

Racing Preparations – FAQs and Tips for Success

Tips from Alessandra

Erg Competitions

How can I prepare for racing 2km at an indoor rowing (erg) competition?

1) Contrary to what you might think, you should still continue some of your longer endurance practices. Maintaining your endurance through a few long-distance practices on the erg or by running will help keep you conditioned for the work ahead. These practices (ideally 2-3 per week) will help strengthen your aerobic base. For extra benefit, add a few 1min or 30second sprints to your long-distance erg or run in order to raise your heart rate & challenge your body. The longer-distance endurance workouts will help in flushing out the lactic acid that builds up during shorter sprint workouts (explained below).

Workout Examples: 40-60min run or erg (add 30-60second sprint every 20min for a challenge); 3x20min steady-state erg @22 SPM with 5min rest between; 2x29min erg rate-pyramid with 5min rest in between. Follow up with 10min stretching.

2) Practice some shorter sprint ergs (or runs) to prepare you for racing at a fast rate. Based on a 5 day training plan, 1-2 days should be spent doing “category 1” or “category 2” work. What this means is that your heart rate is close to maximum (working hard) and the pieces are short and intense. The purpose of this training is to work your anaerobic (i.e.: ‘without oxygen’) system. When you work at a high intensity, lactic acid builds up in your muscles because you are lacking enough oxygen to keep up with the high intensity muscle work. In order to race effectively, you need to learn how to push through this lactic acid build-up in your muscles. One example of this is when you do a relay piece on the erg: ever feel like your quads or glutes are burning? That’s because you’re feeling lactic acid building up in your muscles. This is COMPLETELY normal and every athlete will (and should) experience it. The key is to train yourself to be effective at working through and recovering from lactic acid buildup during anaerobic workouts.

Workout Examples: 10min light warm-up (this is mandatory) followed by either: 6x500m pieces (2min active rest between pieces); or 9x1min sprints (high rate, as hard as possible, 1.5min rest between pieces); or 9x1min hill-run sprints; proceeded by a 10min cool-down run/erg/bike & 10min stretching.

3) Practice a few “category 3” and “category 4” workouts (2-3 per week). These are workouts that are hard enough that you can’t talk while doing them (unlike the more relaxed long-distance workouts where you should be able to occasionally talk without too much difficulty). In these workouts, you should be working hard enough that you can’t speak to others while practicing. They are more intense than regular aerobic workouts, but longer than anaerobic sprint workouts (i.e.: longer than “category 1 & 2” workouts). These workouts are the best to use as a “default” practice when preparing for an indoor rowing competition, because they work your heart rate a good amount & create some lactic acid in your muscles, but are still long enough that you can better prepare for the length of the 2km race.

Workout Examples: 10min light warm-up (mandatory) followed by either: 3x2000m pieces (stroke rate should remain between 26-30SPM); or 3x11min rate ladders (3min@26, 2min@28,

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1min@30, 2min@28, 3min@26); or 3 sets of stairs (in school or dundurn) followed by a 3min rest (repeat twice). Conclude the workout with a 10min cool-down and 10min stretching.

Here’s an example of how a training week based on these types of workouts might look (based on a 5-day schedule – remember to give yourself time to rest):

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
OFF	AM: Cat. 3/4 workout	AM: Cat 1/2 workout PM: Cat. 5/6 40-60min long distance (lactic flush)	AM: Cat 3/4 workout	AM: Cat 1/2 workout PM: Cat. 5/6 40-60min long distance (lactic flush)	AM: Cat. 3/4 workout	OFF

4) Practice your flexibility & core strength – you’ll need it! I can’t overemphasize how important it is that you practice stretching your muscles every day. Hamstrings, quads, glutes (i.e.: your butt), calves, back (mid, lower, and high), and hip-flexors (that area between your quads and your lower abdominals) should all take priority in your stretching regime. If you don’t know how to stretch these areas, or if you’d like additional stretching examples, please ask me and we can review them together. Core strength (particularly strength in your transverse abdominals & the muscles in your back) is incredibly important because it will prevent injuries & ensure better rowing technique. Some of the best core exercises include: various versions of the plank, leg raises, “dead-bug”/“dynamic superman”, back raises (dorsal raises), full-body pushups, and crunches on an exercise ball (works on your stabilizers).

Okay, I’ve prepared physically for the race, but what should I expect and/or do when it’s actually race-time?

1) Expect to arrive early, sign in (with the coaches or at the registration desk), get changed into your racing gear (unisuit or rowing clothes). Have a small snack about 60min before your race (nothing big – just a granola bar or half a banana). You should warm-up on an erg for 10-15min at about 30min before your race. Your erg should be set to a resistance of 3-4, the warm-up should be at a light pace (not hard), but should include at least 4-5 hard 10-stroke sprint pieces at your racing rate. This means that during a 15min warmup, you should sprint at 28-32SPM for 10 strokes every 3 minutes. This will mentally (and physically) prepare you for racing at that pace during the competition. During your 10 stroke bursts, you should aim to hold your target 2km split during those strokes (i.e.: if you want to pull an 8min 2km race, you need to have a split of 2:00ave/500m. As such, you would increase your rate to 28-32SPM and lower your split to 2:00ave/500m during those 10 strokes). After the warmup, have a drink of water & do some minor stretching. You will shortly be called to your racing erg.

2) On your racing erg, a timer will count down “3, 2, 1, ROW!” to indicate when you should begin. Someone will be sitting beside you to record your score or adjust your erg settings, if required. Do NOT touch the screen yourself – just ask the volunteer to adjust it, if required. Request that your resistance be set to 3-4 (the volunteer can change it if it’s not at the right

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setting). Once you're properly sitting on the erg, an announcer will announce the starting of your race and will give instructions on when to start. They will typically say to watch your screen and wait until you see the word "ROW". Do not row before you see this on your screen, or you will be assessed a "false start" (i.e.: starting before everyone else). After that, follow your race plan (an overview of a race plan can be found in the next section). If you notice numbers & names on the bottom half of your screen, that's because the erg is showing who else is close to you (in terms of similar 2km race times) and who the current "1st place" racer is.

3) You will (and should) be exhausted after your race – physically and probably mentally, too. It takes a lot of concentration to complete a race. Have some water & stand up when ready. Be sure to walk around. Do NOT sit and remain in a static position – this will prevent your muscles from recovering. The best thing to do is walk around with your water bottle, do a few stretches for your quads, hamstrings, and back, and then do a 10min cool-down erg or jog. This will help flush the lactic acid (that burning feeling) from your muscles. Depending on how you feel, either have a small snack (e.g.: a banana or a granola bar) before your cool-down erg, or after your cool-down erg. Either way, make sure that you eat something small within 30min of finishing your race. After this, you can enjoy the rest of your day & cheer your teammates on.

Okay, now I know what to expect on race day, but how should I race a 2km competition?

There are many ways to race a 2km rowing competition, but following chart would be my recommendation for most (if not all) of you. To mentally prepare for the race, continue training hard in the weeks leading up to the competitions (this *will* help you, I promise), and review your race plan. Memorizing your race plan or knowing it really well often makes rowers feel calmer and more at-ease with racing. It will still be hard work, but you'll know what you want to do.

Distance Remaining	Race Plan
2000m	<p>START: (10-15 strokes, or approx. 100m)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3-4 short strokes (e.g.: 1/2, 1/2, 3/4, full) • Hold high rate for 5 more strokes • Begin to settle in to your 2km split, lengthen out your stroke, and lower your stroke rate to anywhere between 28-32SPM <p>Main Focus: settling into your race pace</p>
1750m	<p>New 250m Focus: Sitting tall</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on keeping tall posture for the next 250m • Squeeze the core to keep your body strong • Keep your back strong and stable with good posture

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Distance Remaining	Race Plan
1500m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure 5 with the legs to push through the 1500m mark <p>New 250m Focus: Quickness at the Catch</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on driving off quickly from the catch • Keep the chest up (not collapsing to your knees) & push off the footboards • Kick the heels down into the footboards when driving off
1250m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus 5 on holding your split steady & pushing through the 1250m mark <p>New 250m Focus: breathing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exhale at your finish & inhale as you come up to the catch, controlling your slide • Focus on steady breathing to keep the oxygen flowing • Keep calm and strong • At 1050m, start a “push 5” to approach the 1000m mark
1000m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 strokes at higher rate to push through the 1000m mark – almost like doing a second start (everything behind you is history, this is a new 1000m that you can tackle) <p>New 250m Focus: Drive with the legs to 750m</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on squeezing the legs down as soon as you reach the catch
750m	<p>New 250m Focus: Connect (legs/back/arms)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on holding the core strong & connecting the legs, back, and arms as you accelerate into the finish
500m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drive for 5 to push through the 500m mark <p>New 250m Focus: Accelerating into the finish & Quick hands</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep that acceleration going as you push through the hardest part of the race → you’re almost done & the harder you pull now, the quicker it will be over • Focus on quick hands at the finish (quick in & out) as you prepare to start your final sprint

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Distance Remaining	Race Plan
250m	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus 5 to drive into the last 200m <p>New 250/200m Focus: FINISH SPRINT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase your stroke rate by 2SPM (i.e.: if you were racing at 28SPM, you should now race at 30SPM) by driving a bit quicker with the legs • Focus 10 for quick hands & bringing up the rate • Drive 10 for the last 100m to the finish
0m	FINISH

As you can see, this is not a completely comprehensive race plan/preparation guide, but this will hopefully give you a good overview of how racing works & will bring you some confidence in knowing what to expect and/or how to plan for your 2km race. As always, you can contact me with questions or speak to me in person with regards to tailoring your racing plan to meet your specific goals.

See you all soon,
 Alessandra