

The Test

by Emily Super, team captain '02

In the world of rowing, a 2000m erg test is used to evaluate and compare people's fitness levels. This is where a person rows on a rowing machine, also known as an erg, as hard as he or she can for 2000m, which normally takes between six and ten minutes. This test can also be used to determine which place a person should row in an upcoming race. It can even be used to determine who gains or loses a position on a team. What is not often known about a 2k test is the unbelievable amount of pain that people must put themselves through before and after the assessment. The final result is often muscle fatigue, lactic acid build up (acid that builds up in your muscles as a result of a lack of oxygen), oxygen debt and even vomiting. Last year when I rowed for the Ohio State varsity Crew team, my final 2000m erg test forced me to become mentally stronger, believe in myself, and teach myself never to quit.

My coach said that if I had any desire to race in the spring season, the NCAA competing season, I would have to improve my time from the last 2000m test I performed (seven minutes and 42 seconds). By the end of the winter season I had already completed many of these pieces. The NCAA competing season is the time of year when colleges compete for the Big Ten Championship and the NCAA Championship. Even though crew teams practice in the winter and fall, they do not get to compete against other colleges until the spring. During this time, teams spend long hours training in order to build technique, endurance, and strength. I had worked too hard to let this opportunity pass me by.

I had already completed many 2000m pieces so far that year. It was now time for me to perform my final and most important test, and I was an emotional and physical wreck. I had been very sick for most of the winter, and because of this, I missed a lot of valuable training time. I had also lost a great deal of sleep because I was so worried about letting my team, my coach, and myself down. It seemed as though every time the idea of having to carry out this ordeal crossed my mind I broke into tears. The thought of putting myself into a great deal of pain was unbearable. I knew that I had to pull myself together or I would not have a chance to race in the spring.

After almost an hour of warming up, stretching, and running, I was physically ready. I heard my coach say, "Attention, row!" and the true battle began. The first five hundred meters are always the easiest part. At this point I was completely rested and ready for anything. I kept reminding myself not to row too hard because I could very easily exhaust myself. "Breath Emily, relax, slow down," I kept telling myself. At about 400m into the piece, my muscles were starting to tire. By the end of the first 500m I could feel the familiar burning sensation, which meant that the lactic acid was starting to settle into my muscles.

The second 500 meters is the most boring part of the 2000 meters. My coach knew this and tried anything possible to keep my mind off of it. "Come on Emily, let's do ten hard strokes, power ten Emily!" I heard her yell. As she counted out the strokes I slowly started to think about each part of my body. Everything from my toes to my fingers was in pain. The lactic acid was starting to intensify and with every stroke, and I could feel my muscles burn as though they were on fire. I started to become tired physically and mentally. My legs and arms started to feel exceptionally heavy, almost as though lead weights had been added to them while I wasn't paying attention. All I could think about was the fact that I was not even halfway through this suffering!

The third 500 meters is what most rowers see as the weakest out of all the 500 meters. This is the 500 meters that can make or break a piece. It is common for a person to not pull as hard at this time as he or she did in the beginning, causing their time to be worse than expected. If a person can hold him or her self together, then they can stay on track and finish with their desired time. I knew that this was going to be the case, and now I had to make a very tough decision. I was only halfway through, in a lot of pain, and ready to relax a little. No! I choose to race this season, and in order to achieve that I have to spend the next two minutes working harder than before. I pulled harder. I watched as my leg muscles contracted, my arms came in and away from my chest, and as my friends and teammates cheered me on. I was doing it; I was not letting this goal get away from me.

The final 500 meters of the piece was the physically weakest yet mentally strongest out of the four 500 meter segments. For 20 strokes, or 200 meters, I rowed at the same pace I had held for the first 1500m before I increase my speed for the 300-meter sprint (30 strokes). “OK Emily, start your sprint in five, four, three, two, one! NOW!!!” my teammates yelled. At this point the pain reached its highest point. The burning in my muscles was intense and I was having trouble breathing. My legs, arms, and lungs felt as though they had burst into flames. It is all I could do to tell my body to keep moving; I was extremely fatigued. I continued to pull harder and faster as sweat dripped down my forehead landing in my already burning eyes. I closed my eyes; I pulled. My teammates gathered around to cheer me on. “Emily you’re doing it!!! Keep going!!!” they yelled. 10 strokes left I heard them say. “Ten, pull harder, nine, you can do it, eight, faster Emily, seven, six, five, yes Emily, four, finish this strong, three, even harder Emily, two, two more left, one, last one!!!” I was done.

For the next two days I had trouble walking because of all the lactic acid that had built up in my muscles. I also developed a severe cough (it sounded like a smoker’s cough) from the massive amount of lactic acid trapped in my lungs. To cure this I spent a lot of the time stretching and drinking water. None of this mattered though. I had achieved a score that allowed me to race for the entire season. Throughout the spring my boat beat both the crews of Indiana University and the University of Michigan. I also competed at the Big Ten Championships, which OSU won for the first year ever.

Besides providing me with great experiences for the rest of the spring season, the 2000m erg test forced me to look deep inside myself to determine who I was and what I really wanted. I realized that I could do anything if I put my mind to it. I also realized how mentally strong I could be, even when facing great odds. In addition, I determined that I never wanted to let myself quit, not during a 2k test or at anything else I may encounter throughout my life. Most of all I learned to believe in myself and have confidence in my abilities. Even though I only spent 7 minutes and 36.4 seconds in that mental and physical “hell”, I learned many lessons that I will hold onto my entire life.