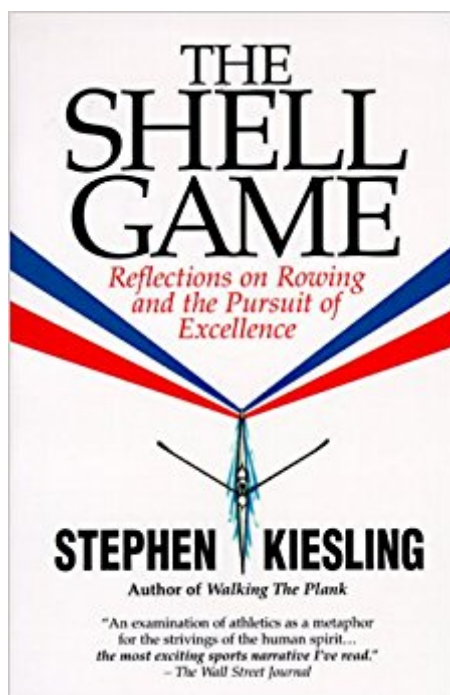


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# Shell Game: Reflections On Rowing And The Pursuit Of Excellence



## Synopsis

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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I recommend this book for anyone who has ever rowed, or has ever wondered what it would be like to row. He makes the reader feel the drastic ups and downs which go along with this addicting sport. I received my copy as a gift from another rower, and I have continually passed my copy on to my teammates and coaches. A must-have for any oarsman.

"The Shell Game" is a nice companion to "Mind Over Water" and "The Amateurs." Where "Mind Over Water" deals with single sculling, "The Shell Game" recounts Stephen Kiesling's personal history of rowing in eights, focusing especially on the Yale-Harvard race, the Henley Royal Regatta, and the preparations and selection camp for the national team for the ill-fated 1980 Olympic Games. Along with "The Amateurs," "The Shell Game" and "Mind Over Water" seem to make up a perfect trio of personal odysseys in the sport of rowing. Of the three, "The Amateurs" is certainly the best written (after all, David Halberstam, need one say more?), but "The Shell Game" and "Mind Over Water" let you peek directly into the minds and hearts of devotees of this weirdly fanatical

sport. Focused on three specific events as it is, "The Shell Game" provides a look into a rarefied world of rowing races, from the hidebound tradition of Henley to the grueling trials at the U.S. Olympic selection camp, from the etiquette of international racing to the mechanics of testing athletes to determine not only their racing abilities but even their rate of oxygen exchange. As with any memoir, there are those who will find the more personal passages a tad cloying, but overall it's a delightful book. Kiesling provides a particularly nice chapter ("The Set") on the tragic dichotomy of the physical and the intellectual that began in ancient Greece and still haunts us today. If ever there were an argument for their reunification, this would surely be one of the best. Definitely a keeper for future re-reading.

I read this book several times in the early 1980's, after my own (undistinguished) rowing career had come to an end. Given that I'm writing this in early 2016, you will forgive me if my memory isn't up to recalling enough details to properly evaluate the book as a whole. At the time, I was thrilled just to have ANY book written about rowing, and one that trafficked in Olympic aspirations could do no wrong. So even back in the day, I'd have been rather obsequious with any criticism of this book. That said, the story of how John Terwilliger came to make the 1979 US National rowing team is itself worth the price of the book (even if you never read the rest of it). It can provide inspiration for anybody, even those who've never picked up an oar, and deserves to become legend far beyond American boathouses. I don't think it's hyperbole to call it Campbellian (as in Joseph) in its capacity to convey perseverance in a mythic structure (even though the story is in fact true!).

Rowing is among the most anonymous of sports. In the prestige categories there are legends and myths, but these are little known or acclaimed outside its community.. It retains its Brahmin character; despite becoming more accessible in recent years, it still has the aura of Groton, Exeter, St. Paul's preps and the Ivy League. The first Yale - Harvard contest was held in 1852, predating any other intercollegiate athletics. Kiesling takes you into the world of the 8's, in futile preparation for the boycotted 1980 Olympics. A house scholar and varsity member at Yale, Kiesling gives you a grasp of the cult like devotion to this sport, the fraternal but bitterly competitive atmosphere for places on the boat, the almost complete physical immersion, beyond exhaustion, in preparation for regattas-- and the little acre of hell and glory (or agony) of the races themselves. This type of athletic intensity is, if not unique, uniquely exhibited in Crew-- members strive to exceed their limits, to match and challenge that of their crew mates, to uphold its traditions. This is a young man's book; his sharp opinions reflect a young man's attitudes born of singular personal challenges-- which

moderate with maturity. It is a good book on rowing, and a great book on the competitive spirit.

A fantastic book for teens starting to row. I related better to it than the amateurs.

If you're new to crew and want a book that will inspire and educate you start here! Great Book, I've given at least 5 of them away as gifts. Great for the young rower just getting started.

A friend told me about this book. I wasn't sure what to expect. It turned out to be a great story, and I found that I couldn't put it down once I started reading it! It reads really well, like a good story should, but it also inspires. Yeah, sure, I row, but even if I didn't I am quite sure that this story would captivate me. Kiesling tells his story well, and explains in a way that makes occasional technical references interesting to non-rowers and rowers alike. It's like an old friend is telling you a story. You won't be disappointed. You'll surely be uplifted, too.

Having tested my own limits several years ago as a rower, and now as a triathlete, this book has become a staple food for my mind, when my body wants to quit. When the going gets rough, I get reading *The Shell Game*. It is both emotionally charging and intellectually provoking. While rowing is traditionally considered a collegiate sport, this book touches on both the regal culture behind the Harvard/Yale rivalry, and the primal challenge felt by every athlete that has ever been on a competitive team.

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