**KEVIN MCFADDEN'S "COACHING 101”**

1. **DAY 1**
2. Additional drills: In addition to ***stop at the hands out***, which should be repeated early and often - first thing every practice and periodically throughout every session - there are a couple of drills that help emphasize different parts of the technique, which I find helpful to use early on in the first practice session:

* ***Forward and back along the gunwale, no paddles*** - After the first attempt at the hands out drill, it is likely chaos will ensue. Do not panic; just break the stroke down even further. Have the crew place their paddles inside the boat, grab the gunwale with their outside hands, slide them forward to catch-position distance, then sit back up, sliding their hands back, into the neutral, square finish position. Make sure they hold the forward position, looking at their seat partners, then turning heads forward, and emphasize this is how it feels to rotate into the catch position. Repeat as many times as necessary, correcting positioning where appropriate, making sure hips are square; inside shoulders are back; and bodies are rotated rather than simply bent forward.
* ***Stirring drill*** - Once the crew has the rotation without paddles, have them pick up their paddles and repeat the above, using the stirring drill. Paddles in the water at the finish, forward through the water to the catch position, then back to the finish through the water. Correct positioning throughout: Straight outside arm; paddle fully buried at the hip at the finish; straight outside arm at the catch; inside elbows bent; inside hand at the forehead; inside shoulder back; body rotated; straight arm on the pull-through, etc. The most common thing that will happen here is paddlers will take their paddles out to come back to the finish. Keep doing it until all paddlers get it right.
* ***Add strokes to the hands out drill*** - Follow up the above two drills by returning to the hands out drill. Having broken down the stroke, there should now be a greater understanding of how it feels to actually execute it properly. Continue to give individual critique and correction, and do this as long as it takes for you to feel that as a team, the paddlers have made progress. Then, to add the concept of timing to the technique, add a stroke, then two, to the drill. Stop then two strokes for several minutes, then stop and three strokes for several minutes. This will allow the team to practice timing without having to go so long that it falls apart. It helps with crew confidence. When you feel the team is ready, after a period of two- or three-stroke stop sequences, have them do 10, then 20, then 1-minute steady, with power after the last stop.

In the first session, this will likely take up the bulk of the practice. Depending upon the team, it may be all you accomplish in the first session. If time remains, go to step b, below.

1. Steady state, with critique: This is, as it sounds, self-explanatory. You know enough to watch the paddlers and tell them what they are doing wrong and IMPORTANTLY, what they are doing right. Call out focus points to all: reach out, long on the front, straight arm pull, inside elbows up, inside shoulders back, use cores, legs, back, drive the upper arm down, rotation, don't bend at the waist, eyes up, timing, etc. Whenever you make an observation, call it out to the individual paddler by name, seat number or distinguishing clothing. If after you do, the paddler does not seem to be able to make a correction, let it run and go physically to that paddler and place his body. Do not hesitate to do this because although it may seem as though you are picking on certain people, they DO want to get it right and will appreciate the attention.

Do this as long as it takes! Along the way, if it feels like timing is good and the crew is ready, call power sets of 10, 15, 20, a minute, whatever - so they can feel the difference between just paddling and paddling with pressure.

1. **DAY 2**
2. Repeat Day 1: Depending upon the crew, you will likely only need to do stop at the hands out. The other two drills need only be repeated if the crew is really not getting it.
3. Introduce starts: Begin by explaining the purpose of starts (to get the boat moving from stationary) as well as their place in the race plan. Explain what the race plan is. Then explain the mechanics of the start stroke: long, deep slow, deliberate strokes followed by shorter increasingly faster "pop" strokes. Then work gradually through:

* **First stroke only**; Stop the boat (do some more explaining based on what you saw); repeat as necessary;
* **First three strokes** (same as above);
* **Three long, 10 pop, paddle out** - Make sure to explain to stroke pair that the pop stroke rate comes up gradually over the first 10, then stays steady for the balance of the start until the settle (repeat several times);
* **3 - 10 - settle for 10, paddle out** - explain the difference between the pop strokes and the settle strokes: that the pop is at a higher rate and consequently a shorter stroke; that it is the back end that gets shortened, never the front; that the pop stroke is all front end; that on the settle, they reach out farther in front, lengthen the back end and lower the rate to the body stroke rate;
* When the crew has the concept down, gradually increase the starts to **3--20-10**; **3-20-20**; then when ready do **3-20- 1 minute, 2 minutes, 100 strokes**, whatever you think they can handle.

After each sequence stop and discuss what you observed, what went wrong, what went right, what needs to happen for the crew to master this skill. I know it sounds obvious, but really watch the team and always be prepared to point out at least one major thing that all can improve on. Failing that, reiterate the principles to hammer it home the best you can… give them some silly thing that will stick in their minds that they will recall on Race Day…. anything.

1. End by bringing it in concentrating on technique and throwing in some stop drills.
2. **DAY 3**
3. Repeat Day 1
4. Practice starts
5. Do at least two 500-meter race-simulation pieces: this is critical. We do not want Race Day to come as a surprise to anyone on these crews. As we all know, paddling at full pressure for two and a half minutes is much harder than it sounds, and the last thing we want is for crews to be discouraged after they race for the first time. Warn them that this will hurt, but also let them know that if they can't do it in practice, they WILL NOT be able to do it on Race Day three times! Be encouraging and positive… Call the race as the drummer would (or have their drummer do so if that person is present - after a tutorial of some kind). Make sure there is a start, a power set somewhere in the piece and a sprint, just as there would be on Race Day. Most important, after each piece, debrief on your thoughts and observations and what can be done to improve. Give individual critique/correction to those about whom you have made specific observations. Give specific advice to the stroke pair regarding their special role in the boat. They will hate you and love you at the same time!
6. **PATIENCE AND UNDERSTANDING**

Do realize that some of these crews are stone rookies, with no experience whatsoever with anything resembling a paddle in their hands [and in some extreme cases, have never done anything athletic except for climbing a flight of stairs their distant past, simply because no escalator or elevator was available]. They will frustrate you. They will seem to be hopelessly uncoachable. Most of them are NOT uncoachable… In fact, you will find that with a little patience and attention, most are eminently coachable and will improve exponentially from the beginning to end of a single practice. Of course, in every crowd you will get the clowns to whom Kevin referred in his tutorial. Disregard them and concentrate your efforts on the vast majority of folks who are eager to learn and to excel. They DID pay to do this, after all.

This, too seems obvious, but when frustration gets the best of you, take a deep breath and keep going. Be respectful, but be firm… You do know more about this than those you are coaching. They realize this and they will respond to you. I have found that the best results are obtained through using humor, humility and self-deprecation. You don't have to do shtick (we can't all be McNamaras!!), but a little laughter goes a long way to breaking the ice.

One thing you should realize is that if they start to get it, they will have a great time, and they will remember you for it! Don't be surprised to hear your name called on Race Day by folks you have coached! And if you have done your job well, as I am sure you will, everyone you coached will continue to return year after year!

If this doesn't make you feel good, I don't know what will!