

A few days after the lightweight men's rowers won a Gold medal at the Olympics, someone said to me, "They must be on something", I was a little bit irritated and curtly replied "Yes, an Olympic training programme".

As soon as a squad, team or individual becomes successful, lay people start to doubt the hard work and effort that goes into this type of achievement. They start sniffing around for a rogue secret to that success, looking for the products or supplements that delivered the result, so that they too may buy these products and become successful. I was asked to write about the developments in Physiotherapy products and reveal some of the secrets that helped get our rowers to the Olympics.

If you looking for secrets its' going to be a short article, if you are looking for some possible explanations, I might have a few credible ones.

If you came to the hpc on a Monday morning at 7am, you had just missed the rowing "Anthrop" at the ISR with Jimmy. The rowing week started before most of us had eaten breakfast.

On a Friday afternoon at 5pm if you were in the vicinity of the hpc parking lot you would see the rowers completing a 10km running time trial, very few non rowers saw this.

On a Saturday morning when most of us were watching Jake White's Brumbies play in the Super15, the rowers were completing another rowing session at Roodeplaat. Some rowers still think Jake is coaching the BOKS, that is how many rugby seasons they are behind.

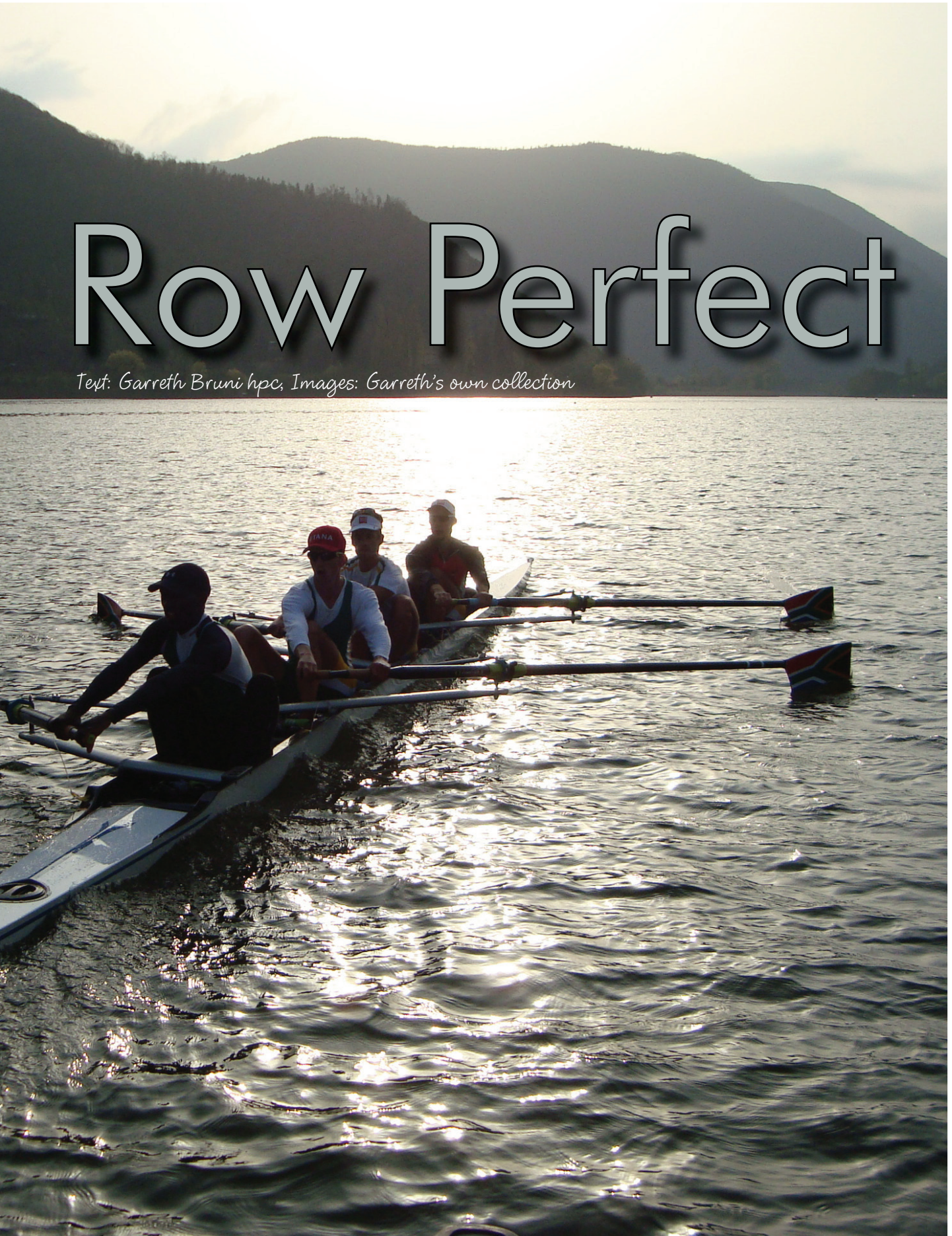
There is nothing holy about Sunday if you row. You row on Sunday too.

A few months ago a rower asked me if he can book a session on Friday.



Row Perfect

Text: Garreth Bruni hpc, Images: Garreth's own collection





I told him it was Good Friday the coming Friday, but he didn't seem to understand. I explained the concept of Easter and long weekends and public holidays. That I was part of the public and that he too, being a member of the public was entitled to a break. I was told promptly that the Swiss and the Danes would probably be training and that the Egyptians and Moroccans don't celebrate these holidays and would be training too. If the competition is training, then we should train too, if they not, then we can get one session ahead of them I was told. Imagine me explaining that the coming Monday was also a public holiday.

Most training days had three sessions consisting of rowing, gym and ergo or an alternate like a run. Sunday being the Sabbath usually only had a rowing session, I think because the gym was closed.

So they trained hard every session, looking to improve, to better their times, better their performance and to better the overall result. If you train three times a day at a high intensity, you will be sore. You will be tired. The physio sessions were applicable here. They came for regular massages and dry needling sessions during the hectic training schedule. Regular specific stretches and exercises were the norm. We tried to stop pain from becoming an injury. If you train with pain, your technique suffers and your injury risk is elevated. I think this was the biggest contribution physiotherapy made towards their success, preventing pain from becoming an injury.

We didn't screen for injuries using a fancy 3D injury screening tool, rather we evaluated the individual and the reason for their pain and treated it

accordingly. Their training was sometimes modified accordingly and alternative sessions implemented until they were able to train pain free.

This is not to say that they were completely injury free. The volume and load they were doing coupled to the intensity and the competition for selection meant that sometimes they rowed through pain and into injury. Sometimes freak accidents did occur which caused injuries. Once again there were no secrets in the treatment of their injuries, simple manual hands on physiotherapy techniques like massage, stretching, cryotherapy, myofascial release; spinal mobilisations, joint mobilisations, dry needling and ultrasound were used. We didn't use any magic physio tape or soothing heal all plasters. They

didn't wear a bracelet to accelerate healing or to improve balance. There were no expensive heal all machines the sales representatives wanted us to purchase. We didn't have the tools or cutting edge equipment of the Australians or British. We didn't need them. We don't need them. On a rowing tour to Italy this year, Luffhansa chose to send my bag on a solo trip around the world. This meant I didn't have a change of clothes or our physio bag. The Italian village we were stationed in didn't have a chemist. We couldn't buy anything that was in the physio bag. I was stuck wearing the same clothes I had left South Africa in. But we made a plan.

Four days later when the bags arrived, the only thing that changed was the massage oil and the distinctive odour in the room. I stopped using the extra virgin olive oil to massage and got a change of clothes. If we had been the Australians with their reliance on Hi-Tech machines, nifty recovery products, gimmicky tapes and aircraft aluminium plinth, our tour would have been in shambles, instead it carried on unaffected.

For me, the success came from the athletes seeing the value of all that was being done around them. They saw the value of their training programme, the coaches input,

the gym work, the core exercises, the sport science, the stretching, the good nutrition, the physio. All these things added value to their training. But I think TRAINING is the SECRET that everybody is after. The training is hard to do and most easily overlooked. Companies can't sell you hard training, they can only sell you products and that is why they market products as if they will make you successful. If you train like a schoolboy, you will perform like a schoolboy. If you train like an Olympian, you will perform like an Olympian.

hpc | physiotherapists

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General sports physiotherapy practice which also offer:

Biomechanical Analysis

- Functional movement analysis to identify :
 - muscle length- and strength imbalances
 - movement impairments
 - areas at risk for injury
- Correction of the above and injury prevention
- Stretching programmes
- Strengthening programmes
- Identification of incorrect muscle recruitment patterns with correction

Massage

Includes sports, pre-event, recovery & pregnancy
Massage therapist also available

Individual and group Pilates classes

Rehabilitation which improves:

- Posture
- Strengthens stabilisers
- Flexibility
- Circulation
- Skill-based conditioning

Spinal alignment and postural correction

