MEAT AXE ROWING

3.5 HOURS OUT

RACE MORNING.

The 2K race-day timeline and warm-up we used, hour by hour, from the morning pre-row to the start line.

This is how we prepared on the morning of a big race, an important one. It's a good blueprint to start from: shape it around your race time and what your crew needs.

> **these are the controllables that stack the odds that you can have a good performance**

THE COUNTDOWN

Write your race time in the last row, count back, and fill in your times.

Before the race	What happens	Your time
3.5 hours or more	Off the water from the morning pre-row	
3 hours	The big feed	
2.5 hours	Sodium bicarbonate (adults, and only if you've practised it)	
2.5 to 1.5 hours	Chill	
1.5 hours	A stretch or a light walk, and box breathing	
1 hour 15 to 1 hour	Caffeine (adults, scaled to your weight)	
1 hour	Erg warm-up, active stretches, team meeting	
40 minutes	Meet at the boat	
35 minutes	Hands on	
30 minutes	Push off for the warm-up on the water	
Race time	Line up in the blocks and race	

THE MORNING PRE-ROW

Off the water at least 3.5 hours out. On the morning of the race we'd do a pre-row, done early enough to go home and get our big feed in. It's generally 4 to 8k of easy rowing, easy zone 2, and then maybe a couple of bursts.

Expect it not to feel perfect. The whole idea is to shake things out: the nerves, and anything carried over from the day before.

Then go over the plan. After the row, reiterate your game plan for the day and your race plan. We had our race plan decided well in advance, so on the morning we were only going over it again.

3 HOURS THE BIG FEED

A big, carb-heavy meal, enough to fuel your body for a sustained period. Mainly carbs, with a good mixture of fast- and slow-digesting carbs, plus a little bit of protein and a little bit of fat. Make it a decently large meal.

2.5 HOURS SODIUM BICARBONATE

Only if it's part of your race and your team does it. Sodium bicarbonate helps buffer your lactate, so you feel a little bit less pain. It can give you a 1% or 2% performance boost, but it can have a severe effect on your gut and give you an upset stomach.

For me it was 33 capsules of 840 mg (about 28 g), taken over 15 minutes at the 2.5-hour mark to give it time to settle and get into your system. That was at 95 kg; yours depends on your body weight.

> **Adults only.** This is what we did as adult elite athletes. It's not for under-18s, it has to be practised in training first, and check with a sports doctor or dietitian before you use it.

1.5 HOURS LIMBER UP

Until then, chill. From the 2.5-hour mark you're just chilling, relaxing for a good wee while.

At about 1.5 hours, a little stretch or a light walk, just to limber up the body again. It's a good time for box breathing too, to bring yourself nice and calm and centred: breathe in for a count of four, hold for four, out for four, hold for four, and repeat.

1 HOUR 15 TO 1 HOUR CAFFEINE

For me at 95 kg it was 300 to 400 mg. Scale it to your body weight.

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1 HOUR THE ERG WARM-UP

On the erg and just moving. You should be coming off it after about 15 or 20 minutes of work.

Step	What you do
1	Steady state, easy work, not trying to work too hard, building up to zone 2.
2	Build a little bit past that, over 10 minutes or so.
3	A couple of threshold pieces: 30 seconds on, 30 seconds off, 2 or 3 times, at your 5K or 6K pace.
4	One 2-minute piece at your 5K or 6K pace, or 2 to 3 minutes, depending on your fitness.
5	A couple of bursts at race pace, and maybe an overspeed where you let the rate really go up, just to get your legs firing.

Adjust it to you. If you're less fit or it's early in the season, do less: even 1.5 minutes for step 4. Fitter and closer to your prime racing season, you might be doing close to 3 minutes. Listen to your body, and feel free to stop during the erg to stretch and limber up.

Then some active stretching. Leg swings, hamstring glides, back rotations to warm up the back, and a few hip stretches (90/90s), so you can get into the rowing position nice and relaxed. Then a quick team meeting to catch up as a team.

40 MINUTES MEET AT THE BOAT

A few little stretches, getting your minds ready. It's a really good time for a little box breathing to calm yourselves down. Run through the plan again as a team, and keep it really simple: focus on what you can control, not everything else that's happening.

Hands on at 35 minutes. Push off the pontoon at about 30 minutes and go through a full race warm-up.

THE WARM-UP ON THE WATER

Piece	What you do
Builds in fours	A quick build off the back: hands only, bodies, quarter slide, half, full. Then swap fours. Or build off the front in fours, to emphasise the catch right from the beginning.
Build as an eight	Off the back, just to get the timing.
Steady paddle	As an eight, roughly 1k to 1,500m.
28, 30, 32	20 strokes at rate 28, paddle 10. 20 at 30, paddle 10. 20 at 32, paddle 10.
36 to 39	Start at 36 and let the rate build to 37, 38, 39 over 20 strokes. Paddle 10, then paddle out for a couple of minutes.
Starts	Stop, then build through a 1-stroke, 3-stroke, 5-stroke, 7-stroke and 12-stroke start.
Catch slaps	A few, before or after the starts.
Race pace	Rate 37 to 38 for 15 to 20 strokes, then paddle.
Overspeed	Wind it up to rate 42 for 15 strokes, moving quickly and making it feel nice and easy.
Last piece	Optional. One more at race pace, maybe only 10 strokes, just getting everything firing together.

Catch slaps, if you've practised them in training. Roll up with a feathered blade and slap it in as hard as you can, the whole crew together, for 10 or 15 strokes. A few right before race-pace work really sharpen things up and get you on the boil.

EARLY-SEASON OPTIONS

It depends on what your crew needs.

A quarter-slide build. Row on quarter slide and build the rate up to 50+, just to really get the hands moving. Practise it in training first, and don't get too silly with it.

> **this can kind of shock the system to make the rating, 37, feel a hell of a lot easier**

Gunwale taps during the steady paddle.

Catch slaps earlier, in the paddle before any pieces, instead of before the starts.

INTO THE BLOCKS

Line up in the start blocks, make your final adjustments, and race.

Send this to a Meataxe who needs to hear it.