

Flatwater Newsletter April/May 2011

After yet another absence to make your heart grow fonder, the newsletter is back in being once again. In this scintillating issue there will be lots of items generated by you the canoeing public and translated by yours truly into hopefully useful information.

The regatta season is with us again and the weekend of 15/16 April sees the start of what will be a most exciting year as it is the year of qualifying for the Olympics in London 2012. The qualifying system seems to get more and more complicated for many of us and if there is someone out there who can let me know in simple terms how it works then please can they set it out for us. The essentials seem to be that the numbers able to take part in canoeing is severely restricted as part of the IOC desire to limit the size of the Olympics to about 15,000 athletes. That number swells enormously with all the coaches and physios and the last figure I saw was another 30,000.

In addition there are all the hangers on and sponsors and TV and Uncle Tom Cobley and all.

With sprint canoeing restricted to 245, plus about 110 for slalom, there can only be room for the crème de la crème, right?

Wrong! The world is divided up into areas to try and achieve the impossible of getting the best in the world and everyone else including all the "Eddy the Eagles". Whilst this is a laudable aim it seems to be the impossible dream without having some casualties. Canoeing is at its most intense and strongest in Europe and yet this is one of the world area qualifying sections. Africa and Australasia are another. Seems to me that the paddlers from Europe have a much harder time to even get to the Olympics let alone win a medal. It's usually a maximum of one entry per nation anyway apart from some "spares". This compares with the three or even four entries for some of the track and field events that take place in the main stadium and receive the maximum TV coverage and therefore exposure for the sponsors. Having said that canoeing and slalom in particular rank very high in the "most viewed" sports. Slalom has been in the top five for the past four Olympics.

Team games push up the numbers of course.

Ever wondered why the games take place in August even in really hot climates like Greece? To take a jaundiced view it is because the American sports season is between its main activities of Football and Baseball. So there is a lull in advertising opportunities that the games fill in very nicely.

On the other hand without all the TV and sponsors there would be a very pale version of the event. Seems like whichever way you turn there is a conundrum to be solved.

You could get rid of the games and level the playing field for all the World Championship sports but then one can only conclude that this would leave the world a poorer place.

All this diatribe is against a system which does not reward all excellence in its total and yet still produces the greatest show on earth every four years. There is absolutely no doubt that all the competitors and most especially the medal winners deserve all the plaudits they receive. It is a great achievement to take part and the pinnacle of many an athlete's career to win a medal. They also get the chance to meet other sportsmen which without the games they would never have had the opportunity. Sport is a great leveler and a foundation for friendship over the world. Anything which supports the creation of friendship on this scale has just got to increase the chance of us all having just a small increase in understanding of what makes us all tick. It might just prevent another conflict or argument, however large or small. The relationship of sports friends surely drives many to remain part of the world family.

Next year the games come to town and like me I trust that many of you have signed up to be a part of it. It will never come to these shores again for many years, if at all, and to make sure it succeeds has got to be worthwhile.

Lightnings

These boats have come to the fore in a debate in both of the flatwater committees but with slightly different starting points. For Marathon it was whether to keep the Geoff Sanders Trophy exclusively for these boats and after a long debate it was decided that this was just what would happen. So no change at the moment.

For the SRC it was related to Mini sprints and the boat in general. Again after a long and quite heated debate it was again decided not to change the current situation.

Here are a few of the views expressed in the e mails that both committees created in trying to find a view as to how the end users saw the boat.

"I know from experience how popular the lightnings are with clubs (coaches, parents, helpers and paddlers) and I suspect that many would consider their current fleets of these boats as having a life expectancy that is significantly longer than 3 years."

"We should then make sure that the debate is truly serious about the future of U10/U12 racing. It may be contrary to one philosophy of racing, but it is also very popular across a large

population of clubs and it does ensure that the youngest paddlers are not exposed to the competitive excesses of some much older (and often slower) seniors whose aggressive racing tactics were held out as one reason to establish age group races for these ages rather than pure ability based divisions when that decision was made many years ago."

"I have canvassed opinion around our club and there was unanimous support for the Lightnings.

The children enjoy paddling them and, as a single design, there is no feeling of anyone having an advantage by paddling a 'better' boat.

The boats are durable and many clubs have invested a lot of money in them. Allowing other boats to be used for competitions could very quickly render the existing boats redundant and result in more expense to replace them with whatever comes next."

"The Pyranha boats have lost some of the speed of the Mini kayaks, and rather "too stable" as well and may be old. But our youngsters can use them throughout the winter without fear. Speed is "relative" the construction lends itself to "club use" and paddlers do progress to K1-s well. Besides, change costs money and it is in short supply."

"Many clubs, including ours, have invested in Lightnings and in the interest of fairness they are "the ones we have." More expense for clubs if we have to change them. Anything else is opening the way to "buy" success for those wealthy enough to do so. I cringe at the thought of having one set of boats for sprint and a different set for marathon in our beginner juniors and watching some of the ones that enter marathon in them, any other boat would be beyond their reach."

"The argument that kids train in K1s and want to race the same boat in competition, just shows that some people are holding their young paddlers down, by not encouraging entering them in youth D classes (or Div 9 in marathon.)"

"My vote would be for keeping them and a "level playing field" at that age for those young paddlers not yet ready to make the move to a full size boat. If young paddlers are good enough to move out of them, it should be into the D classes & full length/weight boats."

"For what they do they are fine. They were not the best design and we have other mini boats at the club that are more popular with the

paddlers because they are lighter and inherently quicker.

"Many clubs, including ours, have invested in Lightnings and in the interest of fairness they are "the ones we have." More expense for clubs if we have to change them. Anything else is opening the way to "buy" success for those wealthy enough to so. I cringe at the thought of having one set of boats for sprint and a different set for marathon in our beginner juniors and watching some of the ones that enter marathon in them, any other boat would be beyond their reach."

Devizes To Westminster

By the time you read this the 2011 event will have been concluded. This year sees a number of firsts for the event. Firstly in the men K2 we have a reigning World Marathon Champion taking part with a 5 times past Marathon World Champion in the form of Ben Brown and Ivan Lawler. As the race is late in the year and the weather has been so good there is a chance for the record to go even though the lack of water in the Thames will go against that possibility, as there has been precious little rain lately.

The second is the very experienced crew of Tim Cornish and Ollie Harding. Tim currently holds the "official" record from 1979, yes that's correct it was as far back as 32 years ago, even though Steve Baker and Duncan Capps beat it in 2000. This record time was disallowed as the event had been stopped due to dangerous conditions. You can see the familiar names from just the first few in the K2 record list below, with thanks to DW Committee for their excellent and comprehensive website.

<u>15:17:45</u>	2000	Baker Steve & Capps Duncan	Elmbridge CC & Army
<u>15:34:12</u>	1979	Greenham B R & Cornish T J	Reading and Leighton Park CC & Richmond CC
<u>15:37:36</u>	1998	Baker Steve & Dark S	Royal CC & Bradford on Avon
<u>15:39:13</u>	1989	Wells P & Wells M	Richmond CC
<u>15:42:03</u>	1994	Phillips Mark C & Lewis Richard	Royal Navy K A & Bradford on Avon CC
<u>15:50:18</u>	1994	Belcher R J & Cornish T J	Independent
<u>15:57:38</u>	1979	Harding Ollie & White Ian	Hereford CC

Finally this event is now one of the races in the new International Canoe Federation Classic Race Series. This is one of ten events from all over the world and will include such well known events such as the Dusi and Sella. Look at the ICF website for full details.

Attached to this newsletter is the ICF Marathon newsletter from last month for those of you who have not seen it yet for information on the international events to come.

"Tuning the Materials"

by Stan Missen

Although this is a Flatwater article I am starting with something a bit bouncy! Bear with me, its is going somewhere relevant!

'Tuning the materials' is the time allocated to pre race preparation for the round Madeira marathon and the importance of this time for all competitors & coaches is confirmed by the race rules in that, I quote " craft must be capable of withstanding 3 metre waves" - all very matter of fact, but something that *concentrates the competitors minds* when we think of boat and equipment preparation and the consequences of NOT being properly prepared!

There is no doubt that whether you are a follower of marathon or sprint the considerable time athletes are now spending on their physical preparation and training is far beyond that than it has every been in the history of our sport. This dedication to succeed and commitment is commendable and long may it continue - indeed results from the 2010 season, at all levels, confirm the growing strength of UK kayak racing.

But are we controlling the controllable? I have witnessed an increasingly apparent weakness in boat and equipment preparation at events. Recent items that confirm this point are a broken tiller T - bar, seats crashing to the ground during portaging, boats starting events with frayed and rusty rudder cables, loose footrest brackets, paddling with cracked paddles (!) and plenty of 'gaffer tape liberally spread around!! And in some ways the worst of all 'petrol for the power' failing, that is the hydration systems that are impossible to reach or siphon out your life blood into the river often simply because they haven't been tested adequately!

Is this all old hat and the problem has always been there or perhaps with age I realise the importance of such things, as I no longer have benefit of youth and power to overcome the odd inconvenience during a big race! I suspect however that its more to do with the fact that we are teaching our youngsters to prepare themselves physically and race well but *not* teaching them the skills that we 'enjoyed' when having to repair and service our *one* old, multi discipline kayak in which we trained, did marathons and

sprinted, often all in the same week!! Simply has the standard of equipment and quantity available to us pushed it beyond the need for proper basic maintenance? I think not.

So who is to blame? Are we facing a future where paddlers know little or nothing about correct boat and equipment maintenance and do we have a generation who are happy to rely on others. Does the responsibility fall back with the parent, in the case of our youngsters, or the club or team coach? I accept that the vast majority of paddlers do not face equipment issues whilst racing , but when is that by their design, as they HAVE carried out work on their equipment, or when is it that, up until now, they have just been lucky?

At a recent junior international a T - bar break in the last 500mtrs of a stage race resulted in huge disappointment. Whilst repairing it I asked the crew involved had they taken it out and inspected the T-bar when they prepared their boat, their reply 'no our coach had a quick look and said it *should* be OK! It had obviously never been removed since the boat was new.

Responsibility must of course rest ultimately with the paddler but we must remember to teach them the skills that they need, and most importantly must implement, each time before they race; each and every time! Despite the fact that our colleagues on the river, the oarsmen, go backwards all their lives it does not escape notice that they are, at all levels, dab hands with their boat maintenance & spanner swinging ability. Indeed they can spend half an entire intended training session putting their boats together before they even take to the water - a far cry from a lot of kayakers I see who seem happy to take the boat from the roof of the car and immediately to the race start line!

So lets teach and pass on the experience we have gained over the years and make sure that our paddlers spend some time on the basics and ensure that we can all enjoy their racing without failures and with the best possible all round preparation for every event, whether it be a domestic or international. It is the one aspect of paddling and ultimate performance that's fully within our control.

International Marathon

This year the major internationals apart from the Classic races are;

- World Cup in Rome on the river Tiber on 25/26 June.
- European Championships St Jean de Losne on the river Saone [nearest big town Dijon] where there will be a Masters event as well as the usual Juniors, under 23 and senior

- championship classes. This takes place over 20/24 July.
- World Championships in Singapore also with Masters and will include an Asian Championship too. Hopefully there will be many Asian nations taking part. Seven have already confirmed entries.

For this event those masters wanting to take their own boat there will be containers going from Holland in early September. These will have many European nation teams boats and if you want a slot then book early. Contact Ruud Heijselaar on r-heijselaar@wxs.nl.

The Sella takes place as usual in early August and for full details see their website www.descensodelsella.com
Contact Andy Goodsell at BCU HQ in Bingham for full details of entry requirements, andy.goodsell@bcu.org.uk. The details will include membership of the BCU and entry through Andy.

Yearbook

The yearbook for Sprint and Marathon is well and truly out now and no self-respecting enthusiast should be without one. Contact Di Bates on diane.bates@dial.pipex.com.

Had I mentioned that contributions to the newsletter are eagerly welcomed?

Alan Laws

Please note that any opinions expressed are not necessarily those of the BCU.