

Suggested Abandonment Protocol for Head of the River Races.

Introduction: Weather conditions, even today, are unpredictable and race organisers have to avoid optimism that allows them to think that things will improve. Decisions must be made as early as possible. Events can be abandoned in the days before the race, on the day of the race, when crews are on the water before the race starts, and immediately before the race when crews are in the marshalling areas and of course, during the race.

This protocol is directed at abandonment when crews are in the marshalling areas and during the race, which would have similar procedures. The objective is to return crews to their boating area safely and quickly. A strong line must be taken against crews which disregard this protocol and attempt to race or row through the conditions or hazards.

Decision Making:

1. It is essential that once an abandonment has been decided, control of the return procedures must be controlled by one person, preferably the Chief Marshal. The Chief Marshal would instruct the marshals on the scene to implement the turning and returning of crews to their boating area.
2. Radio nets must be organised to enable clear emergency management communication. The Chief Marshal must rely on the judgement of marshals at the scene to inform his decisions. They are the only ones able to implement the procedure, but if they have a clear set of principles then all will know what is going on and their part when it is their turn.
3. There should be lead marshal in each marshalling area who will communicate with the Chief Marshal to relay conditions, the progress of returning etc and lead the other marshals in the returning procedure etc. No procedure can cover all eventualities, but if the basic procedure set out below is followed, there should be more clarity and an effective return for crews.
4. Events use many launch-based umpires along the course. These should be familiar with an abandonment procedure as they would play a major role in shepherding returning crews. Here, the ability to communicate with marshals both on and off the water is of paramount importance and it is at this level that the organisation of the recovery operation will succeed or fail.

Procedure for returning crews.

The basic principle for abandonment must be that crews at the downstream end of the marshalling area should return first.

Situation One Race is abandoned

1. Strict Radio silence, apart from priority communications with the Chief Marshal, or an emergency.
2. Crews above Chiswick Bridge are held.
3. Crews already racing down must stop, drift and proceed down only if Marshals consider it is safe for them to proceed past any incident or through rough water.
4. If it is not safe to proceed down, marshals turn them to join the marshalling crew and their boating base is downstream of the marshal.
5. If it is not safe to proceed down, or they are upstream based, marshals must turn them to join the marshalling crews in the safety of the bank.

Situation Two At this stage, all crews should be stationary and under the surveillance of marshals.

When it is clear for crews to return, the following order should be followed.

Stage one - Marshalling area below Barnes Bridge.

1. Marshals should turn crews from Putney and Hammersmith starting at the bottom end of the area, working up.
2. Marshals and umpires in the Hammersmith area would control safe turning into the boathouses at Hammersmith and St. Paul's.
3. Other crews would move up. Middx crews for Barnes clubs could move up and disembark.
4. When marshals are satisfied that area below Barnes Bridge is clear of crews moving downstream, a release can be given by the Chief Marshal to marshals above Barnes to let their crews start moving.

Stage Two - Marshalling Above Barnes Bridge.

1. Marshals should repeat the procedure, turning crews for Hammersmith and Putney, allowing crews for Chiswick area boathouses to move up.
2. Once the Middx. Crews for Barnes have disembarked, the turning should be stopped by the Chief Marshal to allow the Surrey crews for Barnes to cross. With a clear river, this could be done very quickly with crews crossing together.

3. When the river is clear, the turning above Barnes could resume. This rolling process would continue until all Putney and Hammersmith crews below Chiswick have turned.
4. Crews for Barnes should then turn.
5. Crews for Chiswick would move up to the boathouses.

Stage Three - Marshalling Above Chiswick Bridge

1. Where possible crews should be allowed to return to MAA, QBC PTRC, UL and TSS. Even during stages one and two,
2. All crews in the centre division should be sent down, well-spaced to allow crews to turn into boathouses, followed by crews from Hammersmith and Putney from the other divisions. Crews for Barnes should then follow and Chiswick Crews should then follow.

This Strategy would allow the Surrey Bank to be cleared so that crews could return down the Surrey bank in case of rough water.

Returning crews: In the case of abandonment during the race there will be the added problem of crews returning upstream from Putney into a possibly confused situation. Crews who have completed the course and need to return to boathouses above Putney should be held at Putney if crews coming down are being told to stay on the Surrey bank.

Principles of This Strategy It is a strategy which could form the basis on which the decisions of the marshals, on the day, could be made. A clear understanding of the principles involved, with clear leadership and control would allow the marshals to use their skills and experience to ensure the safest and most effective return of crews. Of course, each set of circumstances would be different but if there is an agreed basic strategy, marshals would be able to modify as circumstances demanded.

The Head of the River Races have very similar marshalling procedures and use essentially the same teams of marshals, so a basically similar procedure would be more beneficial than separate ones. Cooperation and consultation between the events has increased recently and should continue and increase.

Aftercare: There will be wet cold and miserable crews, some separated from their support teams and dry clothing and any overall strategy for abandonment does require a procedure for identifying and locating clubs that can be assembly or feeding points whilst crews and belongings are re-united.

Additional points from comments received which may not be appropriate for this protocol, but perhaps should be incorporated in briefings or instructions.

1. Post codes of likely casualty landing points should be identified to Ambulance providers with post code – their navigation systems apparently depend on post codes.
2. The procedure for stopping racing crews along the course.
3. Keeping the area in front of ULBC clear of marshalling crew (as with PTRC MAA and QBC to allow rapid disembarkation.
4. Some form of indication of crews boating area to enable marshals to see where they need to return to.