

Name:

Stefan Pons Sztanca

The team you coach:

Mercer Masters

The number of years you've been rowing:

28 (give or take)

What side/ seat do you prefer:

no preference, though I've stroked the most

Favorite post-workout snack:

bananas

Teams you rowed for:

CR Flamengo, CR Vasco da Gama, Botafogo FR, Brazil National Team, then small participations in various master clubs

Favorite thing about the sport:

It allows you to let your mind wander while keeping your body engaged

Biggest achievements in rowing:

National Champion a few times, ranked 1st in the country sculling and sweep when in the national team. With the exception of worlds, I've had the satisfaction of beating everyone who has beaten me in a race (before I started racing random masters events), including a South American singles champion.

What does rowing mean to you:

Rowing is a parallel with life. It's hard, takes its toll, but it teaches you amazing things about yourself, and if you put all your effort into it, it can be incredibly rewarding. Rowing makes us understand ourselves more and respect our opponents because we know what they've put into it.

How has it impacted your life:

Dealing with rowing since a young age has made me tough and resilient to the point where no challenge seems out of reach and no effort seems unachievable. Going to sleep late and waking up early in high school goes hand in hand with early parenthood, which I am now realizing, requires a lot of this toughness, resilience and focus that we learn in sport, especially rowing. I've been in and out of rowing many times, and since I started coaching it has opened a new perspective in my life.

What made you decide to become a coach:

I started coaching out of curiosity and the right opportunity. When I realized that my actions and words could take people to the most amazing places, achieve the most amazing things and become the most amazing people, I knew that this is what I wanted to do. My first degree was in graphic design, and worked in many areas throughout my life, but I made a point to make coaching work. I went back to school to get a bachelor degree in physical education and figured out a way to work as a coach.

The most rewarding aspect of coaching:

The moment you see people realize they can achieve things they never thought they would. I've seen this with juniors, masters and elite rowers. Everyone can learn something new and everyone can improve, no matter who or where they are.

A favorite moment while coaching PNRA/ Mercer:

There were 2 particular moments that marked the beginning of a transformation with the masters team last summer: after almost a full hour of still drills in fours, when no one could take it anymore, I let them row and the boat was set like they had never seen. The expressions of astonishment were mesmerizing.

The other was one day when we didn't have enough rowers and I took out 7 people, including rowing coxswains, and coxed an eight. I would stand up and shake the boat to make a point and in the end they managed to set the boat and row at a decent pressure. Once again it made them realize that it's never that people aren't good enough, it's just a matter of pushing them in the right direction.