



For the Team

By Kenneth Roden

4:30 A.M. ALARM, CAN'T HIT THE SNOOZE BUTTON AGAIN OR I WILL BE LATE.

With another late night at the office I only managed to get five hours of sleep. Pop into the car and it is still dark, the radio's morning DJs aren't even in yet. I get out of the car, see the sunrise over the boathouse and remember why I love this sport.

All 20 of my teammates are warming up. Once we're briefed on the morning's drills it's right on the water we go. The Anacostia is a hidden beauty of Washington DC that the DC Strokes are fortunate to share. The flat water is perfect for a few practice sprints or a long and steady row to the monuments.



I couldn't think of a better way to spend my morning than enjoying the beauty of Washington while training with people I consider not only teammates but friends. The DC Strokes are committed to pushing ourselves to the limits and doing it as a team. Since winning six medals at the Stonewall Regatta, the DC Strokes have upped the intensity of our workouts, focusing on every stroke like it alone is responsible for the success of our race. That 1,000-meter race is a commitment to my boat, my team and to myself. A race gives me 100 strokes to prove myself – just as for each rower on the team. Every push with the legs represents a commitment to my boat, every time I place my oar in the water is a promise to my team, and every ounce of pain I feel is a pledge to myself that I can do this.

At Charm City Sprints during the final 250 meters of the Men's Masters 8 event, my quads burned as other crews began to creep up. Our coxswain called us into the final sprint early, knowing we had to step it up now or we lose. We take 10 strokes for composure to push ahead of Carolina; 10 strokes really pushing with the legs as we close the distance between Capital; and the last 10 strokes are for us. As I emptied all my energy into that last stroke, I thought of

why I endure this pain: I love my team. I know after each race that every one of my teammates has given everything they have, and I want to show them the same commitment.

Crew presents a unique scenario in the world of athletics, where one person slacking for a few seconds can cause the entire boat to lose everything. There will never be a Shaquille O'Neal in rowing. Rowers must look to their crew as well as themselves to win a race: crew rowers win as a team, not as an individual.

As the DC Strokes enter the final weeks before the Outgames in Copenhagen, our focus is to row hard and row together. With some of the most competitive crews in the world in attendance, our edge comes from the confidence we have in our training and our trust in one another. When I enter the stadium for the opening ceremonies of the Outgames, I know the rowers with me represent not only the DC Strokes but also Team DC. Rowing demands that a crew work together and row as one, we are a team committed to one another and that is the meaning of crew. Loud and proud, we are the Strokes.

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