

Junior Rowing News #3

Title: High Priests and Pilgrims



[...insert image of HRR <https://www.vision4sport.com/henley-royal-regatta...>]

“He saw the disciples straining at the oars, because the wind was against them” ... read Sir Steven Redgrave from the Gospel of Mark at the annual regatta church service in St Mary’s, Henley on Thames. St Mary’s is the picture-postcard church which adorns the skyline of Henley and gives a clear reference point for coxswains, crews or scullers navigating down the course. I was there following a crew from New Zealand who were planning to race with foils for the first time in the 2018 Visitors’ Challenge Cup.

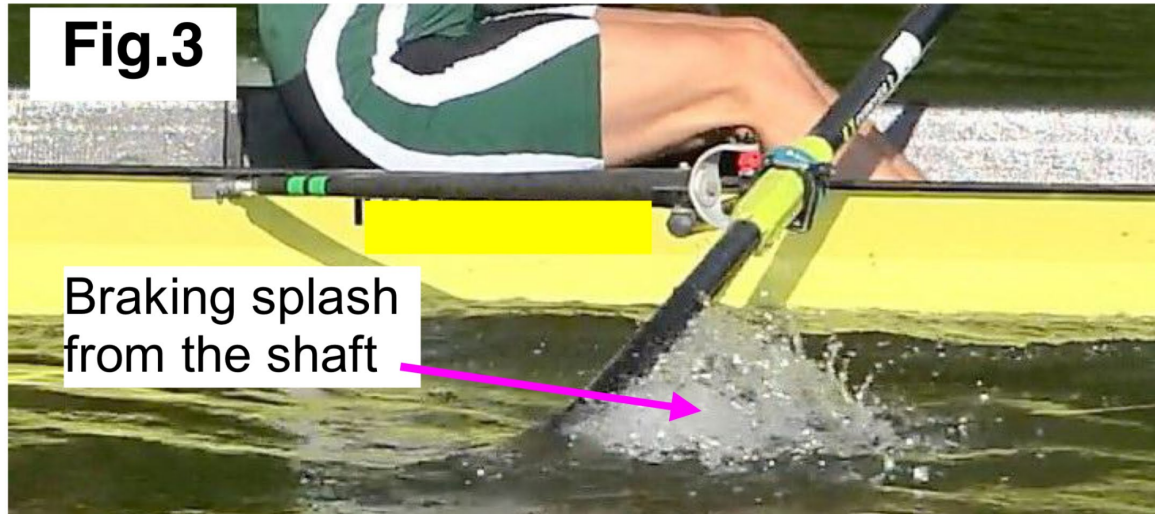
I had embarked on a pilgrimage from Australia to the capital of rowing Christendom, and I placed my foils and a written submission before the rowing high priests, The Stewards. It felt like I, humbled and prostrate on the ground, was asking if they would permit an oar which differed from those rowed by Christ’s own disciples. I had had my celestial vision of my Kiwi crew holding aloft the cup, although in reality, my phone calls to the Stewards were not being returned and my emails were not replied to. The “Bad Boys” stroked by Drikus Conradie had been testing the foil in New Zealand during the year but we had no guarantees they would be permitted to race with them at Henley. They were at Henley on one last hoorah after the disappointment of having their Rio Olympic qualification spot given to Russia on appeal following the massive state-administered doping program. We couldn’t take a chance on disqualification so gaining Stewards certification was the only option. Sharing my journey with others, I was told not to expect anything good. “Look, we don’t take our coats off unless the Stewards allow us, and you’re asking them to approve a new oar design - no chance!” Said one spectator as we waiting in line for an ale.

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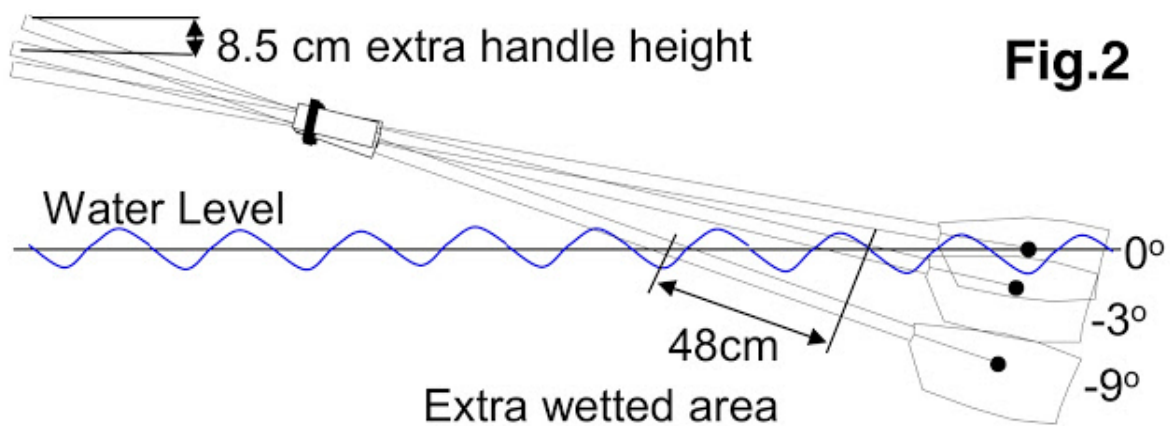
[... insert image of Dr Valery Kleshnev ...]

During the regatta, I had arranged to meet the biomechanist Dr. Valery Kleshnev who had conducted an efficacy test on my design the previous year. Valery is a highly venerated scientist, world-renowned sculler in his day and whose son Victor recently represented GB at World Cup III. Valery had published research on “braking splash” and I knew that, based on his results, that the foil would reduce, if not eliminate it (BioRow Newsletter No 173 August 2015). The term “braking splash,” what I had called “oar shaft drag,” is seen by the trail of water that races up the shaft during the stroke. Such contact between the shaft and the water has a detrimental effect, which Valery described as having a ‘braking’ effect and reduced boat speed.



[... insert images of braking splash ... Used with permission]

It's a simple equation, reduce braking splash and you increase boat speed. Valery measured the resistance created by the oar shaft moving through the water at various depths and he concluded that an extra 6 degrees of the blade depth greatly increases drag resistance ... and decreases the speed by 3.5% (14s over 2km race). The foil could almost hold the blade at 0-degrees and we were seeing comparable speed increases.



[...insert Kleshnev diagram ...Used with Permission]

Valery tested my foil prototype at the Olympic course with scullers from his Maiden Head development squad and the results were promising. The embryonic design reduced breaking splash, catch slip, increased force and recorded positive boat speeds. Due to changing weather conditions some of the data points were compromised however Valery deemed that there was “something” worth exploring with the foil and he encouraged me to continue my work developing the design. When we finally met, I give him some of the first production Randall foils and we talked together about his time working in Australia and cheered his son Victor who was racing.



[.... insert Kleshnev ... Title: Side-by-side testing, foils top sculler - used with permission]

It was not until the very day before racing commenced I received the Stewards decision. They had given their Apostolic blessing and the foil was now certified. Unfortunately, it did not leave enough time to fit the foils, not enough time to allow the marine adhesive to cure, not enough time to change the pitch or raise the gates and make it to the start in time. Just not enough time.

“We discussed at management committee meeting yesterday evening and agreed that in the absence of a clear ruling on the acceptability of the technology, Henley Royal Regatta will accept this innovation in 2018 but reserve the right to withdraw this acceptance in consultation with other global rowing authorities e.g FISA.” - Andrew Crawford, Henley Steward

As it turned out the timing was perfect, for the Stewards decision established the foundation for certification by British Rowing and ultimately with FISA. The NZ “bad boys” made it through to the Semifinals and I sat on the banks with my feet in the cool waters holding a cold beer and letting the waves of the Umpires launch splash up on my legs.

