flying Eagle Boat Company in China. These boats are somewhat heavier and more stable than elite racing shells. The motivation behind standardized equipment is to put all competitors on



an equal footing with respect to equipment and to facilitate entries from countries which may not have the financial resources to transport equipment internationally. It is a requirement that, for the 1xMA and 1xWA events, the single sculls be equipped with pontoons. There is currently some debate over the option of competitors providing their own seats. Many national federations feel strongly that personalized seats for athletes in the TA and A categories are a necessity and are in line with the equipment development policy of other adaptive sports organizations (the sports of skiing and track and field, for example, allow for individual equipment development). The standardization versus individual choice debate with respect to competitive rowing equipment is likely to continue

with rule modifications being introduced as more experience is gained.



For the Bayada Regatta, the organizers also supply the boats. Alden recreational singles and doubles are used. The rigger/seat/footstretcher assembly is detachable and can be quickly interchanged to suit the individual rower needs.

Adaptive crews at local regattas use the equipment they train in at their own club. This can range from elite coxed fours for LTA events to recreational doubles, such as the Hudson T7 for TA events.

7.5 Rowing Competitions

Canadian National Adaptive Rowing Team (NART)

The National Adaptive team, established in 2004, has no specified team size and is dependent on the number of athletes trying for positions on the team, anticipated performance of crews relative to international adaptive rowing standards and available funding.

The National Adaptive Team selection policy and criteria are published by RCA each year. Final selection of the Canadian National Adaptive Rowing Team is generally completed in early June of each year. Selection to NART requires the athlete to compete at the Rowing Canadian Henley Regatta and/or the FISA World Championships and/or the Paralympic Games, depending on available funding. Athletes not selected are encouraged to compete at the Royal Canadian Henley representing their home club, and to continue their training development for later consideration.

Athletes wishing to be considered for selection should participate in an organized training program at their home club. This training program should include aerobic conditioning, weight training, extensive work-outs on a rowing ergometer and as much on water training and regatta experience as possible. Crew candidates must complete a supervised (by a crew coach or club official) ergometer test on a monthly basis between at least January and April. Recorded times (for 2000 or 1000 m depending on LTA/TA or A category, respectively) are submitted to the National Adaptive Team Coordinator at RCA for review and compilation. Athletes who are deemed to meet the minimum qualifying standards are invited to participate in a weekend Training/Selection Camp in early June. The Selection Camp involves time trials or a series of seat races to allow the coaches to evaluate all athletes. For the participation at the FISA World Championships, final crew selection takes place before the end of June using a combination of results from ergometer testing, the selection camp seat racing, and regatta experience. For logistical reasons final crew assignments may be influenced by geographic considerations. What this means is that it may be preferable and more practical to select the 2xTA from one club than attempt to select two individual TA athletes from different clubs and try to put them in the same boat for competition.



Club Competition

The adaptive rowing events at the Royal Canadian Henley Regatta are open to all adaptive rowing athletes, and attract entries from the United States. As competitive adaptive rowing participation grows, demand for more competition at local and regional regattas will increase.