

March 2016

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### Digital Addictions

Answering a customer's question about the monitor last week got me thinking about the human race's relatively recent addiction to technology in the form of digital feedback. That mning I had spent an extremely pleasant forty minutes rowing on an Indoor Sculler on the deck at Mosman Rowing Club with a good friend, the Club President Will Liley. Will had started twenty minutes before me and as he finished was surprised to see I didn't turn on the monitor as dawn started to break. He asked why and I just pointed at the beautiful view over Middle Harbour in Sydney - Will laughed and understood immediately. Like many if not most rowers, I used fixed ergometers for quite a few years and I know how addictive monitor feedback can be – but with the benefit of hindsight, the best thing that ever happened to my training was weaning myself from what I believe is a digital addiction. To be frank I believe the only reason we use fixed machines at all is the digital feedback (see reference below to reduced endorphin levels in rowers using fixed ergometers). But even on the Rowperfect I rarely use the monitor. However I do log my time spent on the machine, and to a reasonable degree plan the type of session I'll be doing



It's not that electronic feedback doesn't have value – it definitely does – but there's a huge amount of feedback already available in technical and physiological feedback points that are far better practised without the distraction of digital feedback. More importantly I think so much more – at least partly because my head isn't shaking.

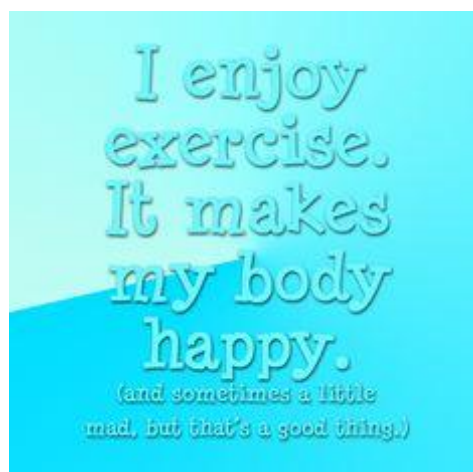
I think about movement patterns, concentrate on fully relaxed shoulders and so on – all things that can't be done on a fixed ergometer because too many protective movements are required and the constant momentum shifts distract attention. I also spend a lot of time thinking about anything other than the rowing I'm doing – enjoying the music I'm listening to, working out challenges at work, concentrating on listening to my breathing, seeing if I can get a little more hum from the fan by breathing deeper, or whatever.

So I'm a limited fan of electronic feedback as you can tell – in fact I believe addiction to electronic feedback of limited relevance to real rowing is ruining the experience of training for thousands of rowers, and non-rowers for that matter, all around the world.

I regularly try to row on a fixed ergometer for a few minutes – every time I'm fascinated by how unpleasant it is, and I'm reminded me to get back out and try to share what I now do with others. A 2010 study at Oxford University showed a dramatic difference in endorphin

levels between rowers after a session of on-water rowing and after rowing on a fixed ergometer (significantly lower levels after erg). Interesting. I believe it may prove what I have believed for a long time - that the continual head shaking reduces the normal physiological response of pleasant exercise.

The enjoyment I've had since ditching fixed erg rowing on a non-tipping seat to using the 17kg Indoor Sculler with its dynamic action and Limited Tilt Seat is just so very different to the limited and repetitive feel of moving back-and-forth on a fixed ergometer. It may be a Quixotic crusade but there you go!



### **Training Ideas - Cross-Training/Complementary Training**

Rowing is very close to the complete physical activity; in fact at the recent Australian Coaches' Conference it was suggested that in some cases no other training is needed. However I think most of us believe in doing other training involving lateral movements, jumping and so forth.

Almost thirty years ago when I was still a competitive open grade sculler, our coach Mick Lowrey introduced me to the circuit Professor Frank Cotton had developed for the "Guinea Pig" group he coached at Leichhardt Rowing Club based on the physiological principles he developed, and for which he is justifiably famous. It's quick, can be done almost anywhere (hotel room when travelling for instance) and requires no equipment at all.

I guess the fact that I'm still doing it as regularly as possible is a strong testimonial:

20 shuttle runs – only 5-7m

40-50 squats

30-40 rower situps (v-sits)

20-40 pushups

15-18 burpees

50 side-hops – count only on one foot i.e. 50 each side.

Repeat burpees

(Chinups can be added if there happens to be something you can hang from nearby)

So much recent evidence points to the value of short bursts of intense, full-body exercise - if you do this circuit really well (i.e. do the movements really well - a head dip is not a squat!) you'll find it's definitely intense. Do the circuit at least twice a week. If you're feeling keen, occasionally try it three times through consecutively with minimal rest between circuits.



## Music

A recent edition of the ABC television show *Catalyst* examined the simply breathtaking effect of music on dementia and Parkinson's Disease sufferers. If you haven't see it, I strongly suggest searching Catalyst "Music on the Brain", I think you'll enjoy it very much. The transformation of sufferers is literally breathtaking - an amazing emotional impact. Interestingly they use headphones rather than music via speakers in the room - I think it's a great idea; certainly the impact of music for my training is greatly improved by headphones rather than speakers, which I find distracting.

Three recent additions to my playlist:

1. AC/DC "**If You Want Blood**" from the *Highway to Hell* album – amazing start-up tune; a great "re-discovery"
2. Springsteen "**Human Touch**" from the album of the same name. Definitely one of his best; a wonderful song from one of the greats.
3. Groove Armada "**Easy**" from the *Love Box* album. Impossible to give this a plug without pointing out it's the back-track from the final scenes of the wonderful 2005 Australian movie *Gettin' Square*. One of my absolute favourite movies and more than happy to plug it any time (but with a language warning: the movie is about a group pf criminals at Surfers Paradise and it's fair to say the sixth letter of the alphabet does start a lot of the adjectives, though in my opinion the language is completely appropriate for the setting and absolutely accurate). The scene with

David Wenham as a "hopeless" heroin addict bamboozling Jonathon Biggins' Senior Counsel is incredibly funny, and *Getting' Square* absolutely deserved the swag of AFTA awards it received



### Cox Value

I think anyone who has rowed more than a couple of times in a crew boat knows that there is one member who can make more of a difference to the overall crew performance than any other: the smallest person in the boat.

I was reminded of this in November when I raced as a member of a Mosman Rowing Club crew in the over 55 division of the 8.6km Head of the Yarra Head Race. During training we were lucky enough to find three wonderful girls who between them found time to steer us twice a week, but none of them were able to make it to Melbourne, meaning we only met our coxswain Tom Fisher the afternoon before the race.

His calls during training that afternoon told us he would do a good job; we found out Tom was an excellent coach as well as an excellent coxswain. It turned out to be a bit better than a "good" job. From the first stroke of the race Tom's voice was calm and clear while he steered what we all recognised to be a great course - tight on every corner, through the optimal point on each bridge. If he wanted an effort he gave us something to focus on that was both clear to us and achievable.

Repeatedly throughout the race he picked a specific technical focus, or perhaps a clever time to attack at a turn and the effect on all of us was the same: we relaxed and concentrated on what we could do to help, which was of course to row our own oar as well as we were able. The final result was a satisfying win against very good opposition in our third attempt at this race.

For the record, our GPS-linked Stroke Coach recorded our actual distance travelled as 8.1 km. Yes, that's 500 metres less than the measured distance following the middle of the river. We won by 30 seconds, and 500 metres takes around 1min 45seconds. It's fair to say all the coxes try to steer a good course, but taking almost 6% off the distance of the race has to be an exceptional effort. Thanks Tom!

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