



Top Coaches Answer Your Technique and Training Questions

“How do you describe ‘hanging on the oar’ to your rowers?”

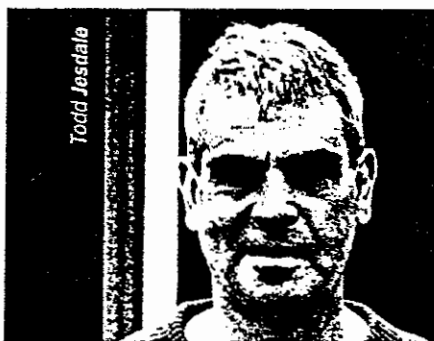
Todd Jesdale, U.S. Men’s Junior National Coach, Cincinnati Junior Rowing

A rower needs to find ways to have the push and power of the legs go directly to the oar handle, with little interruption. Simultaneously, one must realize that every ounce of power applied to the oar handle must emanate from the footstretchers, that there is a one to one connection between push against the footstretchers and pull on the oar handle. So, when one pushes very hard with the legs and keeps various parts of the body from giving way or breaking, one moves the oar handle as well. I don’t use “hanging on the oar” as such, but I think I understand the concept.

When the rower understands the principle that the push of the legs equals the pull of the oar, he can work toward making his body comply with that requirement, along with advice from the launch.

Most of the interruptions in the chain between footstretchers and oar handle are likely to take the form of breaking elbows too soon or hunched shoulders or knees moving from side to side.

A useful drill: Legs only. Nowhere is the delivery of legs to oar handle more plain.



Igor Grinko, U.S. National Sculling Coach

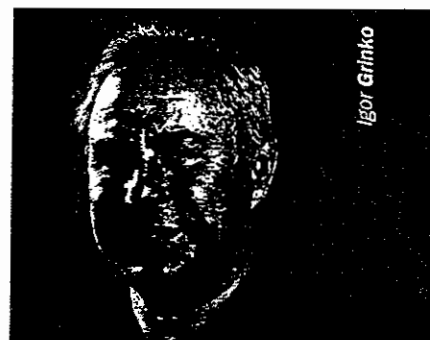
First we need to understand the difference between hanging and suspension. Many people consider them synonymous, but “suspension” describes the body’s position over the seat, whereas “hanging” has to do with the connection between footstretchers and handle, or handles, through the body.

There is only one moment in the stroke when one can get hang and that is at the moment of the catch, when the body’s position is changing. It starts with a very relaxed upper body and connection going through the legs, back, torso and arms. At the moment of the catch the rower feels hang in his lower back and lats, not in his shoulders. One should feel stretching below the arms, not tension above (some coaches suggest thinking about keeping a long neck as a reminder that the shoulders should be down and relaxed). With tension in the arms or shoulders, one can hang, but the stroke will be short and the acceleration of the handle or handles to the finish of the stroke will be difficult.

Mike Teti, U.S. Men’s National Sweep Coach

Before you describe how to “hang on the oar” you have to demonstrate so the athlete has a picture of how to actually do it. A Model B Concept II erg is excellent for this. Have the athlete sit at the catch as you stabilize the wheel so it won’t spin (i.e. with a long screwdriver or rigger wrench through the cage). Then ask the athlete to “suspend” his body on the oar handle. His butt should lift off the seat. Pressure should be against the footstretchers, and the lats and arms are engaged (arms are locked straight). Once the athlete feels this suspension, he should apply this to continuous rowing and finally to the boat.

Hanging the body weight on the oar handle with pressure against the footstretchers is the most efficient way to apply power which ultimately transfers to boat speed.



Holly Metcalf, Community Boating, Row As One Founder and Director

The previous two articles contain the keys to “hanging” on the oar. Good catch timing and proper lat engagement as a result of hand position and grip on the oar are essential to the athlete if she is to understand a coach’s constant demand for hanging on the oar.

Hang on the oar has as much to do with overall body strength as technique. A coach and athlete will do what it takes in the weight room to ensure that the athlete builds balance between lower body and upper body (including abdominals and lower back) strength. For example, an athlete who “shoots her butt” may not only need to work on catch timing, but also lat strength, or simply learning how to engage them. Often times “shooting the butt” becomes an unconscious part of an athlete’s repertoire; an athlete cannot hang on the oar with poor upper body strength and powerful legs; she will tend to lead her stroke with the stronger muscle group.

Many of us are kinesthetic learners. I find athletes make the most dramatic changes when they feel the muscle groups involved. I break





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shoulders were low, lats engaged, before slowly letting my arms lead my upper body back to its body angle forward position. He was not promoting a pause at the finish; he was simply showing me how to retrain my muscle memory through exaggeration. I was now able to hang on the oar and pull more weight than ever possible using my old technique.

The Suspension Drill: Legs and Lats

The suspension drill can be done on land or on the water. Stewart MacDonald had me do this during a 1981 national team development camp on a dockside rowing contraption. I had a horrible finish. All of my focus was on my finish, right along with the coach who was screaming and yelling at me to quit hitting myself.

Stewart equated this problem with a poor hang or connection. He took me aside, had me sit at the catch, blade buried, told me to drive my legs to lift myself off my seat. No surprise; I

couldn't do it. I bent my arms right away, shoulders up, as I drove my legs in my effort to suspend. I allowed my leg power to "break" my upper body structure (the static, but strong position of the upper body created by muscle contraction).

Once I discovered how to maintain my lat connection throughout my leg drive, I was able to lift right up off the seat. My finish was taken care of. My muscles had a new feel for the catch and finish ends of the stroke.

Barb Kirch, U.S. Women's Junior National Coach, Head Coach of Women's Rowing at Dartmouth College

Hanging on the oar. You'll know you've got it mastered when you find yourself sticking an entire roll of white tape on your seat, just to keep it under you on the drive.

"Hanging on the oar" is like being on the winning side of a tug-of-war contest. Your feet are driving into the ground while your upper body is



Barb Kirch

leaning with all its weight in the opposite direction, and your seat is off the ground. You and your team throw your weight on the rope, leaning and swinging with all of the mass of your upper body, arms and shoulders hanging fully extended in front of you, trying desperately to accelerate at just the right moment to offset the balance of the other team. Your total power application on the rope is limited only by the strength of the grip in your hands.



down hanging on the oar into two parts: lat connection, then leg drive. Try the following exercises, even if you have done them before, and watch carefully for possible imbalances in strength, especially between lats and legs. These exercises helped me understand, feel and achieve good connection or hang.

Seated Row (lats)

Buzz Congram dramatically changed my feel for hang (connection) as an athlete through weight exercise. As a member of Buzz's 1983 women's national team 4+, I had sufficient balance between my upper and lower body strength, but had not learned how to engage my lats effectively. Like many rowers, I equated "working hard" with tight shoulders and tightness in my arms. Buzz knew how much faster I could move the boat if he could help me feel how to be powerful through more efficient connection.



Buzz sat me down at the back side of an old Universal leg extension/curl machine. He reconnected the weight to a bar, had me sit with my legs slightly bent, my feet propped against a board, and took me through the following four stages:

1. Basically the exercise is like doing the rowing arms and back drill. He had me reach forward with my arms extended. The first change he had me make was to reach my chest out, not down, not allowing me to drop my chin below the level of my shoulders.
2. Next we focused on my elbows, putting a slight bend in my arms, pointing my elbows down and slightly in toward one another. I felt my shoulders lower as my lats engaged. In this position Buzz had me do "straight arm swing," performing 40 repetitions.
3. Then we added regular arms and back rowing—no bend in the arms at the body forward position—still straight arm swing. With this new lat connection, I was able to lift a substantial amount of weight; in my other position, my lower back and traps were left with most of the load.
4. Finally, Buzz had me add arms bending once I began my swing motion. He had me hold the bar at my shirt for a count of two, checking to make sure my

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