



KAYAK ROLLING

The Black Art Demystified

Loel Collins

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Introduction

I remember my first roll. It was on the River Tawe in South Wales. I actually pushed off the bottom but it was enough to make me realise that I could do it. That incident is living proof to me that the secret of rolling under pressure is mostly in the head. However I also remember my last swim... getting tumbled down a shallow creek in California and realising that no one's roll is perfect.

For some the appeal of rolling is that it is perceived as the ultimate skill for the kayaker. For many people this is simply because they've had such a hard time trying to master the roll they are convinced that it must be the pinnacle of skill. The truth is that it is often possible to get people to roll very quickly if you push the right buttons, but that it then falls apart once you hit the cold water because the skill isn't 'strong' enough. People become disillusioned and convinced it's some kind of 'black art.'

I wanted to write a simple book about how to learn to roll and how to deal with any little problems that may arise. Here it is!

Loel Collins

Loel Collins is the head of the canoeing department at Plas y Brenin, the National Mountain Centre, and was formerly the Director of the National White Water Centre, Canolfan Tryweryn. Loel is one of the UK's leading coaches.

His passion lies in coaching white water skills and exploring and travelling in both kayak and canoe. He has paddled and taken part in first descents in many parts of the world including Papua New



Guinea, Pakistan and Iran... and he has a reasonably reliable roll!

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Acknowledgements

I've always enjoyed the challenges of teaching rolling. My biggest single step forward with teaching rolling was courtesy of Marcus Baillie who introduced me to the C to C rolling method.

Every time you teach someone to roll you'll learn something new, so a big thanks is due to all the learners I've worked with over the years.

A special thanks is due to Pete Catterall, Vicky Barlow and Polly Salter for acting as 'models' for the photographs and to Plas y Brenin for allowing us to use their kayak training pool.

I also owe Ray Goodwin a pint, he did his first ever hand roll when I was coaching him as part of a coach assessment many years ago. Luckily for me it convinced the assessor (my future publisher!) that I could teach... and he passed me.

1 How to Use This Book

This book is not very long and it would do no harm to read it all and familiarise yourself with all the exercises. Having done that, you can use the flow chart on the next page as a guide to choosing the right sequence of exercises for you. Be honest in your self-appraisal when using the flow chart.

All the exercises should be practised on left and right alternately. This is essential if you are to develop a reliable, all conditions roll.

If you can already roll or have worked your way through the 'how to roll' section and are still having problems, move on to the 'trouble shooting' section.

How to Practise

Quality practice is the key to good skill acquisition. So how do we make it count?

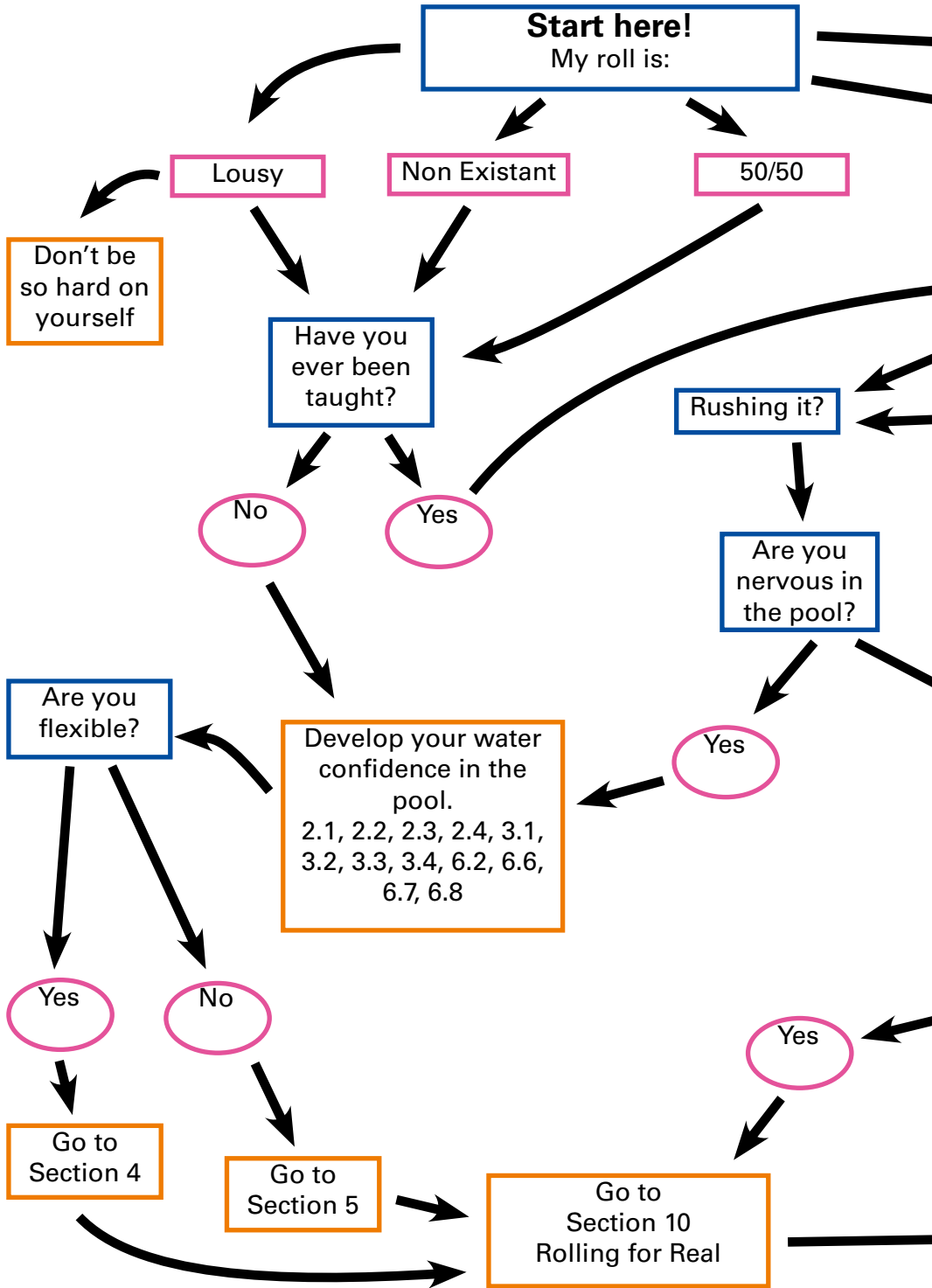
Skills have to be practised and reinforced even after they have been acquired. Performing an exercise once isn't in itself proof that the skill has been learnt. The exercise should be performed fluently, with the minimum of effort, and above all... consistently.

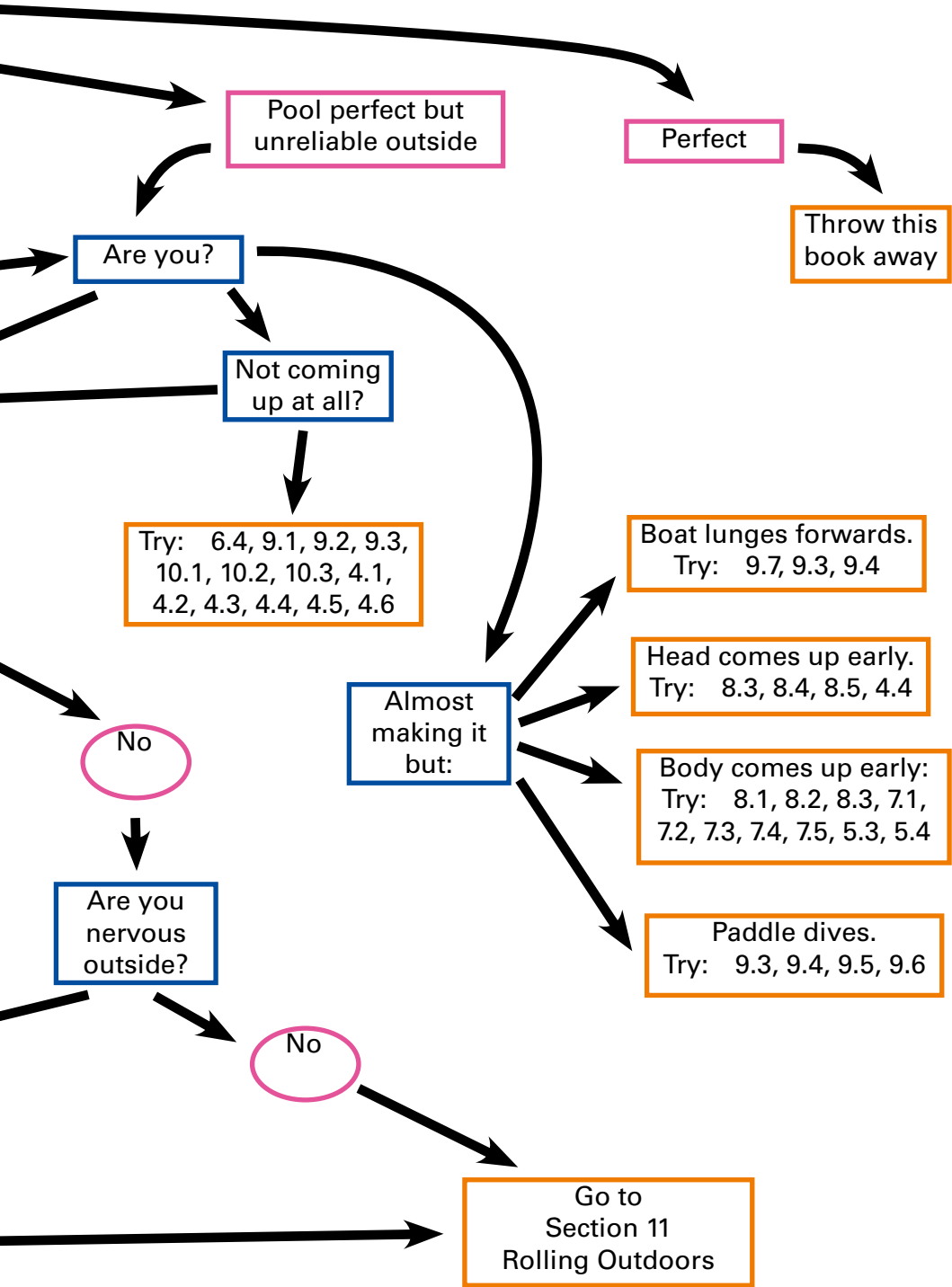
Some simple steps that will help to make your practice efficient are:

1. Warm up prior to any activity.
2. Ensure that you are physically comfortable in your boat.
3. Whenever you are practising, work on both sides, alternately.
4. Initially, whilst you learn the basic technique, practise in blocks of time. Do the same exercise several times in the same 'block', then rest.
5. Once you have the basic technique 'nailed', change things so as to vary the practice:
 - Different boats
 - Different paddles
 - Different parts of the pool
 - Have your helpers splash the surface of the pool
 - Start from a slightly different position
 - Start from the other side
 - Wear your buoyancy aid
 - Wear a helmet
 - Wear a cagoule
 - Try it with your eyes shut
 - Try it with your eyes open
6. After your session, warm down.

Remember: 'Variety is the spice of practice'.

(Martin Chester - PYB coach)





1 How to Use This Book

I'm sure H.W. Pawlata was a nice fellow and, considering that he worked out the 'Pawlata' roll after reading accounts of Eskimo rolls written by explorers, he did a great job. However, I'm not convinced he got it quite right. "Sacrilege!" I hear you shout. "He'll go straight to hell!" I hear you mutter.

In all seriousness, this book will not advocate the Pawlata or any form of extended paddle roll because it has little to offer the modern paddler. It doesn't work at all with low volume white water boats because the combination of massive leverage and the extremely laid-back body position causes the kayak to stern dip!

Even in a sea kayak it has severe limitations in that it takes so long to set up that in rough water you have at best a fifty-fifty chance of a successful roll. Even when you do come up you are holding the paddle in such a way that you can't use it as a paddle, which means that in rough water you'll probably capsize again.

Worst of all, it 'grooves in' a body action and a reliance on brute force, which guarantees that, once paddlers have learnt a Pawlata, they will find it very difficult to learn any other form of roll. *Therefore it should not even be used as part of a learning progression.*

4 Learning to Roll – C to C as the Core

Fundamental to any roll is flexibility in the lower back and hip, and a slow, controlled roll is more reliable in rough or white water. The C to C roll is by far the most reliable rough water roll. You should only consider learning the back deck roll if you lack flexibility in the waist.

The first stage is to develop confidence under water and an understanding of the range of movements required to perform the C to C roll. *Make sure you perform all these actions on both sides!*

4.1 Front to Back Action

Flip over, towards one of your partners, let the boat settle upside down for a moment. Let your body hang below the boat for a moment. Next, lean forwards reaching towards the bow of the boat with your hands. Then lean right back sweeping your hands over your head and towards the back of the boat. When you've had enough, tap the boat so that you can be recovered.



4.2 Front to Side Action

Flip over and allow the boat to settle. Relax and let your body float below the boat. Lean forwards with your hands extended forwards, sweep your hands across the surface out to the right, then sweep them back to the bow. Then repeat the exercise to the left.



4

4.3 C to C Action

This builds on the previous exercise. Flip over in the same way. This time lean as far over to the left as you can, curving your spine sideways to do this and pushing your hands clear of the water. Next, slowly sweep your hands out and down towards the bottom of the pool and over to the right-hand side of the kayak. Use your spine throughout the movement, ending up with your hands out of the water on the right-hand side.



Once completed, tap the boat and get yourself recovered. Practise this exercise starting left and right so that you can do it on both sides.

This movement should be practised slowly and deliberately.

4.4 Hands for Support

Flip over on one side. Reach up to the surface on the other side and have a partner support your hands. Get your partners to feed back to you how much weight they are supporting on a scale of 1 to 5. By concentrating on the use of the hip and waist action, aim to reduce this to a 1 on your scale.



4

4.5 Introduce the Paddle

Sit upright, holding your paddle horizontally in front of you. Have partner A gently hold the paddle blade that is on their side of the boat so that the paddle remains at right angles to the kayak throughout the exercise.

Let go of the paddle and capsize away from partner A. When upside down, reach up towards partner A and gently take hold the paddle shaft. Roll the boat away from partner A, who will support the paddle blade, while partner B gently helps the boat upright if necessary.



4.6 The Half Roll

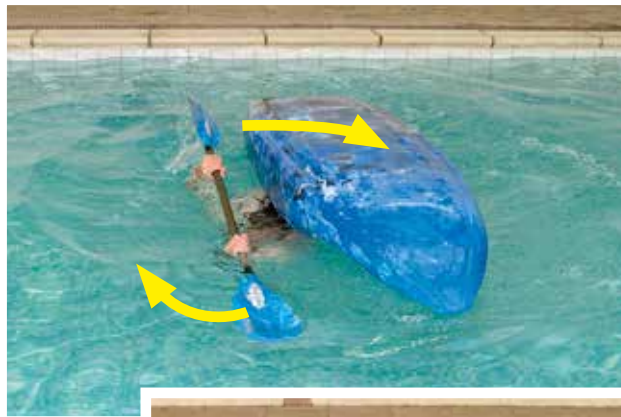
Repeat this on alternate sides until your partners need no longer support the paddle blade. This is a half roll, well done!

4.7 C to C Roll

The final step is to develop this into a full roll. Hold the paddle shaft in the normal way and then lean forward and place it in the water close alongside and parallel to the boat (the 'set up'). Have a partner stand at the end of the kayak.

Capsize towards the paddle, let the boat settle and allow the partner to move the paddle out to the starting point of the previous exercise. The partner can then tap the boat and you can roll up, again do this alternating from side to side. Initially the partner may need to support the working blade but as your confidence increases the roll will develop.





The Full Sequence

Or... How it looks 'for real'.





- Learn to roll
- Improve your roll
- Develop a bomb-proof roll



A visual approach to learning to roll a kayak or developing a 'bomb-proof' rough water roll.

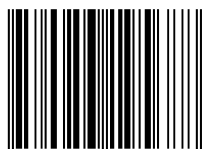


Rolling is learnt by working through a sequence of exercises to allow the learner to 'feel' what is required.



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