

A MANUAL
OF COACHING
TECHNIQUES,
ADVICE AND
GUIDELINES FOR
THE CANOE AND
KAYAK COACH

**BRITISH
CANOE
UNION**

The logo for the British Canoe Union, featuring a stylized white wave graphic below the text.

COACHING HANDBOOK



THE BRITISH CANOE UNION

COACHING HANDBOOK

EDITED BY FRANCO FERRERO

With contributions by:

Bill Taylor, Nick Draper, Chris Hodgson, Phil Hadley, Franco Ferrero,
Dino Heald, Bob Timms, Lara Tipper, Sue Hornby, Leo Hoare, Graham
Campbell, Ian Coleman, Chris Forrest, Trys Morris, Nigel Robinson,
Loel Collins, Alan Edge and Pete Catterall.

PESDA PRESS - WALES

WWW.PESDAPRESS.COM

Reprinted 2007

Reprinted 2009

Reprinted 2012

Published in Great Britain 2006

by Pesda Press

Tan y Coed Canol

Ceunant

Caernarfon

Gwynedd

LL55 4RN

info@pesdapress.com

Copyright © 2006 BCU Coaching Service

ISBN-10 0-9547061-6-1

ISBN-13 9780954706166

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Printed in Poland, Polska Book

FOREWORD

Congratulations must go to everyone involved in this fantastic project and indeed to all BCU Coaches, young and old, past and present. All have, in their own way, contributed to this great coaching resource.

Encompassed within this work are the coaching, technical and tactical experiences of BCU Coaches and the BCU Coaching service.

Integrating the 'How', the 'Why' and the 'What' of Coaching, the BCU Coaching Handbook will help the Paddlesports Coach at all levels appreciate the role of the Coach and build the Coaching Process and technical skills to assist and enhance Coaching performance in the Paddlesport environment.

This is a book that will aid existing Coaches and those coming into Paddlesport coaching for the first time. It will help place the theory of the Coaching Process in a practical context delivering theory through practice. The BCU Coaching Handbook shares the experiences of its contributing coaches focusing on the 'how' skills of coaching (the all important coaching process skills), alongside the 'what to coach' skills of Paddlesport. With sections covering all elements of coaching theory and delivery this comprehensive resource is a must on every coach's bookshelf and will be a major supporting element of the BCU's United Kingdom Coaching Certificate endorsed coach education programme when it goes live.

While presented here by the 'few' it would not have been possible without the enthusiasm, knowledge and skill of the 'many' coaches who have contributed to establishing BCU Coaching as the respected and progressive sport coaching body that it is today. That we have matured to this level of resource... thanks should go to every BCU Coach for their own individual commitment.

Enjoy the read



Mike Devlin
BCU Director of Coaching

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to all the members of the BCU coaching scheme, past and present who have helped to develop our body of knowledge to what it is today. I would also like to thank those coach educators, coaches from other sports and Sports Coach UK who have influenced our development over the years.

A special thanks is due to those people who have contributed by supporting the writers by offering suggestions, support, proof reading, acting as models for photographs and in a hundred other ways. Apologies to those of you who were not brought to my attention, those who were are:

Richard Manchett, Lee Miles, Matt Cooke, Vicky Barlow, Richard Chrimes, Vicky Adkin, Peter Wood, Andy Spinks, Glyn Brackenbury, Howard Jeffs, Joan Ferrero, Rose Powell, Marianne Davies, Kelly Dyer, Stuart Bell, Andy Jackson, Samantha Turner, Clive Atkins, Barney Wainright, Richard Lee John Males, Bill Endicott, Hugh Mantle, Keith Lyons, Dave Crosbee, Reg Hatch, Shaun Pierce and Ian Raspin.

Organisations to be thanked include:

BCU Coaching Service, BCU World Class, BCU Young People's Programme, Leicester Outdoor Pursuits Centre, Holme Pierrepont Canoe Club, Plas y Brenin National Mountain Centre, Peak UK, Pyranha, Nigel Dennis Sea Kayaks and Palm International.

The Editor

PHOTOGRAPHS

Unless otherwise specified all photos in Chapters 1-11, 13, 18, 20, 21 by **Dave Leathborough** of Focused on Adventure, dave@focused-on-adventure.com, Tel: 0115-846-0575. Also 12-1,2,12,14,15,16,17 - 19-9,10,11a,12 (19- is the chapter and 5,6,7 the photo numbers, T indicates a Title photo, P a portrait photo).

Unless otherwise specified all photos in Chapters 11,14 and 17 by **Lucinda Manouch**, www.freedomphotographs.co.uk. Also: 1-3 - 5-4c - 19-6,7,8.

Unless otherwise specified all photos in Chapter 12 by BCU World Class. Also 9-4 - 20-T.

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Coaching Service Contact Details

British Canoe Union, 18 Market Place, Bingham, Nottinghamshire, NG13 8AP

info@bcu.org.uk www.bcu.org.uk

Tel. 0845-370-9500

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INTRODUCTION

If you have picked up this book you probably have one main aim in reading it: to become a better paddlesport coach. Fortunately, the main aim of this book is to help you achieve just that. Although written by the coaching service of the British Canoe Union, this book is designed to be fundamental reading for anyone who coaches paddlesport, whether they be based in the UK or not.

GUIDING CONSIDERATIONS

In producing this book, the authors and editor have been guided by the following considerations:

1. This book is about how to coach. The assumption is made that the reader is familiar with how to paddle. So although, for example, key points may be given for a particular manoeuvre or stroke for the purposes of illustration, breakdowns of every stroke and manoeuvre are not included. The reader is referred to the BCU Canoe and Kayak Handbook for that kind of information and an excellent overview of paddlesport.
2. In recent years the BCU has made great advances in coach education, particularly in the area of making coaching theory more accessible. We are aware of the danger that the pendulum can swing too far the other way. Theory is only of use if it helps us to become better *practical* coaches. To this end there is a great emphasis on balancing the theory by providing practical tools to help the coach out there on the water.
3. The BCU Star Tests are invaluable as a means of measuring progress and providing proof of having achieved minimum technical competence before attending training for the various coaching awards. However, the downside is that some BCU coaches are putting far too much emphasis on measuring skill and not enough on developing it. The Star Tests are, and always were, designed as a means of measuring progress and *never* intended as a training syllabus. To this end they will only be mentioned in terms of being one of many ways of measuring progress or a possible aid to goal setting.
4. This book is intended for all paddlesport coaches, so plain English is used throughout. Jargon is only used where it aids rather than hinders understanding and is always explained.
5. A picture speaks a thousand words, so we have used many photos, drawings and diagrams.

COMPONENT PARTS AND TRANSFERABLE SKILLS

Even where a discipline is not specifically covered many of the coaching needs for that aspect of the sport can be met by combining different chapters. As an example, a wild water racing coach would benefit specifically from reading chapters 1 to 5, 8,9,11,12,17, 20 and 21.

Many of the concepts and techniques used in different disciplines are transferable. So do get around to reading those chapters that may not appear to apply to you. As an example, no matter what your background you would benefit from studying the ideas on teaching leadership outlined in Chapter 15 Sea Kayaking.

EFFECTIVE

We hope that you will find this book an informative and enjoyable read. However, the real proof of success will be if you find that some of the things you have read in this book help you improve the effectiveness of your coaching.

Read on!

Franco Ferrero



13 ROLLING

The intention of this chapter is to deal with the 'how' of coaching rolling rather than the 'what'. There are many texts covering the mechanical and technical knowledge a coach would need to understand in order to be an effective coach of rolling, some of which are contained in the references. It is not the role of this chapter to repeat the technical manuals. If you are interested in further reading around the act of rolling and its coaching why not begin with the Inuit whale hunters in skin boats and icy waters in an era when your grandfather or father was the only coach you had.

The main issues dealt with will be:-

- ⊙ Equipment and Dynamic Seating Position.
- ⊙ The need to deliberately coach the action of rolling in appropriate environments, after acquiring the basic movement vocabulary.
- ⊙ The effects of attribution and goal setting on the psychological well-being of the learner.
- ⊙ The effect on performance as 'cold shock' and 'diving reflex' compete for control over the submerged paddler.
- ⊙ Variability and its pivotal position in a roll for all occasions.

Rolling is one of the most difficult of all coaching challenges. This chapter will help equip all coaches interested in developing their input into rolling skills with a set of principles and guiding concepts around which they can construct their coaching. As we pro-

ceed through the chapter there will be examples of 'tools' a coach could use or adjust as necessary. It is important to remember that one of the most rewarding aspects of coaching is the creation of original coaching tools. This ability to create your own tools and exercises in changing environments is a skill all coaches should nurture. It could be argued that the point at which you step beyond the training or education received at any level in coaching is the start of the coach's development. The analogy that we could apply to both this coaching context and an underpinning philosophy behind the development of a paddler's roll would be the often heard 'you learn to drive after you pass your test'. In both rolling and coaching the most significant learning takes place after a person has realised a minimum level of competence.

The order the material is presented here should not indicate a priority, moreover it is important that the individualised coaching is a diet, based on the learner's needs and desires. It is worth mentioning at this

point that the indoor swimming pool should not be cast in the role of novice-only territory, and should be used with integrity and ambition for developing rolling at every level of proficiency. The mere fact that your learner can capsiz e many times without real discomfort is important, particularly when the alternative is where one capsiz e is extremely uncomfortable for the learner.

► EQUIPMENT AND THE DYNAMIC SEATING POSITION

There is a great deal of merit in achieving the best fit for your learner in a craft, as rolling puts enormous strain on the interface between boat and body. The locking of the feet, knees and bottom against the control surfaces of the boat is the dynamic seating position (DSP). In younger or smaller paddlers this is extremely difficult to achieve accurately, hence learning to roll is often left until the youngster is able to solve this physical problem. This is a pity since the principles of Long Term Paddler Development (LTPD) state that from around the age of 12 body awareness and general co-ordination are the key areas, both addressed in the action of rolling.

There are a number of satisfactory solutions to this problem. Easy to fit re-usable kits are now available providing extra foam sections supporting 1,2 or 3 of the contact points. Alternatively, much can be done with closed cell foam and glue or 'Gaffer' tape. Combining this with improved backrest systems helps many young paddlers achieve a functional fit in the cockpit.

Although the footrest is often the easiest of the contact points to adjust, it is in some respects the least important. Keeping the relationship between the knee pressure and the bottom position is critical; to this end solutions that allow smaller people's legs and thighs to reach the front of the cockpit rim are better. In some boats it is possible to move the seat forward and/up so the knees can reach the front of the cockpit, allowing contact to be established. Provided the solution does not trap the paddler in any way, imagination and some basic DIY skills usually provide the answer.

There is a direct link between the speed and accuracy of learning and the quality of the equipment used, including fit. Easy to manage hull shapes, appropriate paddle lengths, blade shape and a spraydeck which does not pop the moment water pressure or torso/knee pressure is applied all need to be considered.

Equipment or props can take on many roles, the common pool equipment is one level, another use is

to distract the learner from a specific outcome by using props to change their point of focus. An example from trampolining is where a coach might put tennis balls in the hands of the performer to heighten the awareness of the arm position during flight.

Performance rolling is usually 'blind' (dark or aerated water/eyes closed in polluted water). It is possible to practise the feel and timing of limited visual feedback by the use of dark goggles. We can use the coach as a prop gripping the hull of an upturned boat to provide friction against the righting action; this might be for several constructive reasons. It could be to simulate a loaded boat in sea paddling or to check for fit in a paddler who is prone to let the lower body release when concentrating on upper body or arm movements.

One final point is that of 'surfer's ear', a condition that can occur if people constantly flush cold water into the ear. Try to use either a specialist ear plug, a skull cap or even Blue-tac to lessen the chances of damage to the ear.

► DEDICATED ROLLING COACHING

It is stating the obvious to say the act of rolling a craft is extremely skilful; successful completion of the action is a synthesis of many sub-skills which need to be selected and blended to a time scale which can be demanding (sometimes too demanding). As coaches we therefore have an equally skilful challenge. This is one of the key points and probably the most important message of this chapter. If the learner is in need of a roll both as a useful skill in terms of their physical comfort, i.e. not swimming on a rocky river at 11.00am in March, or because of the psychological comfort of being able to tackle tougher challenges secure in the knowledge that the odds of swimming are less, then *we* as coaches have a responsibility to structure rolling coaching in many more contexts and environmentally varied situations than we do currently.

Simply put we need to *coach* rolling in a similar context to that of any other paddlesport skill, in a structured, organised and technically informed manner.

The coaching action I refer to is not the off-the-cuff advice for the 'next time'. It is easy as a coach to jump in and assist a learner who has fallen in and pulled an ugly recovery or work in the pool with a novice. The effective coach should design programmes that use exercises and organise varied practice in types and



Photo 1 Coaching rolling in context

temperatures of water which will allow learning to take place both in performance and at the cognitive decision-making level.

These deliberately chosen opportunities might include:

- ✔ A summer beach with small or no waves, where tasks include using firstly the sand as an introduction followed by progressively deeper water.
- ✔ Warm water lake (summer or abroad!) with a stiff breeze blowing on-shore, where a task involving the beginnings of flat water cartwheels blended with informed coaching on the effect of starting position on recovery.
- ✔ The local jet at low water levels in the autumn using the direction of flow to give variance to the roll.
- ✔ Slow-flowing deep water rivers in autumn, looking at timing issues in the righting of the hull.
- ✔ A dedicated canoe course in low season or midweek, using the safe hole/wave, free from the pressure of eddy queues and river runners.
- ✔ Canals and outdoor pools, taking the initial steps to stress proof the foundation skills, leading to the concept of learning 'how to fall in', maximising the learner's chance of rolling from a series of practised pre-positions.
- ✔ In a swimming pool focusing on the transfer to the outdoor next autumn by rolling in buoyancy aids, cags and helmets.

All of the above, if used imaginatively will create environments where coaches can help the learners build variability into their movements and decisions. A further layer of coaching effectiveness is to move the emphasis away from the technical coaching context; this is achieved by using the 'tactical' approach.

In paddlesport coaching generally there is a simple model to explain the options available to the coach

in terms of session construction. The aspects we can change are: the *task*, the *environment* or the *equipment*, what you are doing, where and with what. In rolling coaching we can use this to change the emphasis to give the learner new enthusiasm. This innovation and creation of inventive exercises particularly applies in contexts the learner might perceive to be lacking challenge because of familiarity; some ideas might be:

- ✔ By changing site we are now in a faster moving piece of water.
- ✔ Swapping boats means that boxy rail is less of a problem.
- ✔ Trying to roll faster or in slow motion gives the learner better feel for the timing aspects of the action.
- ✔ Complete immediate rolls, up and downstream.
- ✔ Introduce paddle mitts in a low threat environment.
- ✔ Use a set of splits in a scenario-based task.
- ✔ Roll in the eddy, on the eddy line and in the current.

▶ PSYCHOLOGICAL AND PHYSIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

Let us now look at two psychological and one physiological principle important to all coaches but extremely significant for the coaching of rolling activities. These are variability, self-esteem and cold shock (competitive reflex reaction).

VARIABILITY

This is a term used in conjunction with the organisation of 'practice', more specifically 'random practice'. It is the concept of equipping learners with the ability to solve increasingly varied questions generated by the environment. The most effective method of equipping the paddler with this variation of solution is to practise in a manner that will demand increasingly varied solutions.

If you imagine the initial set of solutions as a 'narrow' track, only wide enough to cycle down, as the metaphor for the paddler's limited solutions at the beginning of the process. The coach's role is to 'broaden' the track giving the learner a wider range of solutions, turning the track into dual carriageway in terms of the choices of route for the cyclist. As a performer if the choice of skill is from a 'narrow' band of solutions or worse still a single solution, then it may prove to be inadequate or mismatched. In reality it is

this narrow movement solution learner paddlers are all too regularly relying on.

In the skill of rolling, if you possess a 'wide' band of options or a variety of solutions it will result in a more reliable roll in a greater range of environments, underwater positions and craft.

Example exercises:

- ✔ Even at the early stages keep a good balance of left and right (allowing for success necessary to maintain the motivation of the learner).
- ✔ Capsize in different starting positions by putting a skill before it, i.e. reverse sweep.
- ✔ On a jet, variations in position relative to the flow but also the speed and direction of the paddler, i.e. reverse paddling strongly across the flow, capsizing upstream.
- ✔ In small waves face left and right and encourage the learner to feel for the wave and use the pressure on the blade to initiate a roll (the results should be varied i.e. back/front of the blade and different sides).
- ✔ In a safe hole using 'real' situations encourage the paddler to verbalise the pressure build-up they feel on the blade. This can be done upright at first, developing into an inverted exercise.

An alternative type of variability is to remain within a solution but vary the demands made upon it. These

demands are constructed by the coach to allow the learner to develop specific aspects of the skill.

The example used here is a screw roll, which is well established in a stable environment with a deliberate capsized. Although not initiated from a set-up position the preparation phase of the skill needs to develop considerable width to cope with a moving water environment. The 'noise' generated cognitively when a situation new to the learner is experienced can be enormous, requiring a great deal of practice to overcome and allow the paddler to achieve the position from which to begin the righting action. Developing progressive achievable tasks for the learner to succeed in the roll but develop aspects of its make-up is the coaching skill.

These might include:

- ✔ Exercises on broken waves in surf where a partner or coach rights the paddler to a pre-arranged timescale, the capsized paddler completing a cognitive task whilst underwater.
- ✔ Moving through different body and paddle positions before righting themselves.
- ✔ Capsizing without a paddle, the coach then presenting it in different positions and orientations, i.e. vertical, blade first or behind them. As a progression it can be agreed before capsizing where the paddle will appear. If the water is clear enough to use vision to solve the problem then limiting the visual feedback would build better kinaesthetic awareness.



2

Photo 2 Rolling exercise in a safe hole



3a



3b



3c

Photo 3a-c Capsize whilst performing another skill and then roll, in this case a 'stern squirt'.

- Complete another skill immediately prior to the capsize, i.e. a draw stroke. This can be combined with variations in the water speed and direction; with a rope it can also be simulated in a pool.

PADDLER WELL-BEING

As stated in the chapter on Psychology, the coach needs to find clarity and a sympathy between the 'what' of the physical requirement of tasks and a developed understanding of the 'how' to construct an effective coaching framework.

In an activity so obviously success (product) related, failure to achieve the product has a heightened mental cost to the learner. The coach therefore has extra responsibility to the learner to buffer the negative effects this

failure might generate. To maintain the learner's self-confidence when the outcomes are apparently so polarised is a significant coaching skill, underpinned by a greater understanding of three areas of coaching knowledge: goal setting, motivation and attribution.

The initial aim of the coach in a rolling context is to equip the learner with an understanding of the process, pitched at an appropriate level, allowing suitably small and technically achievable process goals to be set. If these goals are sympathetic to the technical level of the learner and understood cognitively, the odd failure, although unfortunate, will not detract from the learner making sense of the situation and keeping their confidence high.

Expectations prior to the activity can be guided away from the yes or no of the final product. This technique, usually termed 'frontloading', helps the learner adjust their expectations to be more aware of the process involved, seeing success in different parts of the skill and happy that they are learning. There is an especially strong case in rolling to support a far more incremental approach to the tasks chosen by the coach. The ability to break down the whole movement skills into much smaller achievable goals will allow the satisfaction of regular success in progressively more demanding tasks. This blend of accurate technical input with regular success will develop the foundations of key skills in the learner so as to allow the next steps to be taken accurately. The integrity of the increments used by the coach will help reinforce a difficult concept for some learners, that the development of rolling skill may not always be the roll itself.

If the context of the learner shifts to 'a person who may well be able to right themselves with some consistency', then as coaches we also shift the goals to begin developing focal points within the process. This top-end goal setting, beyond the simple product of success is the important link into rolling effectively in progressively more demanding situations and not stalling the learning curve at a particular part of the process.

An example would be a paddler who has a consistent roll in green water, but in aerated water struggles with the recovery phase, particularly the head. The coach would use the timing and positioning of the head recovery in a coaching session to give an improved understanding and efficiency in this aspect, possibly taking some of the leverage away by varying the paddles or slowing the movement down to understand the subtlety of the head's influence on the accuracy of the action.

To summarise the goal setting subtlety necessary in coaching rolling, the coach should:

- ✔ Understand the full range of increments available with which to break the process down.
- ✔ Be skilful in allowing the learner access to the key information at the appropriate times and through the appropriate medium.
- ✔ Provide internalised feedback points so the learner is capable of self-checking the process (not just the product), scoring themselves on pressure points in the DSP.
- ✔ Set small enough challenges to allow confidence to remain high but keep the learner in a tangible progression.
- ✔ Once 'product' success is achieved begin the methodical improvement on key components in an individual, based on accurate technical analysis of their needs.
- ✔ As before, construct learning opportunities matched to the learner's needs... *coach rolling*... not the recovery of other paddling errors.
- ✔ Front-loading sessions so as to keep the learners' expectations accurate and achievable.

Using a technically accurate and audience-friendly vocabulary at this stage is key. Much of what we are coaching is 'feel' and 'timing', extremely difficult concepts to verbalise, so avoiding left/right, up/down, push/pull and in/out or such words will help enormously in keeping the process clear. Rely on kinaesthetic input or questions to elicit cognitive registry when analysing the actions.

Helping the learner understand through their actions technically accurate concepts such as leverage and pressure is a crucial element in the battle against loss of self confidence and thus the motivation to learn.

Developing the awareness of the function of accurate goal setting also gives a positive spin on the other main principles likely to interfere with the learning efficiency, that of motivation and attribution. What will the learner gain from this learning, AND who, why or what might your learner be attributing their perceived lack of progress on or to. The main skill needed here is to be aware of your learner's emotional strength and pre-empt the situations, adjusting the goals and feedback accordingly.

A last point on the maintenance of a psychologically robust learner is to avoid if at all possible the learner

swimming out of a task. Wherever possible, either as the coach or by using other paddlers, provide a safety net to allow some degree of attempt and failure without the potentially demoralising outcome of swimming. In practical terms this often means being in the water close to the action, in more situations than the swimming pool. Be clear about the sequencing of the practice to ensure the learner knows when the system, which is agreed and understood, takes over to recover the situation. This will allow the learner to experiment, practise and occasionally fail without always ending up swimming. Examples of tasks to ensure this would be:

- ✔ Working in water shallow enough to use the bottom for recovery on a beach or on the edge of a lake.
- ✔ Extremely accurate positioning and proactive shepherding in boat-based recoveries in jets to allow for immediate rescues (not motionless observation followed by a sprint after an increasingly urgent tapping on the bottom of a kayak).
- ✔ The donning of appropriate clothing (dry suit etc.) to allow you to be in the water and effect a rescue.

On a point of personal experience, the sympathy between the fit of the craft (DSP), the spraydeck (neoprene) and the type of the paddle used (feather, length, blade shape, shaft profile) is of critical importance, particularly in moving water with learners working beyond the basic mechanics.

COLD SHOCK VS DIVE REFLEX

This topic is not as simple as the reflex action of sucking in breath or ice-cream head. The terms 'cold shock' and 'dive reflex' are in fact far more subtle physiological phenomenon which affect the human organism when its safety or survival is threatened by water or cold water. It is therefore important for a coach to understand their impact in situations where the paddler might have to roll unexpectedly.

When a person is put into threatening situations such as being underwater, the brain has been programmed over thousands of years to respond to survive. In the case of cold shock the brain triggers a number of responses. Heart rate increases, peripheral blood flow is reduced which, combined with the squeezing effect on the body from the pressure of the water, raises blood pressure dramatically, usually within only a few seconds. In extreme cases particularly where heart disease is a factor death has



4

Photo 4 Cross-deck splashing games!

occurred within five minutes. Even though a person may be upside-down in a kayak the physiological responses are the same. The second condition, that of the dive reflex, is a contradiction and is characterised by a reduction in heart rate and motor activity (movement). The brain tries to limit unnecessary use of oxygen by limiting blood-flow to peripheral areas of the body thus maintaining a supply to the brain. Although this all seems strange there have been incidents where people (often babies) have survived long periods underwater with no ill effects.

Due to the conflict between these two innate responses the brain takes time to make a decision. Think of it as the processor on your computer chattering along, red light flickering happily, when suddenly ten programmes are switched on simultaneously. The red light stays on as the processor tries to make sense of the inputs and takes decisions to action the demand. During this process it follows a programmed logic, very similar to the human body. In the case of cold shock versus dive reflex, research indicates that around 15% of people show evidence of the dive reflex, however the predominant response is that of cold shock.

Although this is termed cold shock it can still occur indoors or in relatively warm water, as a reac-

tion to overload, simply asking the learner to take too big a step or misjudging the difficulty or pressure a task requires.

In a practical coaching context this means that the coach should 'prepare' the learner for the situation before it arises; a good phrase to use in this respect is 'roll to roll'. If you play in a hole where the rolling to recover the situation is likely to be near your skilful limit, give yourself the best chances of success by reducing the impact of the cold shock/dive reflex battle. This can be achieved by engaging your learner in small progressively more wet and inverted contexts, thus when a capsize occurs you are ready to over-ride a survival instinct.

An effective coach will imaginatively use games and challenging tasks to lead the learner to this point. Below are some thoughts:

- 🟡 Dampen or wet your helmet and put it back on.
- 🟡 Cross-deck splashing games.
- 🟡 Head dips in the side surf position in small surf (reform).
- 🟡 Recoveries off the bow or stern of boats placed in different eddies.

- Using rocks, shallow water on a beach or the bank to pick floating or submerged objects up with your hand or teeth.
- Supported support strokes (coach, bank, or boat).
- Edging games using buddies, rafted in moving water.

I have watched literally hundreds of coaches working and can count on one hand the few who have actively pursued coaching rolling on behalf of their learner as the focus in the session. It is clear that the appeal of the journey or the full experience of the activity seems to put rolling coaching in the shadows as an objective. Yet learners frequently state that they have insecurity because of the lack of confidence in their ability to successfully roll when randomly challenged by their circumstances.

It is this shock tactic of the circumstance that we as coaches have to supply solutions to; coaching the varied responses to the action of a capsized provide us with our challenge.

IN CONCLUSION

This chapter sets out to help coaches work more accurately with learners of all types and abilities in a varied coaching environment. It is an accepted starting point that the founding principles of good coaching, held true in other paddlesport activity and outlined in the first chapter of this book, apply to the coaching of rolling.

An appropriate starting point might be the most significant misconception, that of 'one size fits all'. The name of the roll is not the priority, good coaching should be applied to the individual and can be applied to any rolling technique.

FURTHER READING

Essentials of Sea Survival, Golden, F & Tipton, 2002, *Human Kinetics*
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IAN COLEMAN

Ian is a senior lecturer at the University of Chichester and has been actively involved in sports coaching since becoming a basketball coach in 1981. The transfer of knowledge from areas in sport where significant developments have already been made has guided his input into the coaching scheme, mainly centred in the 'acquisition of skill'. As a recipient of 'old school' rolling coaching it is a personal priority to help coaches improve their understanding of the pivotal principles coaches must embrace to develop the coaching of rolling. Having swum in the sea and on a river recently, continuing to improve rolling coaching techniques is a vested interest.





PRACTICAL & THEORETICAL EXERCISES



CONCISE KEY POINT SUMMARIES

CHAPTERS INCLUDE:

- physiology
- psychology
- coaching novices
- coaching improvers
- performance coaching
- coaching young people
- use of video
- forward paddling
- open canoe
- sea kayaking
- surfing
- white water
- slalom
- freestyle

COACHING HANDBOOK



This book is a mine of useful information and practical tips. If you aspire to be a better canoe or kayak coach, this is the book for you.

Part One deals with coaching theory and fundamentals such as psychology and physiology explained in terms that make sense to a practical water-based coach.

Part Two looks at generic coaching skills that will provide useful tools whatever the discipline the coach is involved in. It works its way from introducing people to canoesport right through to coaching elite athletes.

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ISBN 0-9547061-6-1



9 780954 706166

RRP
£19-95

PUBLISHED BY
PESDA PRESS

