

## **Mahé on his beginnings and the rise of Rowing NZ**



**The 2014 Halberg awards speech you had along with that wonderful [video about passion](#). It is so inspiring. Can you tell me the story behind that project?**

I was actually very happy to be asked to do it. Obviously I didn't do all the editing, I just did the text. And I was really happy with how it came out. Of course, to really understand it you almost need to be a New Zealander, there is a lot of history inside there. You know Sir Edmund Hillary on the Everest and the gold medal of our eight at the 1972 Olympics, Waddell...

**Let us now go to the very beginning of your rowing career. How was Mahé as a junior, perhaps in the days when Waddell was winning in Sydney?**

I started rowing at university when I was 18, just for fun. Then I would row for a couple of years and sort of gave up, I thought was too much, didn't have time for all that. But then watching the Sydney Olympics and [Rob Waddell wining the single](#), I really thought I want to go to the Games and win a gold medal as well. So that's what got me back in the boat. I was lucky with timing, because New Zealand didn't have any rowers, everyone had retired after Sydney. I was not at any kind of national standard. Now I would not have a chance to get in if I was at the same level I was in 2001. They didn't have anyone and were looking for development, so they picked an eight. Later on it turned out that 5 of those guys have represented New Zealand at the Olympics and two of them have won gold.

**When you watched Waddell win the single scull in Sydney. Did you feel a wish, a dream or were you feeling right from that moment you could do the same and win yourself too?**

It was a motivation, it was a dream. I always wanted to go to the Olympics. But also felt I could do it. I thought he was about the same size as me, two arms, two legs, he was a Kiwi... So if he can do it why can't I do it? Obviously, getting the chance to be part of the NZ team, all living and training together was a huge advantage.

**So your development as an athlete and the growth of [Rowing NZ](#) was somehow contemporary?**

Yes, it was. What happened since Sydney is huge. It has all become a big wave now. In 15 years NZ has grown to be the strongest rowing nation in the world. In Sydney we had Rob Waddell win his gold. In Athens we had the Evers-Swindell sisters winning gold, they were the next ones who carried on. And we were the developing athletes. But from 2005 we started winning medals as well. That was really the start of the success of Rowing NZ. In 2005 the government started putting a lot of money in high performance sport. And as we were successful we were the best funded program of any sport in NZ. Among the Olympic sports with rowing, cycling and sailing we get very strong founding, but now also equestrian, athletics, kayaking with Lisa Carrington are getting more and more money and are the tier 1 sports as we call it. We have promised 5 medals in London and we delivered. So until you keep performing in this system you keep the good funding.

**Also the training system Rowing NZ is using and the centralized program is part of these changes?**

Yes, that too started in 2001. First, they moved the senior squad to a centralized program. Then, in 2005 they brought in the U23 and the junior team as well. So from then on everyone has been based on lake Karapiro

and it is a very competitive system. We are always competing, especially with crews of similar speed. So I race with the women's double, we are similar speed and we train together every day. The competition then lifts the standard. Just surviving this grueling routine makes you tough already.

**The whole infrastructure you have at lake Karapiro has also changed a lot since the beginning I believe?**

Yes, that is one more thing High Performance Sport NZ has done for us. They have paid for a lot of the infrastructure we are currently using. Now we have a huge building with all our boats, the administrators upstairs, the massage rooms, the physios, weight room, ergs...everything is in one building right by the lake. It is really easy now, you finish your session and you go do your weights, see the physio, see the management - it is all there set for you. And we all live close around there.

**However, on the other side, you have to be there. The only way for a NZ rower to do it is to be part of the system?**

Yeah, you can't do your own thing. What it does, is to reinforce the competition. You know where the standard is, who is doing well and who is not, so you continually try to improve. It is a very successful system. I think it is sustainable. The U23's are coming through nicely. Like the eight for example. They have been U23 world champions twice and now in the elite team they are closing up to the best in the world. We have started with the small boats; we just got bigger and bigger and had to start looking to building the bigger boats. To give an opportunity for more talents to get in the elite team and get to race. Now that we have built all the possible boats, it is going to be harder. Nowhere more to grow. So in turn the U23 team hasn't been so successful the past two years because we used a lot of talent for the elite team. With time that will change and in turn create even more competition at all the levels – the junior, the U23 and the elite. So I think we have a really good systems in place to keep the quality and keep developing and it is all sustainable. If you are in NZ and you want to win an Olympic medal, rowing is the best opportunity. It is our most successful sport, winning 5 medals in London – out of a total 13 for NZ – and in Rio we hope to win the same number if not more.

**It is an amazing rise of a sport system anyhow we put it.**

Yes. You know in NZ after Sydney we were the best in the country but we were rubbish internationally. But the luck we had was that we always had someone that was either an Olympic champion or a World Champion to compare ourselves to. Rob Waddell was the benchmark for the Ever-Swindells. Ever-Swindells were the benchmark for us. And now we are becoming the benchmark for the younger generation.

Therefore, you always had someone who was at the top. So a young athlete knows he is 2 or 3 or even more percent behind the top guys. Every week he can check that. So he knows if he is progressing, he can make a goal for himself to improve for say 0,5 percent over a particular period on our tables and he will see he is getting closer and closer. And when he gets there with the percentages, he knows he can win the big race. So that's really the key to the system.

**What about coaching? Do you manage to keep this rate of growth and development of the squad at the level of coaching stuff?**

Well that's always the struggle. I think developing a coach takes time, coaches also need years to learn and grow. However, with the rate of our expansion we need more and more of them. Also with the successes we have become a target for other nations regarding coaches. We have lost a few coaches overseas. Maybe in NZ they were just crew coaches and got offered a head coach position. Nevertheless, for them it is about learning and growing and hopefully we get them back one day. However, when you loose a coach like that it is not easy because you have to bring someone in to replace him. It is something we are managing well, but I wouldn't say we have a lot of excess coaches.

## **Mahé on racing, winning and his rivals**



**If you weren't a rower, what kind of sport would you choose? Can you imagine yourself in any other sport?**

I think probably golf. I love my golf. It is something I certainly enjoy.

**Not some kind of grueling sport like cycling maybe?**

Probably I would love to be a cyclist, but I don't have the physique. However, it is something I enjoy doing for my training quite a lot. Doing some kayaking as well!

**In Athens you were 5th in the four and then in Beijing the big struggle with the sickness. Clearly, you deserved to win, you were ready to win. Was it just sheer toughness to manage to grab a medal in that circumstances?**

It was hard, yes. I got a stomach bug in Beijing. It was one of those things that come and happen. When I reviewed it afterwards I wasn't prepared for something like that to happen. I was very good and I set myself the goal of winning, probably I was even doing enough to win. But I was probably not doing as much as I possibly could do. That was probably the one thing that I was disappointed with myself after Beijing. I felt I was not as good as I could be. As world champion, it kind of covered up all the little problems that I had. It was not a question of motivation, it was a question of being honest with yourself. Yes, I was winning, but I wasn't doing enough to be the best I could possibly be. I got sick in Beijing, you can't really control that, people get sick. It was just very unfortunate; I lost 5 kilos during the week of the race. And I was only a second or so from winning. So I thought, had I done all those little things, I could probably get sick and still win. That was really hard to take. But it was also a very important lesson for London.

I had to make sure, if I was going to London, I would do all the little things and be as good as I could be. And that was exactly what I did do. 2009 was a perfect year for me. I set the world's best time by 2 seconds. That was really the start for me saying I am not only going for the win, I am going to be out there on the start and be the best I can possibly be.

From then on I got really bad luck. In 2010 I hurt my back, I had a disc injury and that led on to arthritis. I had to change all my training so now I do only one row per day just to protect my back. In the morning I would row and in the afternoon I go for bike rides or make gym. Just to allow my back to recover. Then I had 2 bike crashes and one of them was 6 weeks before the Olympics. I could not row for 3 weeks. I could really say it wasn't an ideal build up.

But because of the preparation and because of my aim to be as good as I possibly could be, I was able to overcome these things. While Beijing was difficult to take, it thought me you need to always make sure you are the best you can possibly be when you go out here. And if you do that there is a lot of things you can overcome. There was a lot of obstacles I had to overcome, but I was able to still win at the end. It was pretty satisfying.

**When you crossed the finish line in London, what was your first thought?**

To be honest in [London](#) the first thought was relief. I was just so happy to have finally done it. It was the one thing in my career missing. I had a very successful career but the Olympic gold was still missing. So relief was the first thought for a couple of seconds. And then just elation. It was an awesome experience, as I knew what I had put in for that one race.

**All the tiredness and the stress came after you?**

Yes, I just collapsed after the race once I got to the pontoon. You are absolutely shattered after a final like that. It was a very very tough race. Everybody was just laying around on that pontoon, just completely spent. In that race I have taken a big risk with 500 meters to go. I just put in all the energy into my strokes 500 meters to go, knowing I only had power for a 250 meters at that intensity. But thought if it was hurting me, it would be hurting Ondřej Sinek even more. So it was an interesting race, normally the rating is going up all the way to the finish line. But in this race with an early kick, for us both the rating was going lower and lower towards the finish line and you could see everyone else closing on us.

**Who do you think will be the biggest challengers for you in Rio?**

Well I would say Ondřej Synek has been my biggest challenger throughout my career. This year he hasn't been as good as he can be and I still expect him to be fast this year. And I think Ángel Fournier from Cuba. He is really coming on and in this Olympic cycle he has won medals at all the World Championships. I think he can be a threat in Rio. There's a lot of other guys, but those will be the two I am really watching. You still have to sort of see what is going on around you because you never really know who is coming. We had Alan Campbell winning a medal in Luzerne. We had a Belorussian sculler winning a medal in the Varese world cup. You never really know what's coming but I think Ángel and Ondřej are the guys I am going to watch closely.

## **Mahé on training**



**This brings us to training. How does an athlete like you in a grueling physical sport approach the sessions?**

It is a lot of training. We do train 11 month per year, 6 days a week. And we usually do 2 sessions a day. So for me it is rowing in the morning and a cycle in the afternoon, maybe weights once or twice per week.

**You do much weights?**

Sometimes we do it sometimes not. This year we did it twice per week. Because in cycling I loose so much upper body strength. This year we did it to build my body strength and keep it. In addition, we use kayaking for that.

**Your back doesn't hurt in a kayak?**

Actually not. I lean a bit forward and the rotation is good for my back. That is something I have really enjoyed. I have always done a bit of kayaking in my life so picked it up fairly quickly. I use a ski or a proper K1.

**How many of your sessions are high intensity?**

Not that many. In a week we would generally do two sessions at a very high intensity. And we do around 12 sessions per week normally. 10 of them are aerobic sessions and 2 are high intensity sessions. Usually that would be a race of some sort, a 5 kilometer or an 8 kilometer piece. So long distance races most of the year. However, at this time of the year those 2 sessions might be 1000 or 500 meter races or a minute on/minute off type of sessions. [Dick Tonks](#), my coach, very much believes in the mantra 'miles make champions'.

**A bit the [Arthur Lydiard](#) way?**

Yes, exactly, very much the way Lydiard had put it out. So very long stuff. But as I have said, it is all very competitive. It is long but it is not slow. It's always hard and we are pushing each other to go even harder. We normally race at 36 to 38 strokes per minute but we would set ourselves at 22 strokes per minute and just going long and hard at these sessions. So an aerobic pace is like 80% of the race pace. That is definitely not slow, we are pushing it. A lot of people just row, we never just row, when we are in the boat we push hard.

**So even the long sessions are pretty damn intense I see. How does the body adapt to it?**

The aim of it all is to go as hard as you can, but still be able to do well the hard intensity sessions. And of course also to be able to make it to the end of the week. So you want to be able to do it every single day. At the end of the week, yes, you are tired and towards the end of the week you might struggle to keep the speeds. But you don't want to drop these speed too much. At the beginning when I was starting I could only

make it to Tuesday. But you learn and it pushes you to get those speeds as relaxed and as easily as you can. And that becomes important in a race too, to stay composed and relaxed also when the body is getting very tired.

With the volume of top class crews we have, it is also easy to build training groups. The men's light weight four trains with the women's eight. There is like 10 seconds difference between their world record times. The lightweight women's double trains with the lightweight men single sculls. And I train with the women's double. So the women's singles train alone, it is a bit like the men's eight, they have no one of similar speed.

### **How do you measure quality in training?**

We have a special GPS on our boat and it tells us anything we need to know. A very accurate GPS that gets the stroke to stroke differences. We use that for analysis after training, but I also use another one in the boat to give me real time data to use during the session. The down part of all that, is that it doesn't take into account the wind, the currents and the waves. But you get to learn and you know what you should be getting out of the session independently from the conditions.

### **Is there a big difference between winter and summer speeds?**

Yeah, definitely. The warmer the water the faster you go. But we never have winter, because when there is winter in NZ we are here in Europe and so it is summer again. I never had a real winter since 2001.

### **What is your program based around? Around the two intensity sessions, around the volume you want to achieve, or...?**

It is mainly based on the volume. While the hard sessions mainly take care of themselves. The aerobic sessions are the more important sessions but the intensity sessions are when you have the whole squad together. We race and our times are compared with the world record pace in the respective classes. So we get a percentage, that is comparable among classes. And that gets put on the board. So you get to know where do you stand, how much back you are. So on any distance you get an X percent of world record. There might be front wind or tail wind, it doesn't matter because now you can compare your performance to the other crews performance in percentages. So because of the amount of crews we have, the conditions become irrelevant. And we have the luck to always have had at least one boat to be absolute top class, an Olympic champion or a World Champ. First it was Waddell, then the Evers-Swindells, now we have many top crews at any moment. Even right here on lake Bohinj with just a part of the whole squad present, we still have 4 gold medal crews and you know somebody is going to go fast.

### **Would you say you use a lot of science in your training, lots of analysis, or is it more based on feelings and the confidence in the methods you use?**

I think for me it is more about feeling and confidence. You know when you feel good and a lot of that is coming from the sessions we do together. So if you are topping the prognostics you know you are doing pretty well. So this year I know I am doing well because I am consistently on top of the prognostics. Well for men at least, because this year we have the women doing exceptionally well. Zoe for example did a world's best time in the lightweight W1x a few weeks ago in Varese and she is only 19 years old. Moreover, we could predict that from the charts at home along with some other women crews. So you sort of always know how you are going to do on the races. The only problem could be that everyone is doing badly and the predictions are wrong all across the board, but you hope that won't be the case because we have so many numbers.

But most of all it gives you a big confidence. When we saw at the Olympics the double win and then the pair has also won... Makes you think you were right there on the prognostics with them, so you know you should be able to win too! Therefore, these charts raise the competitiveness but also rise the team spirit and the confidence in ourselves.

### **Do you have any favorite sessions, sessions you know that help you particularly, or sessions you like to do when the boat isn't running well?**

I think as I get older I really enjoy the aerobic sessions. That's where I get my good feelings and my consistency. And I know that kind of training is going to transfer into my racing. While a lot of speed work brings me down too much. It makes me really tired. Like 500's or minute on with a minute off or bungees

on the boat, they are really useful, but if we do more than 2 or 3 in a week I start to struggle a lot. It is a bit the age, because I never used to suffer this much with those. So definitely the aerobic sessions is where I feel good and feel I can still benefit from them.

**That was also a question I got for you from Iztok Čop (*author's note: Slovenian ex rower, multiple Olympic and World champion, has won his last Olympic medal at the age of 40*), he wanted to know if lately you adjusted your training program to your experience and to your age. Because he had to towards the end of his career...**

Yes, I think I did. But basically I have no control of my program. It is all Dick. He tells us every morning what are we going to do and we do it. No weekly or monthly plan he gives us. And we are fine with that. He controls that and the only thing I have control on is what I do on the bike. So this year I have done a little bit less volume on the bike and it has allowed me to row a little bit better in the mornings as I wasn't so tired.

**So a little bit less volume and a little bit less intensity? And you are going as fast as ever before?**

Yes, yes, exactly. Although on the bike it was a little less volume but more intensity. So rather than 5 hours I was doing like 4 hours but a bit harder....

**I hear you did bike all the way to Soča and upstream from there?**

Oh yes, I did Sorica mountain pass and then down to Soča and up to Tolmin and back to Most na Soči where we took the train back to here. And the other weekend with the lightweight men we went to Kranjska Gora and up the Vršič mountain pass (*author's note: that is 154km for the round trip, Vršič pass being 1750m a.s.l.*). That was a 5 hours ride! And then another 4 hour ride on Monday with Iztok Čop...

**So that's your cross training? A lot of bike, some gym...any corrective exercises or prevention work?**

Yes. A lot of bike, some gym once or twice per week, a bit of kayaking. And then the corrective exercises, I always have to do them for my back and lots of stretching.



## **Mahé on technique**



### **Talking about technique it always comes down to efficiency, doesn't it?**

Absolutely! So for me efficiency comes down to judging your speed to your heart rate. Speed is always number one. And obviously the next thing is rating. If your rating 24 but you are getting the speeds you wanted with a rating of 20 that tells you something. Some days you hit the speeds easily and sometimes you have to work hard for that. It is all about listening to your body and learning how to get that easy feeling every day. And that's what is important in a race too. Everyone on the start line is fit, but if you can get a little bit more run out of your boat or achieve it more easily, then you can win. So training is all about getting more and more consistent at getting that efficient stroke. Every athlete is going through ups and downs. This season for me was really good, everything seems in place, but I also had bad times and you have to get through tough times as well. It's part of the game.

### **How do you work on your technique? You obsess with it? Lots of video? Or, as you said before, you simply trust it will come together with training?**

It is more a feeling. We don't do technique sessions as such. You are always working on technique. Obviously, you know your weaknesses and always working on improving on those. I guess our program is very much based on fitness. We try to be the fittest athletes in the world. I think that gives you a lot of consistency because on your bad days you are still pretty good.

The thing with technique is that there are many ways to do it, but there are some key things one should never miss. How you put up the boat, how you move the boat... A lot of that has to do with timing and feel. Moreover, it is not all about how it looks like. I am certainly not a technical example by any means of imagination. But I don't think many coaches in the world are going to show me how to row or tell me how I do it is wrong. A lot of people could spot a lot of mistakes in my technique, but I believe I do well a lot of key things. That would be the catch and using all my power between the catch and the exit. I always put as much power on the oar as I possibly can with a long water time and a good recovery phase. That sort of things.



I believe it is like this with all the top athletes. Nobody is looking perfect but they all do the key things well. Maybe if I rowed technically perfect I wouldn't be fast. It just feels natural for me the way I do it. Everybody needs to find a way that feels good and natural for them. When you are young it is very important to focus on technique. But when you are on a certain level it is very dangerous for someone to try and change your technique too much. You don't want to work on how it looks like but rather the key things only. Dick said it a number of times: "It's not a dressage competition, it is about how fast you go!" And I think for most NZ crews that's true, they don't look technically perfect, but they go very fast.

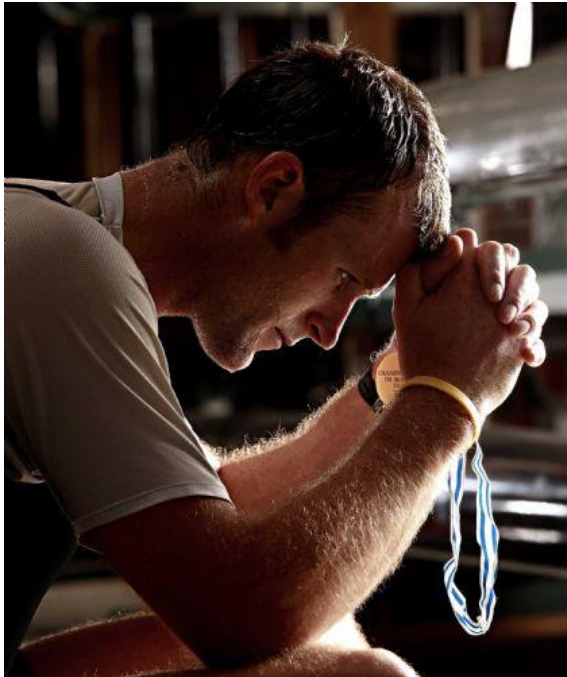
**Do you think the sheer volume helps to cover the eventual technical mistakes or does it polish the technique?**

I think in some ways it just polishes those key things. As I said, it doesn't matter how it looks like, it is about what happens to the blade, the timing, the run. Those are the key things and when you do a lot of volume you have to do those things right to survive.

**Except when you had that back injury?**

Yes, I had to adjust my technique around that injury. And that took a lot of time. It took me at least a year to make the change and still keep the speed. It was about posture and it was about the way that I finish the stroke. At the finish of the stroke I pretty much collapsed in my back and that was putting a lot of load on to the disc. So now I am more upright, I don't lean back as far and I finish earlier in the stroke. I set the world record doing it the old way, I haven't reached that standard yet since then, but I think I am getting there now.

## **Mahé's philosophy**



### **6:33 is the world record. Where do you think you are now?**

Well it obviously depends from the outside conditions as you know. Being an outdoor sports you need to wait for the perfect conditions. But I think I could go very close to that now. That has taken me 6 years to get into this position with changing the technique. So that was a danger, but for me that was a change I had to do if I wanted my back to last.

### **With all this volume and hard pushing you inevitably get tired. How do you approach tiredness and recovery?**

It is hard, it is very hard. You do get grumpy towards the end of the week. It is one of those things about being an athlete...it is what I am paid to do, it is part of the game. It is also quite satisfying on the other hand. You get Sunday off and you actually feel shattered, but you also feel good because you know you pushed yourself to the very limit over the week and you survived. Ultimately, that is what you need to do as an athlete. You need to be pushing the boundaries well beyond where you are comfortable going. It is important to do that.

### **Do you think one of the messages normal people can learn from top sport is about pushing your own limits? Finding what you are capable of?**

Yes, definitely. That's probably the biggest thing that Dick thought me, my limits. What I thought were my limits were not my limits. I could go a lot further.

### **I have talked about you with Mark Watson from the radio show 'The Night Train with Mark Watson' before this interview. And he told me you are a "tough bastard". So that is a scary thing hearing somebody could teach a 'tough bastard' about his limits not being his real limits!**

Dick was my coach for 8 out of the past 10 seasons. He adjusts as the athletes change. And those early days 2005 and 2006 he was continually pushing me to my limits. But now he knows I have nowhere to go, and I think he trusts me I will go there without him having to force me to go there. Not talking about the race, we are talking about every day. Because what you do every day enables you to race the way you want to race and will make the difference between winning and losing. You know, you don't really have to go to that

place, no one really wants to go there, but you have to go there daily if you want to win. That is what happened in London, I did that early finish knowing I can go to a place Ondřej maybe could not.

**Can be that it is a kind of talent to stand all that. To push so hard and not break. Don't you think so?**

Yes, people break, they do. What you see in NZ you see the success. But while there is a huge amount of success there is a huge amount of failure as well. You know, some people just can't hack it. For every Olympic medalist there is probably 10 that don't make it. And those guys you never hear about them. That's just the reality of the sport.

**As a nation, maybe it is something you share with the Scandinavians, you seem fascinated by the big training volumes, the toughness and the daily grind, the endurance in general... Is it the legacy of Arthur Lydiard in NZ sport?**

Yes, there is something. You know Olaf Tufte, he is double Olympic champion in single scull and he does even more hours than I do. So he would go out and row at the speed of our women sculls but for a lot longer. Then on the other hand, when he goes fast he goes out harder and faster than anything that we would ever do in training. So it is all balancing out. Nevertheless, yes, I believe you need the volume in our sport.

I guess you get used to what you get brought up on. At this stage of my career, it would be hard, very hard to change to any other system. I am quite comfortable with what we do. Again there is plenty of very successful systems out there and they work in very different ways. The Danish for example, they work in a completely different way and they are successful. The Americans are very successful in the eights and they use much more intensity. There's plenty of ways. But think for small boats what we have is the best. Probably in the bigger boats we may struggle, but we are now proving it can work in the bigger boats too. Which is quite exciting.

## **Mahé about his lifestyle**



### **Did your life change now that you have a family and a daughter?**

Yes it did. But the number one is rowing, that hasn't changed. And I am really lucky I think in the fact that my wife is an ex rower. So she understands that everything revolves about rowing. She is incredibly supportive. She retired after London where she has won a bronze medal, so she knows what it takes to be at the top level. For me it is a lot about recovery and about looking after myself, so she is not expecting me to go out partying on a Saturday night or anything like that. I think having a child has been really good, because when you come home you sure are tired, but the kid is such a good distraction and it helps you switch off and just be a dad, you forget about rowing. It is nice to be able to focus on someone else. You know I would lay on the floor and she would crawl all over me. It has been an enjoyable change in life. I think in my case I am very lucky I have such a good wife!

### **Do you have any everyday routines?**

Not really. Well I guess I got routines in my warm up, certain stretches I need to do every day. Like 10 to 15 minutes before I row. Then on days when we do some intense stuff I have 40 minutes on the water before we do the actual session. Nothing special really in what I do that anybody else wouldn't do before the session.

## **Mahé about the winning mindset**



### **What do you do to stay sharp, to stay on the top of the game?**

I am very goal oriented, so I always have goals I want to achieve. Going back to technique there is always things you can improve. I have weaknesses, I have talked a lot to Dick about those, and I always want to improve on those.

In addition, one of the greatest things about rowing for me is I have never had a perfect row, never had a perfect race. Therefore, you are always striving for perfection, perfection that might never come. But the whole process of it, this gives you something to strive for. You think you can always improve.

### **Is it also the small little goals for a particular session or is it one big goal at the end of the year?**

No, it's most of the time small goals. What am I going to achieve with a particular session. I have something in my mind I want to work on during a session. And quite often Dick would come to me after the session and say I was sloppy at the exit or that I wasn't quite picking up the stern at the catch. There is always something he would give me and obviously, it becomes the focus for the next session. I would be then thinking how to do this and that better. I have a few drills that I do at the beginning of the session if there is something in particular I want to fix.

### **I have 3 interesting questions from an ex rower who went on to be a journalist today. He is asking where your confidence comes from. You seem so confident on the start line and you keep this confidence and calmness in the first part of the race where normally you are a bit behind.**

It comes from training. Because I know how am I going before I go into a race. So I know I am in good form or not. Generally, if I am in good form I know that if I am going to have my best race I am going to win. That's just fact. Then, if I am slightly off and the other guys have a good race, then they are going to win, obviously. I guess that's where the confidence comes from, because I know before what can I expect. Then it is all about going in and execute it. So on the start line I am focused on executing my perfect race. I know if I do that, it will be very hard to beat me. Since I am doing the single I finished gold or silver just about every race. I think I got two bronze medals and one fourth place in 10 years. So that kind of makes you act confidently. Of course not always things go perfectly. Last year for example I stayed to far behind in the first 500 meters and that is a mistake I ultimately payed for with that silver medal. It is nothing you can do about your competitors, so it is important to just focus on yourself.

### **Actually that was his second question. What goes through your mind in the toughest moments of a race?**

For me it is distraction in a lot of cases. You are trying to distract yourself, because you don't want to think about how much is hurting. Quite often for me, it is something as simple as counting strokes. And ok, sometimes there is some technical points you think about. But that has generally been drilled in in training. You are supposed to do it naturally there. That's where miles after miles of doing the same thing and hopefully doing it technically well come into play. So that in those moments when you are really battling, you can still do it well. Or doing it better than the competitor.

**His last question was about your race at the last world cup race. You went ahead from the start. And you maintained a huge margin the whole time. It was an atypical race for you. Was it planned?**

It was weird. Obviously as I said, last year I stuffed up at World Championships where I lost a world title because I messed up my first 500. Last year for some reason, and it happened the whole season, I struggled to get out of the start and find my rhythm. But then after some 700 meters I would just take off and over the last 250 meters I was 2-3 seconds faster than anybody else. But I was losing just as much in the first 500 meters. It was frustrating last year, every time I would have to come from behind. I always have to come from behind but I don't want to be more than half a length or a length behind. That is manageable, but 2-3 seconds is too much. So that was certainly something I was working on this year. This year I managed to find this good rhythm earlier and just managed to sustain it. This season it was something I focused on every single time we raced. Just going out hard and learning to take that. Certainly something I have improved on. I am very happy I managed to correct that first part now. But the big margin in Luzerne is a little bit deceiving in the sense that usually you probably have that gap between me and those guys. But there normally is Ondřej and Ángel in between. Quite often the fourth or fifth place is 5 seconds behind. So Ondřej isn't performing yet like last year and Ángel had the PanAms. That is something I certainly don't expect to happen at the World Championships.

**Your inspiration now is repeat the gold?**

Yes. The goal is to win again in Rio. That's what I am aiming to do. It is pretty hard to defend an Olympic gold medal. I love the challenge and I really want to do that. That's what I am aiming to do. But the process to get there is every day, that is important. Doing the training, doing those miles as well as you possibly can. And yes, the byproduct of that is I will hopefully go faster than I have ever gone before.

**You think you will need to go faster than ever to win again?**

Yes, I think the standard keeps getting better. So I will have to be better than I was in London if I want to win in Rio. The hard thing in rowing is conditions, so the times might not always reflect your level. However, I think this year I am going as well as I ever have in my career. That's how I feel. And also from the training I am having, that is really the case. That is pretty exciting. I didn't know I would be able to do that at 36. And that certainly helps motivating you. I believe it is natural for people to do the best they possibly can and so if you can still better yourself, that is certainly something that keeps you going every day. You want to be better than you were the day before. Hopefully I can continue that over the next year.

## **Mahé about [Training in Paradise lakes Bled and Bohinj](#)**



### **My last question. How do you find lakes Bled and Bohinj?**

I love this area. We were at the World Championships here in 2011 and I have won a [world title on lake Bled](#) and it always becomes a special place when you have success like that. Also 2011 was the first time we found lake Bohinj. As during the World Championships we came here during the week because it is always hard on the course during the race. And then we came here last year too and we had a very good year. So now the same coaches and boats came here as last year, but this year also the women's eight joined us. It is definitely one of the best places in the world I have ever trained at.

Moreover, it is very affordable compared to a lot of places we have trained in the past. When we are here for 6 weeks that becomes a big factor. I guess when you get one of the best places to train and it is also affordable, that is the dream scenario! Usually it is the other way around; it is perfect but is so expensive you simply can't afford it. Some places in Switzerland for example are ridiculous.

I think we are very fortunate. In addition, the roads are great for cycling with a couple of really good climbs. We really enjoy the area. We will definitely be here in Europe next year too. The plan at the moment is to come back here. Kind of once you find a good place...

It is not just to say, it really is a perfect scenario, fantastic lake! There is no motor boats, so you have to use the electric ones. The length is good. This hotel is perfect, food is really good. We use the gym in Bled. There is so much pluses and nothing we do miss. After every camp we make a review of the place and rank it. The most important thing for us is water. Then obviously the accommodation and food. Every morning it is glassy here. You might get wind later on in the afternoon but it never seems to get rough. It really is awesome. You are very lucky to live here!

But when we go home we never say it is good, we don't want to many people to come. Want to keep it for us...you know only the half of our team is here and so we always tell to the other half of the team the water is always rough and people aren't nice...!