

### Chapter 8

# Race Day

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This section outlines Greg Barton's activities on race day itself. He likes to get up at least two to three hours before a race or heat, so his body "is well awake and ready to perform." And he figures if you know in advance that the race is at 7 a.m., and you are going to have to get up at 5 a.m., you need to get your body used to getting up at that hour, so you have to start doing it a week or so ahead of time.

If Barton has to get up early in the morning, many times he will go for a short run, "even if it's only a half mile, just to wake up and get the blood moving." This is followed by a light breakfast, and traveling to the race course.

For breakfast, he avoids high fat and high sugar foods, concentrating on complex carbohydrates, such as breads, cereals, and fruits.

*The problem I have found with high fats and overeating just before a race is that they cause blood to rush to my stomach to digest the food, instead of to my muscles, where I need it for the race, and that makes me feel sluggish. So if I eat some kind of complex carbohydrates, it's a more gradual release of the energy into my system. Also, I've heard talk about high sugar being bad before a major event. A lot of it depends on the person and the length of time before the event. When some people eat a lot of sugar, it actually makes their blood sugar go down. You get all this rush of sugar into your system and then your pancreas secretes a lot of insulin to take care of the sugar and that actually makes your blood sugar level drop below normal. So, if you eat something that is a little more slow-releasing into your system, it gives you a more steady blood sugar level. Then, I'd also avoid eating anything that would upset my stomach. I wouldn't eat any spicy pepperoni an hour before my race because I would be burping it up. And if you're feeling really nervous, you probably ought to eat a little less than normal because when people get nervous, their digestive system slows down and they're left with this food sitting in their stomach.*

## Double Warm Up

Once at the race course, Barton often does a "double warm up." He goes out in the boat and warms up for about 20 minutes, comes back in and stretches on shore and rests for about a half hour, then goes out right before the race to warm up again.

In a typical first warm up of a double warm up, Barton would go about four kilometers, which is a convenient distance because many of the regatta courses are two kilometers long, so you can just go down and back. Usually, he would paddle the first two kilometers "at a nice steady pace, not too hard." On the way back, he would "pick it up" for a bit — do a 500 in two minutes, then he might do a 250 at a slightly higher pace and go in. That would all take about 20-24 minutes.

He would plan to be on shore doing some stretching, deep breathing, and resting, from 20-60 minutes, depending upon how long he felt the second warm up should be. That, in turn, is determined by how he feels after his first warm up.

*If I felt really good and strong in the first warm up, I'd do a minimum of warm up right before the race. But if I'm still feeling kind of sluggish, I'd go out and do some more sprints, maybe a start or two, and perhaps another one or two longer sprints, if I feel I need it. I also think a lot of it is just your mental state. If you're feeling good, then you'll race better. And I make that decision during the first warm up. I think it's whatever I feel like doing that day, whatever makes me happy. If I'm happy, I'll probably race better.*

The second warm up would generally begin about 15-25 minutes before the start of the race, depending upon how he felt. He would paddle about 1,000m, and then pick it up for a little bit — maybe do a start, or a rolling start, and one 250m piece.

*Generally, I like to do a sprint about five minutes before the start of the race. So, I'm paddling easily and maybe every couple of minutes, I'll pick it up for about 30 seconds, not really hard, like maybe a 60-second 250 pace, something like that, to get the blood moving, but not produce a lot of lactate. It would be about 60-70 percent speed.*

The warm up ends about five minutes before the start and from then until lining up for the start, Barton likes to "cruise around" the start area in big circles at 10 percent speed. He likes to get into the blocks at the same time the majority of other boaters do.

*I don't like to get there first and just sit, waiting for the others. But I also don't like to get there last, and feel rushed.*

## Modification of the Warm Up

Barton would not do a double warm up before each and every heat or race.

*A lot of times, if I'm racing a series of heats and semifinals, and then the finals later that afternoon, the heats and semis act as a warm up for the finals. The fact that I have already gone out a couple of times that day and gotten my heart rate up a little bit often means that I will not do the double warm up before the finals because I'm already feeling pretty good. Another thing*

## The Barton Mold

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*I've noticed is that the warm up time seems to vary. When I'm feeling my best, I can get by with less warm up, but you often don't know how you'll feel until you get out there for the first warm up.*

### Post Race

After the race, Barton does a warm down. If he has to go to boat control, he does that first. If not, he proceeds directly to the warm down, which consists of turning right around after the race and paddling back up the course at 10 percent speed.

*But if I have another high intensity race coming right up, like at the '88 Olympics, then I'd do a higher intensity warm down, maybe 60 percent speed, to work aerobically to help get rid of the lactic acid.*

If he has another race or heat later in the day, Barton would try to eat a little bit right after the first one.

*Maybe I'd pack a banana or some sort of food with me and have something right after I got off the water. I'd observe the same dietary principles I mentioned before: avoid fatty foods and something that would really weigh my stomach down. I'd eat lighter foods, like fresh fruit, grains, bread, then drink some. Plain water is fine.*

Generally at races, Barton eats a big supper because that is the only time of the day when he can eat a large quantity of food since he does not want to have a full stomach when he is racing. Since he needs to get the proper caloric intake in order to avoid running out of energy for the next day, supper is the only time he can eat a lot.

Barton's schedule for race day starts with timing everything out backwards from the time of the race.

*If the race is at 9 a.m. and I want to have a 20-minute warm-up, that means I have to be on the water at 8:40. And if I want to have a half hour after my warm up to come back and stretch and relax that means I have to finish my first warm up at 8:10.*

He does not write out the schedule for the day; he just keeps it in his mind.

### Race Strategies

Many factors go into planning a race strategy, such as whether it is a heat or a final, a big race or a less important one, and whether you are a world-class boater or not. For example, if you are a paddler of lesser ability trying to get into the finals at the World Championships, you will have to race the semi-final as though it were the final, but if you can qualify for the final relatively easily, then you need to conserve energy in the semi-final, so it is difficult to generalize about what approach is best for all people. Except where noted, this section deals only with the strategies that have worked for Barton.

In a heat, even if he expects to qualify easily, Barton believes it is best to start out really hard:

*I've seen people get caught. Figuring they had an easy heat, they go out easy and look up after a while and suddenly they're in fifth place and there's some*

*new hot-shot they didn't know about who is way ahead of them and they end up getting bumped out of the race, so I feel it's better to go out hard and then look around to see how the race is progressing. If you're easily in the top three, and there's nobody else around, then you can slack off a little bit.*

Many race strategies center around making a surprise sprint somewhere during the race and demoralizing the opposition enough that he gives up. These sprints could come at the start, where someone gets way ahead, in the middle of the race, where someone suddenly jumps out ahead, or in the closing sprint.

*People like to have a fast start, especially in the 500, because they think it devastates the person next to them. If somebody pulls a boat length on you at the start of a 500, that's hard to make up, and it's possible that the person left behind is going to have a poor race because he's so discouraged by what's happened. By the same token, if you're grinding along side-by-side with some guy and all of a sudden, BOOM! you sprint for 100 meters and pull ahead by a length, it can give you a psychological advantage and the other person a disadvantage. The same thing can happen at the end. If you know you have a faster kick than somebody else, you know you can go down the whole course even with him and just sprint by in the last 100 meters. One of my psychological advantages is a strong finish. A lot of people think that to beat me, they have to be ahead before the finish. And as soon as I get ahead of them, they give up. For the person who is having these things done to him, the best defense is to try to race his own race and not adjust to someone else's race. Once you adjust, you can fall into their hands. So in preparing for a race, I always tell myself I'm going to stick with my plan and give it whatever I've got, no matter what place I'm in. I'm going to race as hard as I can all the way to the end. If I'm in eighth place coming into the finish, I'm going to try to move up to sixth or seventh. I think that's the best attitude, because when people start playing these sorts of games, the easiest person to take advantage of is the guy who gives up. Once you have the attitude of trying as hard as you can, you rarely come in last in the finals. There are usually a couple of big egos that will blow up in the finals, have a bad start or get behind and get psyched out and end up quitting the race or slowing way down. If you race your best race, you'll end up beating a few people, even if you're the slowest one out there.*

For Barton, having his best race translates into trying to have his fastest time, rather than more tactical concerns:

*While it may help to take into account what the opposition is doing, if you try to beat somebody by being fast at the start in order to discourage him and hope that he will give up, but you end up going two seconds slower than your best possible time, then you really have to think hard to justify that strategy because you could be beaten by someone other than the guy you were keying on. So, I usually pick a strategy that will allow me to do a fast time, regardless of whether it is better psychologically.*

And to have his fastest time, Barton believes he does best by pacing the race out fairly evenly:

## The Barton Mold

*If I try to put in a burst of speed at a fast pace, I start producing a lot of lactic acid. I pay a lot when I try to go at a very high speed. I don't have the same natural speed that some of the top racers have.*

### Pacing

Figure 14 shows splits for a 1,000m race at various final times, in both even pacing (reading straight across from right to left), and at a pacing that is more typical of many racers, including Barton (reading diagonally across from right to left). For example, if you want a time of 3:40, for completely even pacing, you would have to do the 100m in 22 seconds, the 250m in 55, the 500m in 1:50, and the 750m in 2:45 (reading straight across from right to left). But even though he was trying to pace evenly, Greg would probably be closer to the diagonal splits — 100m in about 21.3, 250m in about 53.4, 500m in about 1:48.2, and 750m in about 2:43.5.

Why the difference between the even pacing and the actual pacing? Even though he advocates even pacing, Barton believes it is important to get off to a relatively fast start — the first 50m to 75m or so of the race:

*I feel it's important to get up to race pace as soon as possible off the start, not maximum pace, but race pace, so you can do most of the race at that pace. You can probably reach race pace at 50 meters or so, and what you do after that depends on your strategy for that race. For example, especially in the 500, people often keep accelerating the boat past 50 meters up to 100 or even*

(Pacing Chart courtesy of Reg Hatch)

1,000m	800m	750m	600m	500m	400m	300m	250m	200m	100m	50m	25m
4:20	3:28	3:15	2:36	2:10	1:44	1:18	1:05	0:52	0:26	0:13	0:06.5
4:16	3:24.8	3:12	2:33.6	2:08	1:42.4	1:16.8	1:04	0:51.2	0:25.6	0:12.8	0:06.4
4:08	3:18.4	3:06	2:28.8	2:04	1:39.2	1:14.4	1:02	0:49.6	0:24.8	0:12.4	0:06.2
4:04	3:15.2	3:03	2:26.4	2:02	1:37.6	1:13.2	1:01	0:48.8	0:24.4	0:12.2	0:06.1
4:00	3:12	3:00	2:24	2:00	1:36	1:12	1:00	0:48	0:24	0:12	0:06
3:56	3:08.8	2:57	2:21.6	1:58	1:34.4	1:10.8	0:59	0:47.2	0:23.6	0:11.8	0:05.9
3:52	3:05.6	2:54	2:19.2	1:56	1:32.8	1:09.6	0:58	0:46.4	0:23.2	0:11.6	0:05.8
3:48	3:02.4	2:51	2:16.8	1:54	1:31.2	1:08.4	0:57	0:45.6	0:22.8	0:11.4	0:05.7
3:44	2:59.2	2:48	2:14.4	1:52	1:29.6	1:07.2	0:56	0:44.8	0:22.4	0:11.2	0:05.6
3:40	2:56	2:45	2:12	1:50	1:28	1:06	0:55	0:44	0:22	0:11	0:05.5
3:36	2:52.8	2:42	2:09.6	1:48	1:26.4	1:04.8	0:54	0:43.2	0:21.6	0:10.8	0:05.4
3:32	2:49.6	2:39	2:07.2	1:46	1:24.8	1:03.6	0:53	0:42.4	0:21.2	0:10.6	0:05.3
3:28	2:46.4	2:36	2:04.8	1:44	1:23.2	1:02.4	0:52	0:41.6	0:20.8	0:10.4	0:05.2
3:24	2:43.2	2:33	2:02.4	1:42	1:21.6	1:01.2	0:51	0:40.4	0:20.4	0:10.2	0:05.1
3:20	2:40	2:30	2:00.0	1:40	1:20	1:00	0:50	0:40	0:20	0:10	0:05
3:16	2:36.8	2:27	1:57.6	1:38	1:18.4	0:58.8	0:49	0:39.2	0:19.6	0:09.8	0:04.9
3:12	2:33.0	2:24	1:55.2	1:36	1:16.8	0:57.6	0:48	0:38.4	0:19.2	0:09.6	0:04.8
3:08	2:30.4	2:21	1:52.8	1:34	1:15.2	0:56.4	0:47	0:37.6	0:18.8	0:09.4	0:04.7
3:04	2:27.2	2:18	1:50.4	1:32	1:13.6	0:55.2	0:46	0:36.8	0:18.4	0:09.2	0:04.6
3:00	2:24	2:15	1:48	1:30	1:12	0:54	0:45	0:36	0:18	0:09	0:04.5
	2:20.8	2:12	1:45.6	1:28	1:10.4	0:52.8	0:44	0:35.2	0:17.6	0:08.8	0:04.4
					1:08.8	0:51.6	0:43	0:34.4	0:17.2	0:08.6	0:04.3

**Figure 14**

200 meters, then they start to tire out and slow down. Say your maximum speed is five meters per second, the very fastest that you can go, and four meters per second is your 1,000 meter race pace. You want to get up to four meters per second as quickly as possible. There are two reasons for this. The first is that for return on your investment, you get more from paddling the boat at four meters per second than you do at five. If you are at four and put as much power on the stroke as you can, you're still accelerating the boat. But if you're already at five, even if you put maximum power on you can't make the boat go any faster. That's the first reason for a fast start. I've heard others, too, but I don't know whether they're true or not. I've heard it said with the ATP-CP system, it's a "use it or lose it" syndrome, in that for the first five to ten seconds of the race you can put maximum energy into your pulling and it won't strain your lactic system or your aerobic system, as long as you drop off maximum right afterwards. You're not paying anything for it. You could either go slow off the line and be tired at the end or go fast off the line and be tired at the end! I've also heard it said that going off fast pulls your aerobic system into play faster. That's important because even more important than paddling at your maximum aerobic capacity is how quickly you can reach it. And lastly, a fast start is good for you psychologically. For people like me who appear to have really strong middles and ends to their races, it's not that they are going faster there, it's just that they are dropping off less than the others.

### Wake Riding

According to International Canoe Federation rules, wake riding is illegal in all but the 10,000m event. A boater can be disqualified for doing it, but it is done all the time and is a major factor in sprint racing.

Generally, Barton doesn't think much about riding anyone's wake in the 1,000m because it is very difficult to win a race by doing this: in order to ride wake, he would have to be two to three seconds behind, which would be hard to make up right at the end, so it is rare that someone can win a 1,000m race after wake riding, but people have won Olympic and World Championship silver and bronze medals by doing it. More typically, it is boaters who are the sixth, seventh, or eighth fastest in the race that can benefit from wake riding if they happen to draw a lane next to a fast boater.

*Once you get four to five seconds behind, if the leader is in the middle of his lane and you're in the middle of yours, you're going to hit his wake. And your choices are either to ride it or eat it. You can ride it and it will help you, or you can not ride it and it will hurt you. There is no middle ground. So the sensible thing to do is ride it. If you are counting on riding it, you can go slow off the start and catch it at the 150-meter mark and ride it for 850 meters, but if you go hard off the start, you may not catch it until the 700-meter mark and get to ride it for only 300 meters. So the thing to do is go easy off the start and be rested at the end so you can pull up a place or two at the finish. The other strategy is to go over to the side of your lane, right down the buoy line. Since wakes come off diagonally, being over on the side allows you to ride closer to the boat making the wake. It is illegal, but it is rarely enforced.*

## **The Barton Mold**

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Indeed, Barton believes the rules regarding wake riding should be made stricter. At present, the rules call wake riding "hanging." The rule says "it is forbidden to hang," and it goes on to say, "and no boat may be within five meters of another boat." But Greg believes the ICF is interpreting hanging simply as being within five meters of another boat. He points out that it is possible to hang and be further than five meters away, and that should be clamped down on.

*The ICF could police this better by making sure that people stay in the middle of their lanes. The lanes in most international races are nine meters wide. I think if it looks like a guy is purposefully going over to the side of his lane, and the guy in the next lane over is ahead of him, it should be assumed that the first guy is going over to ride wake. I think they should red flag it and throw him out. If somebody goes in the middle of his lane and still catches a wake, then that's just life. He can't just stop and let the wake pass him, but if he is in the middle of the lane, he has to be another one or two seconds back to catch the wake, and that greatly diminishes the benefit of the wake.*

### **Strategies in the 10,000m**

The 10,000m race is a tactical one and, unlike the 1,000m, where the person who can do the fastest 1,000m time trial would usually win, the fastest person often does not win the 10,000m. Wake riding (legal in the 10,000), paddling in packs of boats, and negotiating turns are all key.

*The start of a 10,000 is as fast as for a 1,000, or for some people, even faster. The 10,000 is a pack race and it is important to establish your position right away in the front pack if you want to do well. After that, after the first 1,000 meters, the pace slows way down. There are usually three packs. To win, you have to have a good position in the first pack. If you're back, getting bounced around in the wakes and people are crashing into you, it's all over for you as far as winning goes.*

Assuming you make the first pack, there are other considerations. In the early part of the race, all you need to do is be in the first pack, but sometimes the first pack splits and if you are at the end of the 20-boat pack, you're going to be left behind with no way to catch up. The best strategic point is to be one of the first few people in the first pack, including being the leader.

*It's true that the closer you are to the lead, the harder you have to work. You are constantly responding to other people trying to move up on you, but the leader is also in the best strategic position. In turns, the leader has the right of way. The rule says that as long as the leader's body is in front of the next guy's bow, the leader has the right of way, so he cannot be pinched off. He has total freedom to cut the buoy close on the turn and the followers sometimes even have to back off a bit to give him room. I generally like to be one of the first three boats. For one thing, I have the endurance to maintain a relatively higher pace throughout the race and still have enough left for a sprint at the end.*

The leader also has the option of weaving back and forth, thus making it harder for others to stay on his wake and thus possibly enabling him to break away for good.

### Turns

Being on the inside of a turn is riskier but faster while being on the outside is safer but slower. The inside has shorter distance, but you can get pinched off. If your bow is not up with the leader's body, he is allowed to cut you off and you may well have to stop paddling for a moment. The outside of the turn is safer, in that you always have a place to go; you cannot get boxed in. Being in the middle is the worst alternative of all, because you usually end up hitting paddles.

Coming out of the turn is as important as going into it, because a breakaway can be made there. Especially if you are attempting a breakaway going into the turn, you must continue to push it coming out of the turn, or the others will simply catch up again.

The last turn is the crucial one, because from there it is only 500m to the finish. Whatever position you have coming out of that turn is your position for the final straightaway. Here there are two basic strategies. One of them is to have the lead and try to hold on to it. The other is to try to come from behind by riding the leader. People have won from both positions.