

## **BRITISH CANOE UNION WILD WATER RACING 2010 CHAIRMAN'S ADDRESS**

### **INTRODUCTION**

It is good to welcome you back to our Annual Consultative Meeting at Llangollen. In a change of format we have arranged supper before hand at "Cafe & Books Llangollen" followed by our ACM. The aim is to ensure we can help fill the cold and dark gap after everyone has finished practicing! Please join us and take this opportunity to meet, get together and to celebrate our success at the World Championships and World Cup with our athletes.

The situation in terms of volunteers I would say is now desperate. The workload continues to be borne by very few people. We have an urgent need for volunteers to help on development, safety, transport, race organisation, regional committee representation and the calendar – we need to really focus on growing our sport so please get involved.

### **GENERAL**

2010 has been a year of real highs and lows – a rollercoaster of a year – again the best year ever for British Wild Water racing in terms of international performance. With Jessica Oughton we have our first ever individual Senior World Champion - brilliant.

Participation however has declined at a really worrying rate – particularly at Division A level. The challenges I spoke about last year have not changed and are worth repeating. The economic climate means that everyone seems to be working at their day jobs harder than ever before. Athletes themselves are increasingly under financial pressure from student grants and the costs of the full-time training needed to excel. The likely funding cuts from the government's spending review mean that the work to run the sport is being done by a dwindling band of ever more hard pressed volunteers. This is simply not sustainable.

I'm over the moon about our international results this year. They are for the second year running simply the best ever results in the history of GB Wild Water Racing. We had truly brilliant results at Masters & Senior level and our Junior team had a great set of performances at this year's European Championships.

The new WWR Calendar did not have the effect we had hoped for. I personally had to develop and run it for the whole year which led to a greater than usual run of errors and omissions. For Wavehopper and Div B we have had new races and organisers stepping forward as well as the hardened regulars – for whom I'm most grateful, so we have probably just maintained the status quo. The new WWR calendar has not worked and we have had a massive decline in Div A participation. We had a meeting in Early September and Jamie Christie's father has kindly taken on calendar compilation for 2011.

We have continued to work on Wild Water development but I would say that we have not yet hit on a winning formula. We have continued to support the

development of C2 through the Andy Clough Memorial fund and through the Canoeing Centre of Excellence in Chester and look forward to continuing to do more for canoeing over the next few years. Pete Hargreaves has been the WWR development director. Torsten Krebs and Ben Nelson have helped development across England and Mackon Khela ran a successful development trip to Bourg. We are aiming to run Junior Squad weekends in the New Year and Graham Froggett, previously Junior Team Manager, has volunteered to take the lead. We are also planning to run a development trip to Bourg and also in Wales during next summer but volunteers will need to step forward and take this on. I understand that entry level composite boats remain elusive despite thinking this was finally fixed last year.

I'm pleased to say we had yet another brilliant year in competition. At the World Championships on the River Noguera Pallaresa at Sort in the Catalan Pyrenees where we had Jessica Individual Gold medal as well as Hannah, Sandra & Jessica's team Gold's & Bronze's, Hannah's brace of Silvers and Jessica's Bronze medals. With the Canadian Doubles classic team only 0.8 seconds off bronze medals for Colin Cartwright & Dave Bradburn, Simon Goulding & Matt Harrison, Simon Wright & Jamie Christie they so narrowly missed repeating their success last year at the Europeans. At the World Cup Jessica was again the well deserved overall Ladies K1 winner for the second year in a row. With Hannah's and Jamie Christie & Simon Wright 's Silver Medals and Ben Oakley's fourth place. We also had Colin Smith & Brian McNulty's Master's Gold, Dee Paterson's Master's Silver, So again we won a record number of medals for Great Britain WWR. Very many congratulations to Alan Tordoff, Jamie Christie and the whole team. We had a strong junior team at the Junior Europeans in Kraljevo, Serbia where they all put in strong individual and team performances.

We have been a significant part of the most successful year ever across BCU Paddlesport and also Lady's dragon boating where Dee's team achieved a clean sweep at the World Championships in Holland and later set a new world record for the fastest 24hr race in the Guinness Book of Records. We also have distinguished alumni in both marathon and sprint racing.

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 as always go to Miranda Churchill and Neil Stamps for the WWR Website and Steve Oxtoby as our Hon. Secretary; to our national coaches; Phil Caunt, Jonnie Folland, Carl Foody, Mike Mason, Nigel Jones, Neil Stamps, Alan Tordoff and James Wingfield; for their continuing work on WWR regional development to Kevin Bowerbank, Jon Finch, Pete Hargreaves, Mackon Khela, Torsten Krebs and Ben Nelson and Simon Wright for his continuing sterling work as treasurer now into his second year in Italy. Also a big thank you this year to James Wingfield, Vince and Anne Postill and Janine and Mike Baker's for their help in ensuring the Junior Europeans were such a success and to Jes and Jo Oughton and Jamie Christie for developing the "Grow our Sport" initiative.

Having such an experienced team, with all the support they get from across the sport has been essential to delivering the great international 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! (PS Anyone want to take on the Dee Race?)

***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***

The changes we made last year did not halt the worrying decline in participation, particularly at Div A. In addition due to lack of volunteers I had to develop and run the calendar for the second year running. This was out in time and despite many proofs circulated there were a number of errors that crept in. Fortunately the website made this manageable and we had no significant issues. For only the second time in many years Yorkshire water failed to open up water for the autumn Washburn race. Apologies to those affected and thanks to Bradford and Bingley CC for putting on a scratch race instead. Also thanks to those who have taken the initiative to put on new races such as the Barrow series and the Sharks CC's winter series – maybe we need to learn from this and experiment with new formats.

Areas for further attention are:

- Better marketing: a database for Race organisers, paddlers and parents to register for race information to “Grow our Sport”. Further development offering more support to race organisers could be added if this initial development is successful.
- More support for Masters: encourage masters to return to attending races and to introduce a new National Masters category into the existing structure, starting with three designated races and an annual prize .
- Clearer structure of the divisions: simplify the structure of the divisions and National championships
- Focus on Flagship events at the AGM weekend, the Prize giving weekend, and the Junior selection race.

This fits, of course, with our two key priorities to increase participation and to win more medals in international competition. I'd like to thank Ian Tordoff for all his help in the last two years. Ian has now stood down from helping me with the calendar but I'm pleased to say Don Christie has volunteered to take on the calendar development. We still need someone with deep knowledge of the sport to provide direction, advice and guidance. We also need a national bib coordinator (I have also been accumulating this role on a part time basis). 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 but we have struggled to get sufficient people and clubs involved to meet demand. Progress on the WWR Academy has continued to be delayed. We will use the BCU launch of the Star Awards to align with coaching and long term athlete development across the BCU and all UK sports. Coach development will continue to use the existing resources in place though the BCU.

The Academy established a simple proven approach to enable new individuals and clubs to learn and experience the enjoyment of river racing. I'm pleased to see that we have continued to make good progress using this framework in the London, North West and Wessex Regions because key individuals have continued to take the initiative locally. Big gaps remain however in the Midlands, Scotland and Wales. I'd like to see the national governing bodies and WWR participants helping take this forward – we now have regional race series that should help reduce the need for lots of travelling to races.

This year the BCU has made the next step on the federalisation journey with the creation of a governance council for Canoe-England. This brings together all the regions and all the different canoeing disciplines in one forum. For me it fills a gap in communications that has existed since the sports management committee focused on the Olympic events and re-builds links that were being lost across the family of paddlesport. We have nominated Nigel Jones on to the coaching committee and John Sherwen has volunteered to represent WWR on the North West regional committee. If anyone is already on a relevant committee or would like to help build up our links in other areas or regions please let Steve Oxtoby or me know.

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 recognise this and our next development plan and committee structure needs to reflect this.

We now have the Perception Wavehopper Challenge established, the Wessex Series, the Barrow Series and the Sharks. Canoeing doubles development continues to be a success with Chester acting as our national centre of excellence with their national canoe championship race as a one-off during the summer. Support from the Andy Clough memorial fund has also been immensely helpful in continuing to help our C2 athletes develop and underpinned our continued strong performance this year. After two good years in 2007/8 our work developing master's events has not continued due to lack of resources and the weather. We again have not succeeded in running a one-off National Master's championships as a regular fixture. What we have done is supported international masters racing with great results.

We are continuing to focus on university students with great participation at the BUCS championships on the Washburn. Unfortunately this year's Student World's was cancelled due to lack of an organising nation. The BCU have

contacted the British Universities and Colleges Sport (BUCS) about whether we could bid for 2014 with Slalom and I'm waiting for a reply. For me this is important as it fills a key gap for aspiring athletes as a stepping-stone to the World Cup and the European Championships – and is great fun.

I understand Desperate Measures in Nottingham are supplying cheap introductory WWR boats based on the French KL design and constructed of vacuumed diolin/epoxy but I have not had any feedback on how this is going. Please let me know. For C2's please contact Iain Clough who will be delighted to help through the Andy Clough memorial fund.

Any review of 2010 wouldn't be complete without another review of the Minibus and Trailer situation. We have three minibuses for use in development and at international competition. One has been off the road now for two years needing a new engine and ECU. Due to the cash situation and lack of a volunteer to chase the garage progress on this has been very slow. The old blue minibus was taken off the road after returning from Sort and is currently with me after I trailered it from Nottingham to Lancashire. A new brake master cylinder has been purchased which I'll fit and then get a local garage to check over before deciding what to do next. I also rebuilt the small trailer after one of the hubs disintegrated due to lack of lubrication. None of the buses have been fully used as intended to support development. They are still not generating sufficient income to cover their costs and are not at sufficient races to justify their purchase. I think the need remains as we must both support athletes at events with shuttle runs and help reduce the cost and environmental impact, but for the second year running we need someone to take responsibility for looking after them and making sure they are used for the benefit of our canoeists, clubs and Paddlesport.

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

I'm yet again absolutely delighted to see the continuing broadening and deepening of our success at international competition. The team and individual medals we have achieved continue to demonstrate how good our athletes and team management actually are. We have yet again comfortably broken all previous records for GB WWR medals. Jessica is our first ever senior world champion and this was our first team gold in 35 years. This has been a very long-term achievement. Our performance plan was put together in 1996 and we have been working steadily towards this ever since!

As I've already said in the highlights the World Championship & World Cup results were absolutely fantastic. I feel confident we really do have the right athletes, management and coaching expertise to this level of performance. Our Junior Team also had a good European Championship in Serbia whilst the Junior ladies have continued to improve during 2010. This gives a really good basis for the 2011 Junior Worlds in the Czech republic and a sound base for the future. We will continue to maintain our focus on elite performance to deliver our promise of helping our best athletes achieve their full potential.

As I said last year 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 enjoyed helping at the development event in Dorset on the river Stour at Spetisbury last December and regularly at the Irwell Div B at the Burrs Activity Centre just as much in sharing the excitements and disappointments of World Championship events. Having seen Jessica from her very first race at the Burrs right the way through to being a truly great world champion and knowing all the great people who have helped on the journey makes me so proud. 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!

The elite squad focus has now moved to preparing for the 2011 Europeans at Kraljevo, Serbia (welcome back to the Hotel Termal!), Sprint Worlds at Augsburg in Germany (subject to ratification), the World Cups, The pre-Worlds in Bourg ste Maurice, France and the Junior Worlds at Opava in the Czech Republic. Please contact Alan Tordoff or Jamie Christie if you want to help in any way as this is a particularly spread-out and challenging calendar to achieve.

Andy Goodsell and John Handyside 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*

Llangollen 30<sup>th</sup> October 2010