

10 Steps for Surviving a Regatta

After five years of being "rowing parents", we learned a few things about how to survive a regatta, which we are happy to share with the novice parents. The basic advice is: plan to go early, stay all day, and bring everything you need with you. Here are the details:

Go early. Parking is at a premium at every regatta. Some regattas are notorious for filling the city's coffers with towing fees and parking fines. (Green Lake's Frostbite Regatta, and Mount Baker's Tri-Mountain Regatta, both in Seattle, are fine sources for such civic revenue). Find out when the boat trailer is expected to arrive, and try to arrive at least 15 to 30 minutes before then. This will usually be before 6:00 A.M. in the morning.

Plan to Stay All Day. Junior rowers are expected to be available at least an hour before their race, and their races are usually spread throughout the day. Even when not racing or preparing to race, they are expected to be available to unload and rig boats, help cheer for their teammates, fill in for other injured or missing teammates in unexpected races, and help de-rig and load the trailers at the end of the day. Some clubs also require their rowers to meet back at the boathouse at the end of the day to assist in unloading the boats from the trailer and returning them to the clubhouse.

Dress Appropriately. In the northwest, you can plan for cold and rain, and you will be right 80% of the time. Dress in layers you can discard if the sun makes a surprise appearance. Some suggested clothing items: comfortable shoes that don't get wet in the rain, wool socks, tee-shirt covered by a long-sleeve shirt, covered by a sweatshirt, which is covered by a Gortex or similar waterproof jacket. Make sure you have a hat or cap of some sort that keeps the rain off your head - even a baseball style hat helps. And finally, bring a good pair of polarized sunglasses - it always seems that when the sun does appear, it is directly across from where you are watching the races.

Personal Items Remember that there may not be a store nearby, and you might not want to give up your parking place to go search for one. The restroom facilities are usually port-a-potties. Therefore a roll of toilet paper and some tampons/sanitary napkins, sealed in a plastic bag, can be life savers when needed.

Tools for Watching Races You will want to keep track of your rower's races, so get a race schedule as soon as they are available (they run out at many regattas). Bring a yellow highlighter and a pen to mark your rower's races and make notes. You will also find that it is nearly impossible to tell which boat is which without binoculars - invest in a good set as soon as possible. Other essential supplies include a reliable camera, plenty of film, and extra camera/flash batteries.

Taking pictures You will soon learn that pictures of crew races are disappointing. Unless you have an extra-long telephoto lens, you won't be able to tell which boat is which, even its closest point. Your best chance to take pictures is when the boats are being prepared for a race, moving the boat to the water, loading the boat in the water, and taking a "team picture" after the boat has been returned to the stretchers. Even for those

shots, a telephoto lens helps considerably. An exception to the above rule is any regatta held at the University of Washington, which goes through the Mountlake Cut. There are pathways on both sides of the cut for spectators to use, and the shells are only a few feet away as they race by. It's a great place to view races and take pictures.

Socializing Regattas are hours of boredom punctuated by a few minutes of excitement as your rower races. Most regattas have areas where teams can set up tents and supply food for their rowers. Find out where most of the other parents will be watching the races, and set up your folding camp chairs. (Exception: any regatta at the Univ. of Washington). You may not be sitting in the chairs all the time, but it reserves a spot for you to call home and where you can store your gear. One of the more pleasant activities at regattas is having hours of time to talk with other parents - you will become good friends with many of them. Visit with the parents running the food tables, and you will learn more about the rowing program works than from any other source. Bring along a book to read, just in case.

Food Different clubs make different arrangements regarding feeding the rowers. Some have food tents and provide food for the rowers, but not the parents. Others feed everyone as long as there is food available. Some require rowers and parents to bring their own food. A few regattas have food that can be purchased, although the quality varies greatly. Regardless, plan on bringing plenty of food for both yourself and your rower. Basic picnic food is sufficient, including sandwiches and snacks. Avoid pop, milk and citrus juices - sports drinks are fine.

Rower's Clothes Bring a bag of extra clothes for your rower. At some regatta during the season, they will be in dire need of an extra pair of socks, sweatpants, or sweatshirt. A warm blanket might also be handy.

Camping Some regattas tolerate rowers bringing small tents for use during the day of the regatta. In the Northwest Region, that includes Green Lake, Mount Baker, Commencement Bay (on American Lake), and Regionals in Vancouver, Washington. Check with the varsity parents about other regattas. Along with a sleeping bag, these are handy for rowers to use to change clothes and warm up after getting soaked in a cold rain during their race. Remember to keep it small and don't pitch it in the prime spectator viewing areas. If you can't see over it, then it's too large.

Good Luck, and Enjoy the Regatta!

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