

# Crews and Coaches

## *How the Season's Races Prove That on the Coaches Three-Fourths of the Result Depends*

By Donald Wilhelm

ONCE more the season's crew races show that the triumphs of rowing are the triumphs of technique; that no sport offers so complex and so enigmatic a study with so surprising results as the sport of shell and oar.

A horseman knows that a pacer swings its legs less high and more efficiently than a trotter, that with each step it gains some infinitesimal advantage that in a mile results in a second or two. A rowing coach knows that a reach an inch longer, a finish an inch shorter, the most unimportant twist of the wrist, may win or lose a race, and all through the long winter season when coaching his crew in the tank; all through the long afternoons in the spring at the machines or on the water, and all through the crucial weeks before the climax, he watches and thinks, labors and experiments, not only to ascertain the strongest men, but to fuse the chosen ones into a machine with the acme of efficiency, a machine that in a race of four miles is faster than any other machine by a second or two; a machine that in eight hundred strokes with its throbbing red-blood power gains on other crews a foot or two.

Old oarsmen by the hundred, old coaches by the score, have studied the technique that Courtney of Cornell, by all means the greatest of American crew coaches, teaches; some say he is superior in teaching the catch, in the sinking of the oar into the water; some say in the finish, the lifting of the oar from the water; some in the way the shoulders are swung into the stroke—there is something different somewhere, something undiscovered, perhaps known by Courtney only in-

stinctively, something that makes his crews win consistently year after year, quite as consistently as the crews of Wray at Harvard have been winning over those of Kennedy at Yale. There are coaches who insist that Courtney wins because of his material—that his oarsman is a New York farmer, older by a few years and stronger by a great deal than the lad from the preparatory school who goes to the eastern universities. Some have said that if Courtney took the material of Rice at Columbia or of Wray at Harvard, and one of those coaches took his material at Cornell, that Courtney would lose; but in all this argument the fact remains that other schools, Syracuse, for one, have essentially the same material from which to choose that Courtney has. It is true he uses a larger blade than other coaches, but down at the bottom of the whole argument lies the fact that Coach Courtney is a greater technician, a greater judge of rowing material, than any other coach in America. He is the dean of American rowing coaches and the best of them all.

Courtney's crew came down the course at Poughkeepsie in the lead, rowing a slower stroke than those following it, rowing with the perfect rhythm that is the glory of a perfect crew. The oars caught the water in clear-cut unison, were pulled through the long stroke, shot clear of the water while the slides moved forward and the hands shot away to another catch. All the while the boat was surging ahead as smoothly as if propelled by a screw propeller.

Right behind it were screws catching and shooting just as gracefully, rowing just as beautifully, yet with

shells that lurched forward and settled down between strokes, as if mounting and sliding down the side of big waves. There was just the difference between the crew in Courtney's boat and the other crews that there is between the pacer that races the trotter and by accumulating the smallest gains wins in the end by a few seconds.

In any successful crew there must be masterful technique; there must be finely conditioned men, but quite as important as either of these considerations is the need of executive management, the need of changes at the eleventh hour, of confident alterations in crew or stroke that make the marginal difference between a winning and a losing crew. These decisions fall upon the shoulders of the coach; in a certain light it is unfortunate that they do not fall upon the oarsmen themselves. A good example of confident change at the last moment was set up by Coach Wray of Harvard just before the Yale race. Captain Cutler stroked the crew in a winning race last year, moreover he is generally said to be one of the finest, perhaps the finest, oarsman handling an oar to-day. Also stroking a winning race last year was Stroke Goodale of the Harvard freshmen, a masterful oarsman, though not so good a one as Cutler, yet, as a stroke, in weight and technique perhaps a bit better or offering promise of being a bit better. When the crew was put on the water Cutler returned to stroke, then the choice was centered on Goodale, and he stroked the boat in the losing race with Cornell, and in all the practice down till the week of the Yale race. During that last week news came from Red Top, the Harvard camp at New London, that Goodale had been moved to 4, and that Newton, a man of much less experience, had been moved to stroke. Wray is but trying to instill more rhythm into Goodale by putting him up ahead, some papers said; others said the crew is slumping and Wray is making a last effort to bring it to some kind of respectable form, that he is demoralized—another way

of saying that he didn't know what he did.

The Elis thought they had a chance to win, and this keen disappointment will result inevitably, old Yale oarsmen maintain, in a complete change in the rowing system at New Haven, and notably in the removal of Coach Kennedy. At the beginning of the year Yale hopes were high. The best athletes in college were drafted to the oar. Captain Frost kept interest at white heat and the new boathouse aided him in doing so. But Kennedy adhered to some new-fangled notions about rowing that he learned in England, and when his crew met Pennsylvania at Springfield and Princeton and Cornell at Princeton in Princeton's first crew race in a decade, and was miserably defeated in both races, sentiment at New Haven forced Kennedy to return to the old stroke used at Yale, the "Bob Cook stroke." The change was made on May 20th, and thenceforth the crew seemed to improve so rapidly that Yale men grew confident that it would at least make a good showing against Harvard. Now Yale graduates say if Kennedy had used the old stroke from the beginning the result would have been different. There are just as many bricks in the air for an unsuccessful coach as there are for a poor umpire, and it is probable that Kennedy will get their full force and have to retire. This much can be said, that absolutely no arrangement of any kind has been made with him for coaching in 1912.

It has been estimated that forty per cent of the success of a football team is contingent upon its coaches, and but sixty per cent upon the innate capabilities of the candidates. In the face of the Harvard-Yale race, in the face of the intercollegiate regatta and Courtney's long string of victories, who will deny that a much greater per cent of the chances of success are contingent upon the crew coach, a per cent even as high as sixty or seventy? Surely this year's results support that estimate.