

# Kayaking, Canoeing & Paddling Exercises

By Courtenay Schurman, MS, CSCS

You're probably already familiar with the phrase, "The best training for X is doing X," and that's certainly the case for paddling sports including rowing, kayaking, and canoeing. However, there are certain strengthening and stretching exercises pre-season and in season that you can include in your land-based training to help balance your body and increase your power, speed, endurance and performance in the boat.

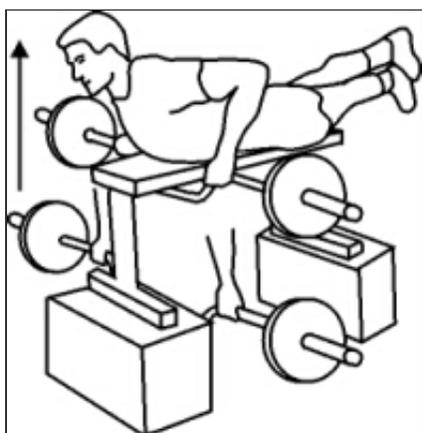
## SIMILARITIES AMONG PADDLING SPORTS

Most rowing and paddling endeavors rely heavily on strength endurance and integrity of the muscles involved around the shoulder joint, including the pulling muscles of the lats, rhomboids, and biceps, as well as the core muscles (abdominals and obliques, the muscles that allow us to rotate and twist through the torso) and forearms (involved in gripping). The muscles that tend to be undertrained or somewhat neglected are the pushing muscles, including the pectorals and triceps, the lower back muscles, crucial to core health and integrity, and the forearm extensors.

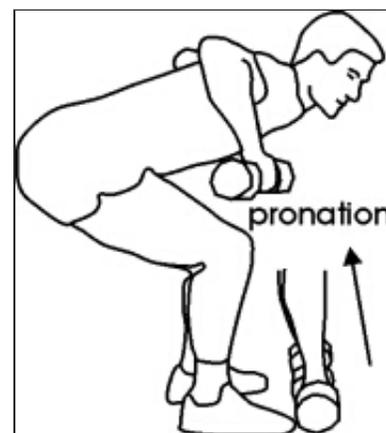
## PADDLING-SPECIFIC EXERCISES

The sample exercises below are ones you can include in pre-season programs for upper body power and strength to help you prepare for water training. As you get closer to race season and you are spending more time in the boat, you will want to decrease the volume (number of sets and repetitions you do each workout) during your strength training and supplement with pushing exercises (triceps dips, pushups, and so forth – see [www.bodyresults.com/e2pushups-pullups.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/e2pushups-pullups.asp) and also [www.bodyresults.com/e2nogym.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/e2nogym.asp) for ideas here) to prevent overuse in the muscles mentioned above.

### 1. **UPPER BODY PULL** – 2-Dumbbell Standing Rows OR Prone Barbell Bench Pulls



If you are affiliated with a rowing or paddling club that has a land-based training area (like many college crew teams), prone barbell bench pulls (left) may already be set up for you. If not, you will need a high bench or sturdy padded board with space underneath you to set up a barbell (see illustration) at arms' length so that you can pull directly into the chest. Otherwise, the "home" or dumbbell alternative, the 2-dumbbell standing row (right) is

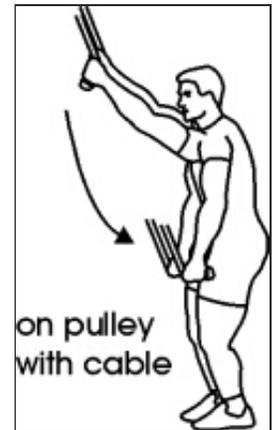


to stand with feet shoulder distance apart, lean forward with a flat back, slight bend in the knees, weight in the heels, and two dumbbells (palms facing thighs) or a barbell held in both

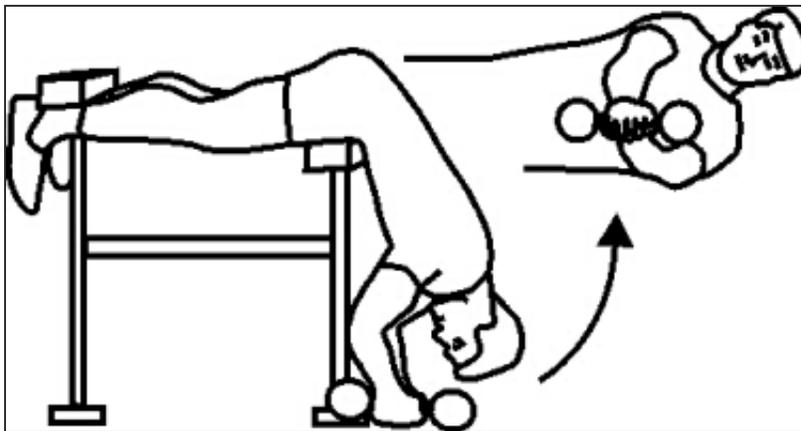
hands, and then on an exhale, pull the weight in toward your belly button. Off season, cycle through workouts where you are a) using lighter weight and completing more repetitions (for strength endurance) and b) performing more sets, using heavier weight, but fewer repetitions per set (for strength and power.)

## 2. **PADDLE DRIVE** – Straight Arm Standing Lat Pull Downs

To perform this exercise, stand with feet hip distance apart facing a cable stack loaded with light weight. Feel free to play around with attachments – pictured is a rope attachment, but you can also use a straight lat or “wobble” triceps bar depending on the position your hands will be in for your sport. Keep your abdominals tight, arms nearly straight but not locked in place, and body straight from shoulders to feet. Exhale as you bring the bar down in an arc to your thighs, and inhale as the bar returns to starting position. Keep a light, open grip on the bar to prevent pulling; concentrate on pushing instead. Avoid leaning forward excessively so that you can more effectively recruit the abdominals. Bending the elbows turns this exercise into a triceps exercise – one of the “pushing” options. To prevent any discomfort in the lower back, hold the abdominals tightly throughout and you can try staggering one foot in front of the other for a wider, more stable platform.



## 3. **TORSO ROTATION** – Seated Ball Oblique Twists (pictured at [www.bodyresults.com/e2medballs.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/e2medballs.asp)) AND Twisting Back Raises



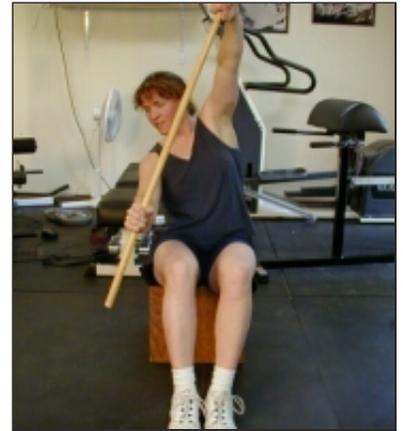
To strengthen the rotational muscles in the lower back and the obliques, you can use either a glute-ham bench or a 45-degree or 90-degree Roman Chair apparatus. Make sure you position yourself on the bench so that you can have as much range of motion through the hips as you can comfortably get. (Men may want to look for a bench with two hip pads and a narrow depression or cut-out in the middle, for obvious reasons!) Let the torso hang down toward the floor, and position your hands at

your lower back, across the chest, behind the head, or hanging straight down below your shoulders with one weight clasped in both hands. Exhale as you lift the torso upward and twist arms and body to one side, just until your trunk is even with your legs, then return to the bottom and come up to the other side, alternating back and forth. It is a good idea to start with straight back raises (no twists) first to be sure you have an appropriate level of lower back strength and endurance, then include the twists unweighted, before adding resistance. Avoid hyperextending the back (coming up too high) and if you have had any history of serious back injury, be sure to check with your health care provider before adding this exercise.

## 4. **SHOULDER ENDURANCE** -- Seated BB Shoulder Figure 8's

A creative option to strengthen the smaller muscles in the shoulders, as well as the trunk and forearms, is a dry-land paddling exercise perfect for kayaking and canoeing. Sit on a box or bench with legs together or extended out in front of you. Hold onto a Bodybar (5-10 pounds) or very light barbell, a dowel with a light ankle weight or “weight donut” firmly secured to each end, or you can simply hold onto two paddles for a little added resistance. Build up to being able to “air row” for 3-5 minutes per set. In order to provide resistance, attach your paddle or dowel to a light cable stack or theraband firmly affixed to a vertical pole not too far in front of you and work each side of the body at a time before setting up on the other side.

Keep in mind that therabands will give you the most resistance at the back, instead of the front as in paddling, so cables (where the weight stays constant at start and finish) will be your best bet if you can figure out a setup that will work for you. With resistance, this exercise turns into more of a "Paddle Drive"



## ADDITIONAL HELPFUL BODY RESULTS LINKS

Take a look at some of the following Body Results web pages for ideas of exercises described elsewhere that you might want to include in your land program:

- For Core training: see <http://www.bodyresults.com/e2medballs2.asp> and also [www.bodyresults.com/E2medballs.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/E2medballs.asp)
- For rowing-specific program ideas: see [www.bodyresults.com/s2rowideas.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/s2rowideas.asp) & [www.bodyresults.com/s2rowpolygon.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/s2rowpolygon.asp)
- For Grip and Upper Body training ideas (although this was written for climbers, there are good ideas included for all sports involving upper body strength and endurance): [www.bodyresults.com/e2upperstrengthrock.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/e2upperstrengthrock.asp)
- For Rotator Cuff training: [www.bodyresults.com/e2rotatorcuff.asp](http://www.bodyresults.com/e2rotatorcuff.asp)