Another View from Westlake

Text and photos by Steve Max

When you're half a boat-length behind in a rowing race, how do you become successful? Is it luck? Is it something that's learned or something you're born with? Or is it an innate longing to be ahead, even when it demands more from you than is comfortable?

Yvan Honorat has, by all accounts, been successful. A rowing member of the four- and doubles- Canadian national teams, he has World Championship and World Rowing Cup medals to show for it. He was in Canada's 'men's four' that began the streak of international gold medals which have extended through many years and counting. He has coached at all levels - junior, senior, masters, and always taken his teams to their own pinnacles of success. It was no surprise, then, when he sought another level of achievement, to be a Rowing National Head Coach.

"I was a fellow coach and member of the Canadian national team and I was happy in Vancouver, but I had a bigger vision. I want to do something different and I did it. I was the first National coach for Palestine with the goal to bring the first Palestinian rowers on start line during the Olympics in Atlanta."

The years of training and racing at the elite level racing haven't left Yvan, and you can feel it in his presence. In my mind's eye, I can see him bringing all of his crews to their fullest potential with the confidence that comes from the experience only a few hundred rowers each year get: sitting on the starting line of an international race.

When I ask him where he developed his approach to coaching his response goes back to the beginning. "I got my feet wet coaching at every level. After rowing in Montreal, I decided very quickly I wanted to go to the Olympics. After graduation, I wasn't fast enough, so I did what any athlete does: I trained more and more. I trained in the morning, at night, during the weekends and holidays. It never stopped. This intensity of training takes years off your body. After 15 years or so you need to plan ahead and move onto something else, like coaching if you still have the 'fire' in you and you have the passion of teaching."

"What I learned from coaching at different levels is that you have to know your athletes, you have to know what they want. Each level has its own goals. You have to coach according to their goals." I had to ask him for more details. "The masters want to be pushed, but they also want to enjoy seeing the sunrise on the water. This is what is important to them, they want it all, and this is a great thing, it is their thing. You don't have the same priorities at 16 years old!"

"Being the first official coach for Palestine opened many doors for me (no coach in the world had wanted to take the risk of getting involved for fear of stigma). I travelled a lot at the request of federations who were looking for a national coach who was not afraid to get involved and especially to have results. After Africa, the Middle East, North America and Europe, here I am in Vietnam in Hanoi."

"I arrived in Vietnam without looking for anything. I just wanted to row to keep in shape. I met Mr Nguyen, the president of Ho Tay rowing club on West Lake. We connected right away. We have the same vision of the world of rowing. I had an incredible chance to meet this extraordinary man. He asked me if I wanted to help him train at the club, my answer was a clear YES. Since then, I have worked with masters, seniors, beginners and Juniors. Each group has a recreational and competitive section."

"Here everything is a challenge when you do not speak the language. So I became an expert at body gesture and mimicry of rowing. An additional teaching skill to my credit." He jokes

"Rowers in all categories are training better every day. We are starting to talk about competing in several international events starting in 2020. We will be present at the West Lake Regatta in April 2020. It will be the first experience for a few rowers, that will give them the Spirit of competition."

If you are interested in getting involved, get in touch! Contact: FB: Ho Tay Boat House
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