

BRITISH CANOE UNION WILD WATER CANOEING 2013 CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS

INTRODUCTION

It is good to welcome you back again to our Annual Consultative Meeting back in the North East.

The situation in terms of volunteers is I think starting to improve with my plea at last year's Annual Consultative Meeting being taken up and individuals seizing the initiative. I'm very pleased to say we have good and growing regional series developing to meet local needs across England and Scotland. This has reduced the pressure on the WWR Executive which was running everything although the workload continues to be borne by very few people. We need to continue growing our sport so please get involved, particularly as there is still nothing in Wales and the Midlands. If there is a gap please feel free to go ahead and seize the initiative. Russell Smith is now our BCU professional support and we have made a good start at bureaucracy busting! Heather Williams is selecting individuals for the Youth Olympic Games in China – please let me know of any nominees.

GENERAL

2013 has overall been a good year. Personally with Jonnie's World Championship Medal, Hannah Brown's being crowned Senior World Champion and another creditable performance by our Junior Team at the World Championships in Lofer. There was also recognition for the first time by the BCU for our top elite athletes and their coaches with our two World Champions Jessica Oughton and Hannah Brown both being invited to the first GB Canoeing Awards this October.

The various different formats for regional and development racing appear to continue capturing people's imagination and regional participation has started to increase. This is great news and a tribute to the dedication of the growing network of race organisers and clubs in England and Scotland that are pushing forward. Participation at National level remains worryingly low despite the new streamlined calendar.

The WWR Calendar has now been moved to the new format, ably driven by Jon Finch. We have rationalised into National & Regional events and moved the season back to September – August. The new results spread-sheet has been a real success in helping our race organisers speed up both race entries and results. Huge thanks again to Ross Pearton and Neal Underwood for their hard work in making it happen and to Phil Brown who has the key role of ranking list compiler collecting and collating results throughout the season.

We have continued to work on Wild Water development with the new appointment of Russell Smith by the BCU and Mackon Khela, Martyn Steele, Kevin Bowerbank, John Sherwen and Nicky Cresser covering England very effectively and Stuart Smith and the SCA with WWR in Scotland. Torsten Krebs has stood down and I'd like to thank him again for all his dedication and commitment over the last number of years. As you may know John Handyside

has left the BCU although continuing to be involved with WWR and I'd like to wish John all the very best with his new ventures. We are able to support the development of C2 through the Andy Clough Memorial fund so if anyone needs help with the art of canoeing please let me know.

With the continuing focus on participation we will be continuing to work hard on balancing development and performance for athletes and coaches. It is recognised that the balance was not right this year at selection and I apologise personally to all those who were impacted. We as a committee are reviewing the selection policy and its objectives for next year and will be implementing an approach to attract new talent to the World Cup and Championship races in 2014 .

I'm pleased to say we had yet another brilliant year in competition. At the World Championships on the River Soca in Slovenia we had Hannah Brown's winning and being crowned World Champion against tough competition with Melanie Mathys (SUI) in second and Sixtine Malaterre (FRA) in third place. We had a developing junior team at the Junior Worlds in Lofer, Austria paddling on the river Saalach where they all put in strong individual and team performances. Many thanks again to Jon Finch, Kevin Bowerbank, Phil Brown, Ben Oakley, Sandra Hyslop and Hannah Brown for making this all happen!

Neil Stamps and Miranda Churchill have again done a tremendous job in updating the website and continuing to update and amend the look and feel. There is now a BCU website update planned and so hopefully we'll be able to improve the alignment of the BCU's many websites so canoeing has the same look & feel. Also the running of the Facebook Site has continued with general and steady increase in membership, now very close to 340 members in the UK and across the world. Again I'd like to express a huge thanks to Miranda and Neil for keeping this essential service going as well as looking fresh and new and performing well on internet searches!

Once again I'd like to give a special thank you to all the coaches, team management, parents and other helpers who made this all happen. For me this continues to be one of the great strengths and joys of our sport. Particular thanks goes to Vince Postill our Hon. Secretary, to Nigel Jones our Head Coach, Jon Finch for taking on the calendar as well as keeping our minibuses serviceable and roadworthy – no small achievement, Paul Anderson to help grow Canoeing. Simon Wright for his continuing sterling work as treasurer, now in his fifth year abroad based in Abu Dhabi and to Ross Pearton for his unswerving support to the Executive. Having such an experienced team, with all the support they get from across the sport has been essential to delivering the great results we have achieved.

I would also like to again thank all the Race Organisers and in particular those coming forward with new races – without them we would not have a sport! Many thanks to Neal Underwood for taking on the Dee Race and to Nicky Cresser for taking on the Tees Races run so successfully by Alan Barber and

his team for something like thirty years, many thanks to Alan for all his help over so many years.

1) Raising the Profile of Paddlesport - *To manage and run an enjoyable programme that meets the needs of the whole WWR paddling community. Deliver a competition programme that attracts and stretches all our paddlers*

We now have implemented the National & Regional Series with a September – August Race calendar. We have also retained a number of events as Open Championships (like the Tryweryn) and Open Events – like the Dee & Tour d’Ecosse. This means there is an increased focus on Regional Events with the focus on a limited number of National Series races that will move venues each year to ensure variety.

This follows the French model with club based regionally-run races and a small number of national events. The hope is that we can recover participation so that people need to qualify at a couple of regional events. We are not at that situation so anyone with the appropriate skill levels is welcome to take part in the national series races and we’ll review progress at each ACM. Regional races and British Universities & Colleges (BUCS) races have continued to grow with a new series in the NE. Mackon Khela, John Handyside and team capitalised on the wave of enthusiasm around the Olympics anniversary with an excellent and well attended race event at Lee Valley so we will continue to experiment with new formats.

Areas for further attention are:

- The new race results spread-sheet with the simplified rules is making it easier for organisers and ranking list compilers alike. Having a clear list of race participants should also help us to keep in touch with athletes and encourage them to come back to more regional and national series races
- More support for Masters: encourage masters to return to attending races
 - this hasn’t happened so please could I have a volunteer to lead this.

This fits, of course, with our two key priorities to increase participation and to win more medals in international competition. Jon Finch has taken on the calendar development in addition to managing the minibuses and his canoe club roles. We still need someone with deep knowledge of the sport to provide direction, advice and guidance. We also need a national bib coordinator. Both these roles need permanent volunteers to lead them.

2) Paddler Focus - *To make the sport accessible to all who want to participate*

Development work has continued in many different ways with Kevin Bowerbank, Jon Finch, Mackon Khela, Martyn Steele, John Sherwen, Nicky Cresser and Neal Underwood, with their respective clubs and Stuart Smith with the SCA are all continuing to run excellent race series and working hard to meet demand.

Russell Smith and Neil Stamps have developed the coaching pathway, syllabus and course material for the discipline specific module for Wild Water

Canoeing. This provides a practical easy to teach course for individuals and clubs to qualify them to take part in Regional Series races. The aim is to run the pilot training course in the South West– likely early in the New Year and to target running three courses across England in 2013.

It is planned to run a number of development events to encourage participation and support aspiring athletes. The programme will include: Canal side Centre, GB Squad training weekends and the Bala assessment and wild water profiling weekend. This will be followed up by team racing focused on World Championships and World Cups. There will also be a summer training camp at the start of the summer holidays. One of the objectives is to aspire to being able to field a strong GB Team

I'm delighted to say that coach development has started making progress this year. Mike Devlin & Russell Smith have both confirmed that it is the role of the WWR Exec to nominate Elite Coaches for GB squad training events and competition. In addition the Accelerated Prior Learning (APL) approach can be used to achieve formal qualification. (This doesn't change the need for coaches to have white water safety and rescue and in-date first aid qualifications.) The Exec. will nominate individuals for this process and if there are other volunteers who would like to be considered please let any Exec committee member know.

In addition the Exec will be nominating Neil Stamps & Alan Tordoff as ex-officio coaches in recognition of their expertise and contribution to the sport.

It is also a continuing disappointment to me that none of the PDO's with a Wild Water Canoeing background have anything to do with supporting development in any way or form. We have continued to get a welcome increase in support the Scottish Canoe Association. The Welsh Canoe Association and Canolfan Tryweryn have had some financial difficulties and East Midlands continues to remain the biggest gap in our coverage at the moment.

The BCU's governance council for Canoe-England is now in its fourth year. This brings together all the regions and all the different canoeing disciplines in one forum. For me it provides a useful communications role but the matrix of disciplines and regions is simply too complex for those who want to go paddling or racing. I have input some ideas on future structure into a BCU review so hopefully this will change. Making the sport accessible, friendly and welcoming to all is, I think, the key area we need to address. The focus across the UK is rightly on increasing participation and enjoyment of sport at all levels. The BCU are starting to recognise this and our next development plan and committee structure needs to reflect this.

We continue to have the Perception Wavehopper Challenge, The Northern Series, the Wessex Series, the Barrow Series and the Sharks with a new NE Series and a the Scottish Series. Canoeing doubles development seems to have stalled and Paul Anderson has volunteered to help out. There is support from the Andy Clough memorial fund for any aspiring C2 athletes' development.

We are continuing to focus on university students with continuing great participation at the BUCS championships on the Washburn and we have managed to align with the autumn calendar. Jonnie Schofield has started an MSc and so will be representing Brunel University this year instead of Loughborough!

I'm pleased to say that through the good offices of Jon Finch the Minibus and Trailer situation is really good. Reliability has been transformed through a lot of hard work and rapid follow up when inevitable faults do occur.

3) International Success - To help paddlers realise their full potential in International competition.

I'm yet again absolutely delighted to see the continuing success at international competition. Hannah Brown's World Championship Gold was simply outstanding and her performance at the Canoe Sprint World Championships continues to demonstrate how good our athletes and coaching actually are. Our performance plan was put together in 1996 and we have been working steadily towards this ever since! What is also clear is that we will have to redouble our efforts to develop new talent in both canoeing and kayak disciplines.

Our Junior Worlds results demonstrated strong potential and I was personally delighted that Kevin Bowerbank managed to enlist the help of such a talented coaching team with Ben Oakley, Hannah Brown and Sandra Hyslop all helping out some of our most talented athletes.

After a decade of continuity we are entering a new era. With Nigel Jones as Head Coach and Paul Anderson developing Canoeing the aim is to continue our focus on elite performance to deliver our promise of helping our best athletes achieve their full potential. What we will be looking to is a new way of doing this over the next year. Anyone who would like to help in any way please get in touch.

I personally remain absolutely committed to delivering for all our athletes at all levels and aspirations involved in the sport, not only at the elite level. My personal focus has always been more in participation – I continue to enjoy running the Irwell Regional Race at the Burrs Activity Centre just as much in sharing the excitements and disappointments of World Championship events. The successes of all of our athletes and their individual journeys to achieve their hopes and potentials continue to make me very proud indeed.

We have a great sport that appeals to many people at all levels. To make this a reality it is not a question of spreading the existing elite coaching staff more thinly but of bringing in many more people in at club and regional level. This can only be done by reaching out to many of the "friends of WWR" across the country and enlisting their help. Please contact me if I can help in this. We already have our top national coaches and athletes taking youngsters down on the Saturday's before races. Having elite athletes helping our new entrants is one of the things that helps keep me going!

Sue Hornby, Andy Goodsell and Howard Blackman continue to provide invaluable links with coaching and competition to ensure we remained aligned with the BCU's overall direction.

So to conclude I would again like to thank everyone for coming to the ACM and again wish you all the very best for the coming season. Happy Paddling!

Peter Schofield

Tyne/Tees 10th November 2012