

The Amateurs Study Guide

The Amateurs by David Halberstam

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Plot Summary

This is a nonfiction work of the 20th century. It is about a handful of Olympic level athletes. The author is a journalist, who won a Pulitzer Prize for his work for the Americans while Americans are participating in military conflicts in Viet Nam. The book begins with an Olympic trial, which goes largely unnoticed. There is very little press. The sport is rowing. This requires high speed, high effort, and teamwork. In this sport individual performance is more intimately associated with the success of the team than is found in many other sports.

The author devotes significant time to each of four major rowing champions. He also educates people about some class-related issues while he does this. Most rowers are upper middle class. The importance of money may manifest somewhat differently amongst this group. David Halberstam gives readers a good realistic sense for this without making too much of it during the course of the book. The financial aspects of the sport of rowing are also involved. He explains how and where there actually is money in it and also shows that the rowing stars tended to do it so passionately that they engaged in it even though it did not make them money. In that regard, money is shown by rowers to be barely relevant; only to the extent that is absolutely unavoidable, does money matter.

The author introduces the rowing world to readers. For those who know the sport, it will be repetitive. For those being introduced to it by this book the information is very helpful. Halberstam has written this book for readers who have seen the Olympic rowing championships and may want to learn more about the sport as a result. The story takes readers through the 1984 Olympic Games and then gives some details about how the main players are doing the year afterward. The entire book is rather short than long, at just over 200 pages.



Chapters 1 & 2

Chapters 1 & 2 Summary and Analysis

One of the first facts about expert rowers is that there is no money in it. There is some funding and the possibility of prize money or money through advertising promotions of rowing products. Unlike sales—where the good get rich and the bad get nowhere—rowing has little to offer in the way of money. Our stars, in this book, are not motivated by money.

Olympic championships are one of the rare opportunities for public recognition in this sport. The author introduces one of the most important people in the sport of rowing, amongst Americans in the 1970s and 1980s: Christopher Wood. Even when the book begins he already has a history with this sport at the Olympic level. In 1976 this young man makes the Olympic rowing team but is not used. This man sticks with the sport and is able to continue to be a top performer for another four years. By the time of the next Olympics he is not only on the team again, but this time he is the Captain. Once again, disappointment kicks in, because President has America boycott the Olympics because they are taking place in the USSR. Christopher Wood is unhappy with this decision. He complains openly about it and through doing so enhances his reputation.

Halberstam begins to explain some of the financial aspects of the situation. The Olympic Committee does provide some financial support to the most likely Olympic rowers. The truth is that even though they do, it is not much. Here, the author does not say how much, but explains that no more than half of Christopher Wood's expenses are covered by the Olympic Committee funding. This man's parents are very supportive and appear to have financially supported his efforts without any discomfort or reluctance. This is in part out of love and appreciation but also because they are quite well off and can easily afford to do so.



Chapters 1 & 2 Cont.

Chapters 1 & 2 Cont. Summary and Analysis

The chapters of this book are rather short. Despite this, they are full of information. The author introduces the other main characters of this nonfictional story during chapter 1. In rowing, even teammates are normally also rivals and competitors. One extraordinary fact is that Tiff Wood did not quit rowing when he was not able to participate in the Olympic games despite having made the team.

The main oarsmen are John Biglow, Joe Bouscaren, Enquist, and Charley Altekruise. They are coached for the Olympic team by Harry Parker. Joe Bouscaren is the little man on the team. He is known for leading early in the race but losing in the end. Readers should assume that this discovery about his limitations is not made until he is amongst his true peers—the Olympic class rowers; up until then, he has been winning even with this limitation. At one point the coach wants to see if he can run Biglow and Enquist as a team in a double. Biglow has been involved with some special training for the double. The coach runs them in singles; John Biglow wins in such a way that the coach decides he cannot run as a team in a double for some time. This puts Biglow into a double with Bouscaren; here, complementary strengths are united. Bouscaren is one year older than Biglow; both row for Yale. Bouscaren, who intends to be a physician, is incredibly interested in the human body. As it turns out; he is relatively well designed to be on a team.

Chapter 2: Tiff Wood develops a particular type of relationship with rowing after several years of experience. He decides to quit. He tells his father this. Then he changes his mind, but determines to only commit to it for a year. He informs his father of this. Then he goes ahead and keeps rowing. He continues to stick with this when others do not. The author describes the situation from a different perspective. Team rowing differs from single rowing in that it allows for the development and use of peer pressure. Peer pressure can help and/or it can hinder depending upon the circumstances and how it is used and what it gets people to do. Most rowers do not stay in the sport for more than 3 or 4 years.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary and Analysis

In chapter 3 the author writes about the amount of pain involved with rowing. There is quite a lot of it actually. The impression is that there is more pain in rowing than in most of the other sports. The book does not give enough context for readers to know whether or not this is true. Rowers, at least at this level, are described as having "Type A personalities." Interpersonal tensions are common, as there is great rivalry amongst men on the same team. Loyalty and rivalry are key words for the chapter, with loyalty usually winning.

Rowing boats. During the first half of the twentieth century there are rowing teams of each gender, but no co-ed teams. There is more than one type of rowing boat; another name for these is sculls. There are singles, doubles, four-person boats, and 8-person boats. The rowers tend to focus on single-rowing in America, even when they are better suited to team playing. Halberstam differentiates between social methods in America and in East Germany. The latter examine people's physiology as a means of deciding who to encourage and who to discourage regarding any given sport, including rowing. The Americans do not do that as much, but there is a natural sifting out of people who will or will not get into this sport. Normally, everyone on crew is from the upper middle class: Halberstam suggests that this is due to the cost of the equipment combined with the locations of the best rowing conditions and training opportunities: Harvard and Yale are the best rowing colleges during the first half of the twentieth century.

The author explains that rowers go at it so hard during their races that they have been known to literally pass out after crossing the watery finish line. Most high level athletic performance involves more training than actual playing time. Oxygen intake is one of the key factors involved with great rowers. Halberstam also reviews related physiology. What makes rowing so painful is that when they go all out, they first use up all of their aerobic energy and then enlist the aid of all of their anaerobic energy. The anaerobic energy usage causes pain.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary and Analysis

Halberstam also explains to readers how the sport is changing during the 1970s and 1980s. Andrew Carnegie gives \$150,000 to Princeton to fund the damming of a stream so that there can be a lake that the team can row on. When Princeton's representative seeks funding, the goal is to get a law school. Princeton's representative is said to have described receiving this gift from Carnegie as being given cake when they asked for bread.

Chapter 4 begins with Halberstam giving more details about Biglow. Biglow is "the big, young guy" in 1982 for the Harvard team under Harry Parker. Like the rest, he is from a wealthier family and has attended private school. He differs in some ways that cause difficulty with feelings of fitting in. One of these is that he is somehow an athlete-innocent. He is from the West Coast, rather than being from the East like the majority of rowers. He is also a perfectionist.

Biglow is hard to get along with, according to the others. He is not particularly well mannered and this seems to be intentional on his part. He is able to be good friends with people, but it can take a while before it works. One perfect example of this is that he makes friends with a man named Goldberg, who is also on crew. Part of what makes him difficult is that he is sensitive to criticism from others but he is insensitive about what he does to others. Given that, it is also noticeable that he does not openly criticize other people.

Halberstam introduces a whole code of rowing, of being on crew. One feature is that the level of pain involved with the sport is so great that none of the rowers ever question one another. Another feature is that rowing is primarily about getting the best performance from oneself even though it often appears as if competing against the others is the main motive. Competition is mainly viewed as a means of attaining superior performance from oneself. Another dictum is to take care not to boast but, at the same time, do not mock losers of a race. In fact, do not embarrass the losers at all. You do not know if they will win later on. One final detail from chapter 4 is that one female member of the Biglow clan witnesses a rower passing out over his oar at the end of a race. She is so horrified that she discourages participation in that sport; nevertheless, John Biglow takes up rowing.



Chapters 5 - 10

Chapters 5 - 10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5: John Biglow & Joe Bouscaren are able to be friends and teammates. Biglow is hard to befriend, mainly because he is very sensitive about himself and insensitive to how he affects others. Joe Bouscaren tries a number of sports before he finds out that he has a talent for being rowing crew. People in his family are taught to not waste talents. His skill improves a great deal from training with a man named Scott Roop. Cultivating mental toughness is vital to success as a rower. There are 3 extremely important endurance rowing races. Head of the Schuylkill race, which is 2.75 miles long, Head of Connecticut, which is 3.5 miles and Head of the Charles which is 3 miles long. At one point, Joe Bouscaren actually wins against Tiff Wood.

Chapter 6: Halberstam reminds readers of how painful this sport really is. Tiff Wood needs 5 days to recover from one rowing race; a race that lasts fewer than 8 minutes. Most rowers are from the upper middle class: easterners and prep school graduates. Halberstam writes that anyone who is extreme in their motivation about anything has a kind of madness. Biglow's version of this madness has even his motivated teammates concluding that he is "Nuts as a Bunny."

Chapter 7: Most rowers really do not last long. They very often lose their seat—this means losing their place on the rowing team. The Harvard rowing crew in the early 1980s is known as the Rude and Smooth crew. They are very cocky but at least they have good reason to be.

Chapter 8: "Rowing through someone": this important phrase means either holding a place out ahead of someone or else coming up from behind and passing them. John Biglow rows through people. Tiff Wood does not hold back from helping John Biglow even though the other man is a real threat. Tiff's ability to not undermine his teammate out of jealousy or anxiety should not be underrated. Both men improve their skills as a direct consequence.

Chapter 9: Harry Parker, the coach, is the focus of this chapter. He is a great rower himself; he can still beat the team players he coaches when in his 40s, but he also does not try to row as often as they do. He maintains a certain emotional distance to perform best as a coach. He tends to measure others up and he is good at doing this. His level of integrity is very high.

Chapter 10: Tiff Wood's prevailing success-producing trait is that he is very determined.



Chapter 11 & 12

Chapter 11 & 12 Summary and Analysis

This chapter begins with information about a second tier rower named Brad Lewis. He is from California and is treated a certain way because of this. This man does come from a financially well off family, but his home life has been rather difficult, with his mother ill much of the time. Brad Lewis has a reputation for being hard to be friends with; he is insensitive about hurting the feelings of others but hypersensitive about being hurt by others. Brad commits a rowing faux pas in 1983 by bragging to others that he will win a given race. Then he does not, adding to his mistake. It is viewed as bad form for rowers to brag or to claim that they will win a race when the outcome will only be proven by the race itself. Only after he has lost the race, does Brad discover how much of a faux pas he committed when bragging about it. Paul Enquist also rows in a double with Brad Lewis as well as with Biglow. This is very challenging for Enquist because it demands that they be friends which is not that easy.

Brad Lewis is a rower. This is a high priority for him. Brad Lewis had found in another, a standard of performance by which to judge himself: Svensson. Brad Lewis becomes friends with this man. He has a major developmental breakthrough when he begins to be able to win against Svensson during the 1983 training for the 1984 Olympic Games. He lives with his parents at age 29 because they have plenty of money for him and they want to support his rowing. He earns money for rowing equipment. This man also earns through a special program called Olympic Job Opportunity: this means he can work, but he works on the side while his main occupation is rowing.

Chapter 12 begins with times and positions for the Olympic trial "heats." Tiff Wood wins at 7:04.1 (7 minutes, 4.1 seconds). Biglow pulls second place with 7:06.43. Third goes to Bouscaren, whose time is 7:08.02. Tiff Wood is upset that the coach puts someone in jeopardy by running the top 4 contenders in the same heat. Tiff presumes Parker would set up the heats so that none of them will be eliminated. He is wrong.



Chapters 13 - 15

Chapters 13 - 15 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13: Tiff Wood has an exceptionally bad race. He feels it very shortly after entering. Others notice it to. This had happened to him before, but not like this. Bouscaren makes the same mistake again. He leads in the early part of the race and then others gain on him. Brad Lewis is doing extremely well. Well enough, in fact, that those who normally defeat him begin to feel uncomfortable and to push themselves harder in order to win. Biglow actually wins this race, but Brad Lewis pulls in a very tight second place. Both of these two are usually further behind early on but make more and more headway until they have rowed through some people. Biglow's win means that he will not be rowing the double with Tiff Wood for the Olympics. For Tiff Wood, he races so badly that he realizes he will probably not be allowed to row the single scull in the Olympics.

Chapter 14: Biglow and coach Harry Parker have an incredibly important conversation. During the conversation Biglow brings up the obvious fact that he is not Tiff Wood and that the coach would probably had preferred for Tiff Wood to win. Parker is taken aback but realizes that he should try responding with an equal amount of honesty. He admits that he feels Biglow is superior at team rowing over Tiff Wood. Biglow really does want to row in the single scull, but he is such a team player that he offers to row in a team boat to satisfy the coach. That is when the coach tells him "No" and points out that by winning the previous race, he has rightfully won the single scull position for the Olympics.

Chapter 15: Tiff Wood becomes increasingly upset when he loses some of his favorite opponents; the Soviets pull out of the Olympics and they take the East Germans with them. This means he cannot race against Rudiger Reiche. It is said that Tiff Wood likes Rudiger although they are not allowed to speak to one another and have only this specific type of sporting relationship. Karpinnen is introduced. This Finnish man is so great at rowing that he has almost turns into a sport of his own. Unlike some of the other champions, he enters the sport as a boy and persists for well over a decade. Biglow idolizes Karpinnen the Finnish sculler.



Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 16 is mainly focused on John Biglow. He has some back trouble during 1982 and 1983 which affects his performance and his whole sense of how to handle the rowing season. The author describes one of the basic conflicts Biglow is experiencing: it is about how he can resolve an inner tension in an effort to make the best choices as far as the upcoming rowing season and the Olympic Games. There are differing attitudes regarding the significance of power and of technique in sculling. One set of coaches feels that sufficient technique and plenty of power is okay whereas others view perfection of technique as the only solution.

Frank Cunningham develops into an English teacher and a rowing coach. Halberstam calls him a very unusual coach; he has a reputation for not pushing his rowers and yet somehow coming up with some of the best crew in the country. Perhaps this tells readers that Cunningham knows there is a secret about how much self-motivation is involved with success in rowing. Biglow has been sent to Yale based upon his ability in rowing and family tradition. He goes where interest has been shown in him. When he starts at Yale he is not even sure whether he wants to focus on soccer or rowing for sports. He is not very confident socially or academically so the right sport could really help or hinder his circumstances. His older brother recommends rowing because they are known to have a high level of camaraderie. Once he makes up his mind, which does not happen instantaneously or all at once, he gives his full commitment. Losers on the Yale team give up their shirts to the winners, which has some predictable results: those who lose need new shirts. The new coach is a man named Tony Johnson. "Biglow never cheated. If anything, he was an enforcer who helped the coach," (p. 151). There is a change over in the intensity level of the rowers. Some of the new ones are much more intense. They work out harder. Halberstam introduces another rowing crew position: the coxswain. For those who know rowing, this is laughably simplistic; for those that do not this tells people something new. Biglow works away and proves to be an excellent oarsman which adds value to his collegiate life. Biglow is advised to not think too much. During Nautilus workouts they can calibrate pain. Here, the author means "good pain." This is the pain of taking the body to limits that make it build itself into something stronger and more powerful but not the kind of pain that indicates injury, "bad pain." Good pain means the muscles are pushing their limits and the anaerobic systems are working to get the needed extra power to the body to finish the job—in this case a rowing race.



Chapters 17 & 18

Chapters 17 & 18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17: Halberstam introduces "team camps" for rowing. He lists a set of virtues that crew is meant to represent and then claims that the team camps are the worst of rowing put into one location and time span. The coach uses the time at camp to pick the teams for the double and the quad. This type of selection is easier in other sports. In this case, it is particularly difficult because the camp is to work out more of the details about the Olympic teams. This camp is running under coach Harry Parker. Halberstam explains that all the tensions between the campers surface at the camp. He also shows how different some of the relationships are between coach and player. The relationships between the players and their fathers affect what happens. Tiff Wood has a relatively smooth relationship with Harry Parker and is secure that he will get one of the open positions but does not necessarily know which one. Biglow's relationship with the coach is quite different: there is more tension between them. Brad Lewis has a lousy experience in the boats. He seems to be put into boats with people that cause them to lose rather than to win. The chapter ends on this note.

Chapter 18: There is another trip after the Princeton racing trials, to Lake Lucerne. At this time, the double is nicknamed The Love Boat because both Bouscaren and Altekruise attract women. At this time, three of the four positions for the quad race have been decided. These are: Sean Colgan, Bill Purdy, and Charley Bracken. Tiff Wood and Jack Frackleton have to compete for the other spot on the team. Harry Parker tries to get Brad Lewis to come along as the "spare," but Brad does not like it one bit. Lewis thinks the spare position will go to either Wood or Frackleton—whoever loses. Brad Lewis goes on a bizarre road trip with some of the others. It leads to two unusual events. He calls his father, who tells his son that the son deserves more respect and since he is not getting it, should quit. Then Lewis devises an alternative, an out-of-the-box solution. He cannot do this alone. In this case he relies on help from Paul Enquist who is willing to do this outrageous thing; they will run as a competing double at Lucerne. Parker allows this, but tells them it is impractical and unwise.



Chapters 19, 20 & 21

Chapters 19, 20 & 21 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 19: Tiff Wood, having only recently won the bronze medal in world championships, is now in danger of not even finding a place on one of the Olympic skulls. Tiff Wood has great faith in his coach Harry Parker but his rage is growing as he faces this difficult challenge of trying to get a position on the Olympic team. Chapter 20: Paul Enquist is mellow and humble with respect to the temperaments of rowers in general. Halberstam tells the background story of this rower. Enquist tries rowing at the University of Washington. He is not very good. He wants to do it anyway, so he does. He is permitted to train around the women's team. The first year, the majority of the women on the team beat him; this is mainly because they have good form and he is rather weak. In this context, his weakness is relative to his own potential—his body has the capacity to be far stronger than it is. Paul Enquist keeps at it, and the situation improves. After a full year of training, his male strength advantage along with improved technique begins to take effect. This same fellow, when placed into crew with Brad Lewis, is a dream come true as far as personality fit. Brad Lewis is egotistical. Paul Enquist is easy going and will not challenge the other man in the same boat. At the same time, Paul is not weak, but he is far from brash. Due to this, he is willing to row in a challenge double with Brad Lewis. They hone one another as a team. This ultimately causes Bouscaren to be knocked out of his place on the Olympic team. He is admired enough that the others hope he will get another chance that he will make good on.

Chapter 21: In this chapter John Biglow, who has won the single sculler position on the Olympic team, has deep sympathy for his teammate Tiff Wood. Tiff Wood is one of the very best oarsman, and Biglow is troubled by the idea of Tiff somehow not being in the Olympics. Biglow proposes that they try the double. Here, the personality difference has a potent influence. Biglow helps his teammate, moving events forward by interacting with the coach in a way that Tiff Wood would never have done left to his own devices. The others get Biglow to back off. This is another event that causes others to object that their behavior is ruining the camp. Those objections are overcome. The power of this idea moves forward, as it is an excellent one. Wood rows in a double with Joh Dietz instead of rowing with Biglow. John Dietz is able to tell Tiff Wood which adjustments to make so that they can have a winning double. Tiff might well not have done this if he had not received this advice.



Chapters 22, 23 & 24

Chapters 22, 23 & 24 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 22: There are signs of trouble with Bouscaren. He is aware that Brad Lewis and Paul Enquist rowing as a double are a real threat to his double with Altekruise. Bouscaren's anxiety is visible and other members of the team have been hassling Bouscaren. Coach Harry Parker observes and notes all of this with a grain of salt and an eye for the effects of this. The next set of races are at Princeton. Brad Lewis & Paul Enquist are growing focused and arrogant in their boat. This proves to be justified when they win one of their first races by 6 lengths. They are being assisted by a man named Tony Johnson; he is an older man, something of a mentor. Oarsmen are not normally obscene but in the case of the Lewis-Enquist double, the two are openly hostile. Brad is even having a better time psychologically now that he knows that he is in the social position of being both an outsider and a challenger. The double of Dietz and Wood are able to take second place; Lewis and Enquist conquer everyone; which leaves Bouscaren and Altekruise in a sad third place with the team boat not coming in until 4th.

Chapter 23: The truth is that in 1976 Wood goes to the Olympics as the spare. He suffers in part because this makes him feel useless. He races against Biglow and wins more often than not. He stops rowing against Biglow because the other man has rightfully won the right to row the single scull but, over all, Tiff Wood is the better rower. Coach Harry Parker is challenged by what to do with Tiff Wood at the rowing camp. The coach knows that Tiff Wood is an excellent rower, but he works better as a single sculler than in a team boat. Despite this shortcoming, a new problem develops when Tiff loses the single sculling position to a man known to be great for a team boat. Coach Harry Parker actually hates leaving Tiff Wood as nothing but the spare during the Olympics of 1976. Tiff also hates it, but may not have realized how much it bothered Coach Parker as well.

Chapter 24: Once exposed to international competitors, the conditions changed. The Finn tends to be friendly despite the gulf of a language barrier. There is a German called Kolbe who is dominant in his nation. Biglow is truly humbled when he realizes that he is not even competitive against either Karpainen the Finn or Kolbe the German. Nonetheless there is still a chance for him to be the best from amongst the rest. So he goes after that. He has to row through semi finals to even get the chance to compete in the race. He makes it, but barely. His characteristic rowing style shows; he falls behind frighteningly, early on in the race, but somehow by the end of it, he is amongst the winners. The chapter ends with him having made it to the next step in the Olympics with two days to rest before the next race.



Chapters 25, 26 & 27

Chapters 25, 26 & 27 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 25: Brad Lewis becomes unreachable again after the rowing camp. He is very upset with their coach Harry Parker; he feels overlooked and cheated. If it is not for Paul Enquist, he is likely to have been lost. Brad is very excited about being on the Olympic team. Amongst other activities, he studies the moves of the prominent opponents. This is done by watching others in live events but also by reviewing tapes of the opposition from events such as the national trials. Lewis reviews the situation and upon consideration realizes that he and Enquist lack the realization that they can compete effectively as a double with people from the other European countries. He decides that they can be ready the next time and that if they do what is necessary they will make it. The details of teamwork are how to do the best rowing given who is really in the boat together. Brad Lewis also makes extra efforts to improve Enquist's morale.

Chapter 26: Harry Parker address the issues with Brad Lewis. The coach realizes that he has made a few mistakes with Brad and it takes him some time to figure out what they were. Brad is tending to relate to people purely in terms of rejection, but has devised some defense mechanisms that provoke undesired results. Parker also knows that Brad Lewis harbors resentment towards the coach about what happened at the rowing camp. Harry Parker is able to learn a new technique for handling Brad Lewis. It pays off that he does so. Meanwhile, Lewis and Enquist have become warriors. They keep to themselves and ultimately, one of the two declares to the other that he is going to piss upon the flag pole of the enemy. His teammate urges his comrade to stay out of jail as he is needed in the double.

Chapter 27: By this point, coach Harry Parker learns what it is that Brad Lewis needs. He needs full support and constant reassurance when his performance is right. He begins to apply this knowledge. For Lewis and Enquist, they face their most terrifying race yet. This combination in the double are able to lead the race from the beginning and to hold that lead. They are not able to do that in this particular, but they do pull it out at the end for the win; they win by 2 seconds.



Chapters 28 - 31

Chapters 28 - 31 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 28: Tiff Wood ends up as a spare and suffers through his 3rd Olympics without rowing in any of the races. He puts together a race amongst the international spares. They go ahead and row. Halberstam describes it as odd. The chapter concludes explaining how Tiff Wood dismantles his scull when John Biglow races in the Olympic Games as the single sculler for the American team, a position he won during camp. Chapter 29: Biglow does not win the bronze at the Olympics as he had at the world championships. He is relieved by this, as well as disappointed. He does not intend to ever race again on crew. Coach Harry Parker finds him, and tells the younger man that he feels he rowed well. John Biglow is somewhat surprised by this; he is uncertain of what Parker's attitude will be towards him.

Chapter 30: Paul Enquist and Brad Lewis are getting along well but they are not sharing a room. This is a very intentional choice to prevent tensions between them from getting out of control and ruining the situation. The work they have put into being a team is finally paying off. Brad Lewis and Paul Enquist go for it and manage to surpass other peoples' expectations by winning the gold medal in the double in the Olympics. Brad Lewis is exuberant on this occasion which is an extreme change in demeanor. Paul Enquist seems pretty much the same—relatively quiet and docile.

Chapter 31: Joe Bouscaren has gone ahead and found an internship at a hospital. While there he watches the Olympics but he has some extraordinary feelings. He is enraged because he feels that he and Altekruise make an excellent double and so he feels somehow cheated. Instead of just being happy for his teammates, he feels it should have been him and Altekruise on the podium. Bouscaren does not give up rowing.



Chapters 32, 33 & The Epilogue

Chapters 32, 33 & The Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 32: John Biglow tries to go ahead and move on. He enters Dartmouth's medical school. There is an occasion when he writes to a number of friends and includes Olympic pins in his letters. In the letters he acknowledges two things: he feels his showing in the Olympics showed the best he could as a single sculler, but he feels that his potential as a team rower was not developed to its full extent.

Chapter 33: The Olympic team tours. Brad Lewis enjoys this even though being a gold medalist in crew does not do much to increase his reputation. He tells others that the gymnasts are the ones who receive the most attention. With that, Halberstam ends the book. He includes an Epilogue

In the Epilogue: Brad Lewis gives up on banking, which is what he had taken up doing for work. Halberstam writes to readers that this is a good thing, but never explains why. Brad wants to row in a double with Tiff Wood, but Tiff does not seem willing. Meanwhile, John Biglow goes to Dartmouth Med School and feels strongly that he had made the right decision. Classmates tell him that they are very much affected by his tendency to ask extremely personal questions: apparently he expects others to open up to him without any intention of exposing himself to others. Biglow concludes that this suggests he might make a good small town doctor. Curiously enough, another crew man is interested in being a physician: Joe Bouscaren. He manages to get a residency position at a hospital in New York state and has incredibly intense feelings about participating in the 1988 Olympic Games as a rower. He wants to do this so much that he nearly takes a far humbler position instead of the one that he really wants because of how much the lesser hospital position would better enable him to practice rowing. Tiff Wood enters the Head of Charles race the following year and comes in second. Given the results, he decides that he will not commit further to rowing but he is having trouble letting go. Harry Parker is invited to celebrate Tiff's marriage that same year.



Characters

John Biglow

This is one of the main oarsmen in this true story. He has a great deal of tenacity in his sport. He does his undergraduate work at Yale where he rows on the team. By the time the book begins, this man had also been a two time national champion. This man comes from Seattle, Washington. This fellow is amongst the bigger rowers.

Biglow is a smart man but has a learning disability that makes it abnormally difficult for him to read. He is also unusual with respect to the rowing peers in that he has not attended boarding school. He has an entire chapter devoted to him. The author does a good job of showing how character traits manifest in various ways. Biglow tends to have a great deal of endurance and to pull into victory after having been the weaker rower during the first half. This is genuinely "unique."

Biglow proves to be a little strange as a rower. He is actually able to beat Tiff Wood as a single sculler, but not the majority of the time. Due to the timing of the trials, he actually wins the position as the single scull for the 1984 Olympic Games. He comes in 4th place, failing to win the bronze—which is the only accessible medal. The unanswerable question for everyone is: would Tiff Wood have won the bronze if he had rowed instead of John Biglow? No one will ever know, but realistically, he might well have. Biglow is supposedly better as an oarsman in a multiple boat. When the book ends, he is considering doing more with this aspect of his abilities.

This man becomes a physician, but the book ends when he begins his residency. At that point his intention is to become a small town physician.

Tiff Wood

This man's name is actually Christopher Wood. He is incredibly passionate and single-minded in his pursuit of excellence as a sculler—a type of rower. He is introduced as a 31 year old who has passed over many other opportunities in order to pursue his rowing. His nickname develops from his own misspeaking of his name: the youngest of children would naturally find Christopher rather difficult to say before age 3 or 4 years.

There is an entire chapter dedicated to this man. He is from the upper middle class by birth, rather than by being self-made. He is strongly supported by his family, which is important because his passion for rowing infiltrates the rest of his life. This man's eventual profession is not provided in the Epilogue.



David Halberstam

This is the author of the book. He wins a Pulitzer Prize for journalism. His personality, while relevant, is not a major focus of the work. As such, his individuality simultaneously pervades the work and is invisible.

This man seems to have written the book for people who have taken an interest in the sport because of the Olympic Games of 1984. For those well versed in rowing, the author talks it about in laughably simple terms. The language is entirely that of introducing readers to rowing.

His writing style is clear. His journalistic powers have come in quite handy in the writing of this book.

Bouscaren

This is one of the younger rowers frequently written of in these scenes. This man is also smaller than most of the others. This turns out to mean that he relies upon more perfectly executed form in order to make the most of his build.

Bouscaren has a brotherly attitude. He develops extremely well when he trains together with another. Both parties improve their abilities by training together.

This fellow has more fast muscle than slow muscle. As a direct consequence he consistently leads in the early part of races (when he competes against the best scullers in the world) and consistently loses those same races.

Bouscaren's performance improves within the context of his peers. Once striving among the very best, he normally moves ahead of everyone only to have a fellow like Biglow catch up and pass him later on. Bouscaren hoped to be a double scull in the 1984 Olympics but he and Altekruise are beaten by Brad Lewis together with Paul Enquist. During the Epilogue, the author explains that this man is a physician, and that he is left enraged by Lewis and Enquist.

Brad Lewis

This man is rather surprising. He is rather difficult to get along with. Once his personality is understood, it became easier for teammates to get along with him. He proves to be incredible in a double. Brad Lewis runs into an issue during the Olympic trials when John Biglow beats out Tiff Wood in the single scull. Brad has been in a double with Biglow, which is no longer possible. Wood is not going to row with him. He is frustrated and during rowing camp the season before the 1984 Olympics, Brad Lewis asks Paul Enquist to join him in a "rebel double." This proves to be more effective than even they had foreseen; these two men end up winning a gold medal in the double scull in the



1984 Olympic Games. During the book, the quest for a medal in the single scull often appears to be the main focus.

Paul Enquist

This man is noted as being particularly pleasant. He is easy to get along with. He is a powerful oarsman. He also has both patience and persistence. He is even able to work with Brad Lewis. He has a flexible enough mentality that if a new way presents itself to him, then he will go ahead and try it. This is what allows him to become one of the two men in the "rebel double" scull. He ends up winning a gold medal in the 1984 Olympic Games because of rowing together with the strong but sometimes very difficult Brad Lewis. They win in their double; the author suggests that no one sees this coming.

Charley Altekruse

This man is best known during the book as an oarsman in one of the multiple boats. In fact, he develops a double with Joe Bouscaren. There is less attention paid to him than to the others in the book. Much of the rowing strategy that he and Bouscaren have to work on is that Bouscaren, when single sculling, tends to outpace everyone early in the race, but beaten at the end. Altekruse does not have the same problem, so it is a matter of them figuring out how to use their combined strengths to get the best results. He and Joe win the double position at the camp but then they are overcome by the combination of Enquist and Lewis.

Harry Parker

This is one of the coaches of the Olympic team. He is an excellent rower himself prior to becoming the coach of this team. Obviously, there are few more prestigious positions in the sport than this. Harry tends to keep relatively distant from those he is coaching. The author interprets this as having been intentional, but no information about this comes from Harry himself. He is dedicated. He serves as Harvard's coach for some time.

His main role in this book is to figure out and prepare the team for the Olympic Games of 1984. This is not the easiest task in the world, and there is a set of crises involved with how this comes together. At the end of the book, Harry attends Tiff Wood's wedding despite Tiff's legitimate disappointment; during much of the book it looks like Tiff Wood is going to be the American single sculler at the Olympic Games but then, John Biglow actually wins that position. Since Wood is relatively no good in the multiple boats, he ends up left out of the Olympics even though he wins against Biglow more than he lost. Not only that, but Biglow is content with team rowing whereas Tiff Wood is not cut out for it.

Korppinen

This Finnish man is generally believed to be the world's best single scull rower, or over all rower in the world in the 1980s. He is only discussed through the American perspective in the book. He wins the gold medal in the single scull in the 1984 Olympic Games. He is described as friendly by the others. John Biglow finds himself genuinely outclassed by the level of skill displayed by Korppinen.

Kolbe

This one is a German. He is also a phenomenal single sculler during the 1980s. He is in the Olympics competing with Korppinen. Kolbe wins the silver medal in the single scull at the 1984 Olympics. There is an anecdote about how Kolbe watches video recordings of the Olympic race and cries as he watches the Finnish man row right through him to take the gold medal. Kolbe, like Korppinen, is admittedly beyond Biglow in ability. John Biglow feels he cannot compete with this man.



Objects/Places

Harvard

This ivy league university is also the home of one of the nation's best rowing teams, at least amongst male competitors. It is brought up in the first chapter because it is one of the places where the champions found in this book improve their abilities.

It is located in the East, where the majority of the best rowing teams are located. This private college serves as the background for a large portion of the events in the book. Much of the time the details are limited to ones relevant to rowing.

Chamber of Commerce

This is an organization found in most cities. It is mentioned during the first chapter in reference to the fact that \$5 million dollars is brought into Princeton, New Jersey by hosting the sculling Olympic trials in 1983. These financial gains, according to the author, are the kind of thing to be reported to the local Chamber of Commerce. He is surprised that, in this case, Princeton's Chamber of Commerce did not know.

Scull

This is the name of the boat designed to be used by a rowing crew. There is more than one kind of these, but like with all other boats, once you know the type you will know that kind when you see it.

There are types for the single, the double, the quad and the eight person team. Obviously, getting the best one for the water to maximize performance does matter. These are stored in a boat house. Issues relating to them are entirely relevant, given budgetary and other restrictions that go along with any given one.

Oar

This is an object used by the rower to connect the rower's energy with the water and/through the boat. There are two of these on a single. The quad and boat for eight have one oar per rower. These are normally made of wood or metal but doubtless materials science is sure to be applied to this item in an effort to get the very best ones able to take rowing to top form.



Seattle

This is the name of the largest city in the state of Washington on the northern edge of the western coastal states. This is the location of some excellent rowers: California and Washington actually have some crews good enough to cultivate even top players to a certain level. Biglow is actually from Seattle, which is the reason it is prominent in this book.

Olympic games

The Olympics is still, as it was in the 1980s, the peak showcase for top performance amateur athletes. The book is focused upon those members of the crews who are able to make it into the 1984 Olympic Games as the American rowing crew. There are times when the history of the Olympics is important. Tiff Wood, one of the best rowers ever, survives the demoralizing effect of boycotted Olympics. This meant he could not be on the team one year and had to stick with it another 4 years for a chance to try again.

Medals

These are the Olympic medals. Gold designates a first place victory in an international amateur competition. Silver is used for the second place spot, whereas bronze signifies third. These are mentioned more than once, including Biglow's bronze victory in 1981; also Brad Lewis and Paul Enquist win gold medals as partners in a double.

Seat

This is part of the scull. These have the ability to slide within a limited range. Integrating this aspect of the entire motion of rowing is relevant to developing the best technique. This is only referred to a couple of times during the book, mainly because one man has been noticed by the others as having the best technique with the slide of the seat.

Boathouse

This is a structure designed for people to store boats in. They come in various sizes. Sculls, used for rowing, are normally kept in a boathouse. The boathouse is more often designed for the small boats that rely upon human power than for the motorized ones. In the context of this book, the sculls are implied to have their own boathouse.

Wedding

There is one wedding mentioned in this book—Tiff Wood's. This occurs within a year after the 1984 Olympic Games. Tiff Wood invites Harry Parker and marries a woman who also has a lot of experience rowing as crew in the women's teams.



Double

This is a type of scull. It contains two rowers, manipulating two oars.

Quad

This is a scull designed to be moved by 4 people working as a team. It has 4 oars, one rower to an oar. This type of rowing boat is mentioned from early on in the book, repeatedly up until chapter 31.

Eight

This scull has 8 oars, and has one rower per oar. These are mentioned repeatedly throughout the book. In the 1980s, the Americans throw together teams for these after training each rower for the single scull, which has two oars but one person rowing. The Germans, on the other hand, train teams for this boat, and cultivate single scullers entirely separately.



Themes

Rowing

The author treats this book as an introduction to rowing. The first thing about rowing, is that like work, there are crews to get the races won and the jobs done. There are special boats for this sport. There are also different boats for running races using various numbers of crew members.

The single scullers. Rowing alone is rather common for practicing, but is far less common for races. The higher up in the competition people can reach, the more prized the opportunity to race as a single sculler.

Doubles. This is a two man or woman boat. These people will have experience training as single scullers and as oarsmen or oarswomen on a team. One contrast showcased in the book is the difference between the Americans and Germans during the 1970s and 1980s. The Americans tend to train people in the single sculls and then cobble together a team at the last minute. The Germans train some people for teams and others are trained to specialize in the single sculling. Tiff Wood is shown to be more of a single sculler where Biglow is exceptional for the double or other team boat.

Quads. This is four person boat. Both women's and men's teams use two hands on each oar in the multiple person boats. Obviously, this means one person can only handle one oar, whereas in the single sculler, one person handles two oars. The eight is also a classical rowing form, and is primarily the same as the four only larger.

Rowing is a very challenging sport. It was more popular during the 19th century than the 20th. Its future is assured but not certain in terms of popularity. The sport is pursued mainly by the upper middle class and the wealthy in part due to the expenses involved with it. In that respect it is like horses, aircraft and some of the skiing available—wonderful but pricey.

Development of Athletes

In addition to the performance of the sport, there is also the saga for each participant. The author delves relatively deeply into the life stories of a few of the main characters. One asset of this is that he reveals the stories of how each of them developed. Halberstam also shows readers part of the development of some of the sport's greatest coaches. There is little to no explanation given for how rowers are "made." However, the author shows that different cultures take a different attitude towards this. The East Germans seemed to believe in something along the lines of eugenics—they check people over and encourage people who have a specific physique whilst discouraging others who do not have "the right build" for this. The Americans acknowledge the role of biology in this sport, but the approach is less restrictive. In fact, one of the best American rowers is described as "not having the right build for rowing" at all.



In addition to the right build, and the proper socio-economic class for participating in this sport, there is a great deal of training. Some of the training is physical and much of it is mental. Mental toughness, a feature also advertised as being needed for the military lifestyle, has a major role in rowing. Weight training, mental training, and a great deal of rowing are all part of the program.

Rowers learn their roles and their equipment. Many of them develop better when they have the company of some of their peers. There is a way of improving and of helping them to improve simply from the kinds of dynamics that emerge when a whole team is able to be trained together. Examples of ways this takes place are included in the book. One way of doing this is shown when a new member of a team is mocked by the coach—the new coach tells him that he will not make the team. This discouragement is mitigated by the fact that the man being mocked is recruited to the school for the sake of being on the team. In another case, Bouscaren finds that he can train with another man, which he enjoys a great deal more than working out alone. Everyone on the team notices that he does this.

Olympic Games

The book focuses upon the amateur competition of the international Olympic Games. The references to it are mainly those of the 1970s and 1980s. Now and then, during discussions of how some of the coaches developed, there is mention of an earlier games. The Olympics are shown to be heavily involved with politics in this book. Twice, American rowers are disappointed by cancellations and boycotts.

Jimmy Carter is viewed as responsible for having blocked Tiff Wood—undoubtedly one of the best rowers in the world—from participating in the Olympic Games. The author writes about how upsetting this is for the athletes and how Tiff Wood starts his move from Olympic team member to team captain, perhaps from complaining in a very outspoken manner about President Jimmy Carter's decision. Four years later, the American athletes are almost equally devastated when the Soviet Russians boycott the Olympic Games. They have been so looking forward to competing with these athletes. This is the general trend, and it holds for the case of rowing as well.

The International spirit of the Olympics is shown in a few more ways. The Games somehow both transcends a lot of politics but also focuses national identities and nurtures patriotism. This is shown by the genuine nature of the admiration and hope involved by the athletes getting together, if only to compete with one another. Halbertsam describes many instances of friendly behaviors across national boundaries. He also writes of how there are problems at times. For example, an American man is misled by a translator to call a young Soviet champion rower something derogatory instead of something more respectful. The motives of the tricksters are political; the whole incident is an accident. This shows how sensitive international situations are and how much the political tensions and diverse motivations of people influence events at such momentous times.



Style

Perspective

This book takes place in the second half of the 20th century. The subjective location is America and the author is male. The author is a journalist. He is writing an incredibly in-depth sporting story. For a journalist, a book is an incredibly long project. David Halberstam is very obviously writing for people who do not understand rowing. It is designed to serve people who have developed an interest in the sport, probably as a consequence of viewing the Olympic Games in 1984.

The author has intentionally written the book for a general audience. Not only are the contents safe for young people, but it is also true that readers could come from all parts of the socio-economic strata and still be interested in this. The book is written with a similar tone and style to newspaper writing; it is clear and accessible. It is clear that he does not expect the readers to automatically know things about how social class affects the sport.

Tone

The tone of the book is informative. It does not assume pre-existing knowledge of the subject nor of any of the people in it. There is not enough information to serve as a primer for the sport, but the whole presentation works like an introduction to the sport. The author is telling readers all about the sport, the rowers, how the trials lead up to sorting out who is on the Olympic Team of 1984 and then what happens to those people.

The tone of the work is upbeat. The author is realistic, rather than artificially optimistic. However, this whole work is presented with an air of excitement and dedication. It is, in some sense, a bit of written sports casting or sports writing. It is unusually long for presentations of sporting information, but it is far from being the only book on the subject. The author cheerfully brings readers along to touch upon numerous aspects of crew—the boats, the rowers' personalities, their interpersonal tensions—helping to share a fuller sense of what happened. The sport has a bright future. Rowing involves collegiate people up through middle aged people. There is at least one rower who begins as a child. Most of them actually did not. Top rowers can still be in their best form during their 30s and 40s. Women and men both row, even though the men's team is the focus. The author makes a point of telling readers that most men rowers marry women rowers.

Structure

The book's structure is quite simple. It does not even have a table of contents. There are nameless chapters. These are numbered clearly and simply. The presentation is



predominantly chronological but there are flashbacks in time. This rarely becomes confusing, though it may be less clear for people who are reading the book and know nothing about the events or people being written of. The book focuses upon the 1980s.

The main characters in this case all exist in real life. The author introduces them as part of introducing the readers to the entire sport. In this respect, it is almost like a biography for the Olympic Team of 1984. There is more than one important person. Four of the rowers receive the majority of the attention in the book. Each has a chapter devoted to him and there are more flashbacks. Their class background and elements of their personality that are relevant to having proper perspective are all provided.

The author includes an Epilogue. This permits him to give readers at least a brief follow-up on the 1984 Olympic Games. Two of the men are heading towards being physicians.



Quotes

"It was not a celebrated event. It was an Olympic trial, to be sure, and the trial of a sport with unusually passionate participants," (p. 1).

"Nonetheless, Parker, an intensely competitive man himself, was intrigued by the three-way competition he had been watching," (p. 17).

"The pain was such a given that all oarsmen who competed deserved to never be questioned," (p. 44).

"Most highly competitive athletes give off a tangible scent of their ego and drive; it is impossible to be around them without feeling their ambition or watching them stake out territory," (p. 45).

"His career at Harvard was a distinguished albeit anonymous one," (p. 70).

"The flame of Olympic glory had flickered just enough to keep him rowing," (p. 99).

"On this weekend Lewis saw himself as a warrior, stalking the enemy," (p. 102).

"Despite the eastern snobbery towards California oarsmen, he thought that Californians had a genuine advantage over the Easterners," (p. 103).

"The Princeton weekend was expensive for Lewis. His total expenditure came to nearly \$4,000," (p. 112).

"Lewis was not happy. He had come so close, only to see victory slip away. Besides, he did not entirely agree with the decision of the judges," (p. 132).

"The problem was that the Bigelow who returned was, as far as Cunningham was concerned, more of a nuisance than a pleasure," (p. 147).

"In addition, he was fighting his own personal disappointment. He was accustomed to being the preeminent figure of American rowing, and he had wanted to be the coach of both the sweeps and the scullers," (p. 162).

"He also felt he should have chosen a different method of selection," (p. 190).



Topics for Discussion

What are the most important qualities for a rower to have?

What is your favorite type of rowing boat: the single, double, quad or eight? Explain why.

What makes Harry Parker such a great coach?

Which of the men discussed in this book is your favorite? Why is that?

What is the typical differential in timing between a victory and a second place or failure during a high speed trial in this book?

Give your opinion on Bouscaren's special ability and tendency to make special adjustments for each race he is in.

Discuss the fact that Bouscaren tended to lead during the first half of races and Biglow had the reputation of coming on with increasing strength such that he achieved victory in the end.

Do you think it is better to train a rowing crew as a team more intensively and extensively or do you feel it is best to make the most of their individual development and then just stick them together for situations needing team work? Give at least one reason for your opinion.

What does it mean to row right through another?