High Performance Committee Minutes

2.23.2024

Attendance
Wyatt Allen
Liam Corrigan
Yaz Farooq
Catherine Starr
Genevra Stone
Josy Verdonkschot (CHPO)
Stephen Hap Whelpley (Chair)

Agenda
Debrief on Winter Speed Order Results & Selection Camp Invitations
General Discussion of Selection & Communication Outlets for Selection Camp Information

The meeting was called to order at 1:10 PM EST.

Debrief on Winter Speed Order Results & Selection Camp Invitations

Chief High Performance Officer Josy Verdonkschot began by noting that the general performance had improved at the Winter Speed Order with higher percentages and a broader depth than previous speed orders. That being said, the one exception may have been the women's singles, which were not quite as competitive as they typically are. This could have to do with some of the athletes transitioning from altitude and some individual health issues.

Looking at the men's sweep, the HPC acknowledged that the top 3 have automatic invitations to selection camp. Two boats broke into the top 7 pairs from outside of last year's World Championship sweep group. Therefore, those two pairs got invited to camp. Gaard and Knippen were not in a position to get invited leading up to Winter Speed Order. Knippen's performance in the single earned him an invite to the camp by being in the top 6 of the M1x. Meanwhile, Gaard improved upon his rank in training with a new pair partner (Tabash) that had him finish ahead of a pair from last year's eight. In order to be even on numbers and sides, Sam Halbert was invited. This was essential in order to run selection for the four while beginning the selection of the eight. Josy noted that while the men's pair performance improved on the whole, it was still a percent behind the winning women's pair. The winning women's pair was still not necessarily of medal caliber speed based upon their position relative to last year's selected pair of Megan Musnicki and Allie Rusher.

Men's sculling saw good improvement in its depth. As expected, Soren and Ben will continue in the double. They are funded and supported in their efforts. Athletes selected for quad camp was a linear selection down the list with those that were eligible. Three athletes were skipped over out of necessity or chosen focus: one is ineligible to row for the US, one is going for the single, and one is going for the LM2x. A specialized coach will be appointed to run the men through selection.

As noted earlier, women's sweep had a good percentage relative to the field, but the winners still did not have a large enough margin over last year's pair to assume they had the speed to medal. Similarly to men's sweep, only boats that broke the order of the top 7 pairs from last year's sweep boats were invited to the camp. This included the Knifton/Kallfelz pair and the Coffey/Czajkowski pair. Erin Reelick was invited to offset a possibly injured athlete on her side. While Reelick finished low in the pairs, her partner was sick, and she was the one athlete that has not been tested in selection last season and has a relevant erg score. Unlike the men, the women's selection will identify 12 athletes but not identify lineups. All boats are qualified, so there's a more even investment across the group to build the best medal possibilities.

On the women's sculling front, Maggie Fellows declined an invitation to quad camp and wants to go for the women's single. Like men's sculling, invitations move down the line of the singles for those that are eligible and not an active lightweight rower. Audrey Boersen posted a similar result to last year relative to some other consistent athletes. She was involved in a thorough and competitive lightweight selection last year and did not make an impact on boatspeed. Meanwhile, Sophia Luwis has not been tested with the other three top lightweight women and will garner an invitation to the lightweight women's double selection. Kristi Wagner and Kara Kohler both underperformed, but were actively recovering from health issues during Winter Speed Order. Both have demonstrated continued improvement in other ways this year. In regards to Kristi and the open double, there is likely not a better double based on erg scores, history, technique, and personalities, assuming Kristi's continued recovery. Based upon their performance and erg scores, Lauren and Teal are likely locks for the quad. Maddie Focht, Emily Delleman, and Savannah Brija will be raced for the midship of the women's quad whereas Grace Joyce will be looked at for bow or stroke.

For the women's lightweight selection, Josy anticipates having the women weight 58kg for the duration of camp. It will be a doubles matrix with clear racing and lineup guidelines. If the women's double can validate their speed relative to lightweight 2x selection, then their lineup will be validated.

General Discussion of Selection & Communication Outlets for Selection Camp Information

As the HPC looks towards selection camps and who gains invitations to them, Josy wanted to generally speak about where he would like selection camps to go. On USRowing's side, we must keep communications as clear and consistent as possible since selections in and out of camps will be difficult and done on narrow margins. With that, the drivers of the National Team must educate athletes on what the criteria is to get invited in terms of objective criteria but also relative criteria. For instance, if an athlete was invited to camp last year, not selected, and did not demonstrate significant improvement, then he or she should not assume he or she automatically gets an invite in future years. Even still, not being selected to camp one year does not mean that he or she would not be selected in subsequent years.

Josy noted that selection needs to drive towards who IS selected rather than validating who is NOT selected. Everyone has a way to the Olympics whether it is through trials or a camp, but the goal of camps are to find the best possible combination of athletes for the pertinent events.

Despite expediting the invitations for selection camp, some athletes still had a challenging lag time after winter speed order and before knowing they were invited. We have to improve the immediacy and clarity of the communications. While USRowing will support media coverage of such decisions, we need to find the clearest and most direct way to get this information into the hands of the athletes.

There being no other business for discussion, the meeting was adjourned at approximately 2:15 PM EST.