

When to power up & Using your power wisely

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You hear it all the time in races, "On the next change, ...Power up!" And, a grueling race gets even tougher. As you power up, precious resources are being used up at an alarming rate. Your self confidence is tested to it's core. How do you know the right time to power up? Or, is there a right time? You hear some paddlers say, "you should pace yourself so that you're spent by the end of the race and exceeding that pace leaves less energy for the finish." Some say, "speeding up and slowing down is a waste of energy."

There are a number of occasions when "powering up" can provide substantial gains during a race. Most of the time, powering up will get you tired and give you only four or five feet. Since you can't effectively power up more than a hand full of minutes during any hour of racing, you must choose wisely the moments when your investment will recoup the best returns.

The start is your first opportunity. You have a chance to place yourself and/or your crew in a dominant position early on, so that everyone else behind you is almost automatically placed on the defensive. The faster you get your canoe up to full speed, the more distance you'll place between yourself and those who would take your position. And, just think of that person who is just ahead of you (if you aren't leading), who is as stressed as you from the hard start and who thought you were going to be left behind. Your good start [can] shake an opponent's confidence for a moment...but only for a moment. If you're going to win against a person of equal physical ability, you have to out smart them and out skill them.

In the OC-6, watch your opponent's steersperson to see if they're ruddering excessively. If so, you can power up whenever the steers person stops paddling. Often, this can be several strokes in a row. Every time your whole crew powers up while their crew is powered down, you get great gains for the energy you spend. When the steers person stops paddling, the power drops by 17 percent. When the steersperson "pry's" a rudder against the hull, the power drops by over 20 percent. If the steersperson "Posts" a rudder out away from the hull, power drops by over 22 percent. (And these are conservative figures.) These are the moments when your investment will pay off in high percentages. When your opponent is zigzagging, you can power up to take advantage of their slowed progress as well.

If you're racing into the current/wind to get to a turning marker, the first boat to get around that marker will gain the most distance from the rest of the pack and they'll gain this distance in the period while the next canoe is still bogged down in that wind/current and stuck in the turn. Once you round the marker and are going with wind/current and while your opponent is still moving against wind/current, you can power up here to gain enormous distance against them. Once your opponent rounds the marker and has their boat up to speed with yours, you can drop down power into your hard race pace. It is in this situation that one can gain so much distance that an opponent can not possibly overtake your position. It is not uncommon in most tidal bays and large rivers to gain

three to eight boat lengths in this situation. An upwind marker can increase the spread between all boats in a race.

When you see an opponent experiencing discomfort or trouble with their gear, they'll likely be slowing to some degree, and that is your moment to speed up. Sometimes, you can tell that your opponent is in a slow moment where he has lost concentration or is experiencing a momentary lull in energy, again take all advantage of such situations. They may get their second wind just as suddenly.

When rounding a coastal outcropping where you must steer a large arc around an object or a point-break, if you can take an "inside" position while your opponent is paddling farther out in the arc. At this time, you will be traveling a lesser distance than canoe that isn't cutting the curve so close. You can power up here to increase the advantage of your position.

Of course, you can simply pick a random moment to power up, but the difference between your boat speed and your opponent's speed will not be as great as when you carefully pick the right moment. And, you don't want to be spent when that opportunity arrives.