

Lee Pooley 00:00:13

Welcome everybody to the British Canoeing Awarding Body Coaching Podcast. My name's Lee Pooley, I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications and I'm joined by Olly Sanders. So hi Olly.

Olly Sanders 00:00:23

Hello there Lee.

Lee Pooley 00:00:24

Olly, thanks very much for joining us today and I'm really looking forward to this particular podcast. It's an area that actually, if I think back many years ago Olly, that you were actually coaching me up in Anglesey, around using features to turn on the sea including wind and swell. So this is an area that's obviously I've got some knowledge in because I've been coached by yourself. So Olly, in terms of why is it so important that people that venture out onto the sea understand and are able to turn in in those types of conditions?

Olly Sanders 00:00:58

I work mainly on Anglesey, but I think any part of the sea journey, unless you got a flat high pressure over you, you're going to encounter various wind directions because a coast lines never, vertical or horizontal. It's always going to be, you're going in and out of bays or crossing bays and stuff like that. So the topography of the coast means that your, even though you may get a forecast, you often encounter winds that aren't necessarily the wind direction you expect.

So I could think probably one of the key things would be for me, is it onshore or offshore winds as well? And I think often people get into trouble when they try and cross a bay and they haven't looked at the topography of the landscape whether you might have a shallow valley and then everything's gonna funnel out so you may go from the shelter of a cliff like journey and then find yourself crossing the bay with an offshore breeze. I mean it's interesting because most of boats want to turn into wind. So, in that case you're gonna be turned towards a short, but whether you can battle against the wind, if it's an onshore breeze, then you're gonna be turned out to sea aren't you, because the boat will naturally want to turn out to sea.

I think there was one fatality a few years ago, we had here, which is Rhosneigr, where a group went out and a skeg stuck down. I think one of the groups separated from the party because they were having trouble and she went to get help because she damaged her skeg it was stuck down so she couldn't actually turn back towards the beach with an offshore breeze and basically just got more and more tired trying to swing the boat around. So having that ability to manoeuvre your boat and to try and get back in the shelter is really key.

Lee Pooley 00:02:33

Yeah. So as a highly experienced coach Olly, you know we was having a joke about that in the opening but you are, extremely extremely coach within sea kayaking and you've probably introduced hundreds, hundreds of people to the wonderful sport of sea kayaking. But how would you go about introducing a relative novice, someone that has got some paddling ability, venturing out on the sea, how would you introduce them to be able to turn their craft with the wind or against the wind?

Olly Sanders 00:03:03

I think if they're going to turn up with their own boats, or you're providing boats, then you need to make sure that I mean, it's really obvious stuff isn't it. That the boat is suitable for the person and the fact they've got reasonable connectivity within the boat. We often forget that. I've often come across people have got boats and they haven't padded the boats out. So you know, if you're trying to do some fundamental skills then they'll just not be able to do it because they don't fit in the boat. You know, asking the right questions so, making sure they went the foot on the foot pegs making sure they can feel the hip pads and then going out and probably doing some exercises where you're gonna gauge the level of ability they've got and it's the whole thing isn't it? Have they got trunk rotation, can they edge a boat, have they got any form of good sweep stroke. So I try and do individualise the coaching. So I'll probably do an exercise with them, just get them to turn around in a bay looking at, sometimes I was getting to write the first four letters of their name. Yeah, it's always a worry if they've got a name like Horatio. So I just like, so you normally work out, you say, just the first four letters. Otherwise, they've gone out and disappear for about an hour and then from that observation I've got a really good benchmark about what I can do

and I suppose the problem or the issue is beginning is the lack of all those basic techniques.

And then it's a good choice of location really, where you can find somewhere you can stick them out in the wind and the ideal place is somewhere you've got maybe an offshore breeze, in a bay, where you can do a box like circuit and I would probably do a little bit of, sort of experimentation with them, go well, go and create a box. Give them some really good parameters, how to do it, you know, you paddle 10, otherwise you don't give people parameters, they paddle you know, they paddle off to sea. You haven't actually said look I want to do ten strokes, do a turn, ten strokes, do a turn, and then back to me and ask them, what the experience within the craft. Where was the easiest way to turn? What was the greatest difficulty? So they've got a little bit of understanding about how wind works.

And then we would probably explore obviously, what is the more difficult section to turn? Is it down wind, is it cross wind, is it back up the wind? Or is it turning back down wind and we can probably work out that the worst, the most difficult type is, on the back of the boat turning back, and then turning down wind is normally very easy for them, because the boat wants naturally do that. And crosswind, they're gonna have issues where the boat wants to keep turning back up towards the bay. And to be honest, I do quite a lot of work with skegs as well. Because I think that the problem is a lot of people don't have a skeg system that works very well. They don't know anything about and this goes not just for beginners, this goes for intermediate paddlers as well. And they've been told it but they've forgotten what they do with the skeg. And how the boat reacts so I would do some work with that and I'd also talk about the fact that the skeg is not an on and off switch. It's a dimmer switch and you need to put it down in increments and see which works best for you. So that solves the problem a little bit about Crossing Bays. Yeah, but then the issue is obviously if they wanna turn, if it's an offshore breeze and they want to turn into wind and head towards the beach, that's not so much of an issue, because that's what the boat wants to do as long as they remember to put their skeg up. But it's obviously, the issue we have is how to turn the boat into wind or downwind or so to speak. So I suppose what I would look at, some form edging exercise. And then sweep strokes could affect a sweep strokes and also a little bit of body trim where they're leaning forward to get the maximum angle out of their sweep stroke to be able to turn. And I

would do probably work in the bay with that. If they're completely beginners then you're limited to what you can actually do in terms of how effective that's going to be. but I mean I think you start working on it and you start working on the skeg. And that's going to solve a lot of those problems and just think about the locations you're going to choose where you're not going to have a real issue with them struggling to turn.

Lee Pooley 00:06:59

Absolutely. You know you said about picking the right location because a lot of the time the environment does the coaching for you doesn't it and people explore and they find out themselves with some top tips as you were saying. And I'm really glad you talked about, people see the skeg as an on off switch because I've had a similar sort of experiences that people just it's on, now it's off but actually I love that description of a dimmer switch. I think that's really important. Can I just dig in to, you talk about edge? Why is edge so important then to turn the sea kayak?

Olly Sanders 00:07:32

Well, most of the boats are changing the profile at the hull aren't you, at the waterline in the boat. There's quite a few boats that have different characteristics. I work in an Aries and I have to detune my coaching because I can do things in the areas that people in NDK boats or some other P&H boats with longer water lines struggle to do. But I'm just, well I normally try and explain it by showing them how the edge works on the beach and how much more of the bow and stern will come out the water and then by adding a sweep stroke to that you're gonna add the turning ability of the boat. I mean, you're always limited aren't you because unless you choose the right venue for the coach and then if you've got wind and the winds coming the wrong direction, then actually that the whole sections not going to work anyway. Because the wind has a larger effect than the fact you're putting it on edge.

So it's always worth thinking about, well how am I going to achieve this? I need to find some way to share with first so they can actually see it works. And the other thing I think with the edging is that people, if you get them to paddle on, put an edge, so your doing an inside turn, so to speak. Is that people struggle with that because what they do is they don't kick it in. So I was trying to explain, once you've got the

edge sorted out, you need to do a really big sweep stroke, on the edging side and that kicks it in, and then paddle normally. If you just put the edge on and start paddling, it doesn't actually always kick in, they feel like they're not achieving. So as long as they do that first initial stroke and make it wide as possible and then they can start paddling normally, the boat starts to turn doesn't it, once it's been initiated it tends to come around a bit. But what happens if they don't do that first big sweep stroke, then they just end up going and nothing's really happening for a while. So I try and get that so they get an idea of what's going to happen. And I also put people in different boats as well if I can. Maybe at lunch time, shove them in something else. Just to see how that reacts, so they get a chance to get a feel for different boats.

Lee Pooley 00:09:29

Yeah, we see it on the water quite often don't we Olly, that there will be people that will try to turn their boat statically. So there's no momentum and there's other people that would do it in a more dynamic way with momentum. What's your thoughts on that?

Olly Sanders 00:09:44

Yeah, I mean you'd be doing a turn with forward motion. Then it's going to be a wide arc turn, isn't it? Yeah, and if your (...) it's gonna be a very small arc turn. So it depends what you want to do with that. I mean, I think certainly for manoeuvring. If you rock up and you're going into narrow spaces, you might be doing static term. But if you could get speed up, then that initiates a turn it's going to be a nice wide, wide turn and you don't lose all your forward speeding, and then you've got start again.

So I think forward and reverse strokes fine, but sometimes it's just killing all the speed. So it depends what I want to do, in terms of wind, again, you could keep the momentum going and do a wide arc turn couldn't you. Which would be a slower way of doing it. But if they really need to get the boat round, then you would do a series of forward and reverse strokes wouldn't you. I mean the bottom line is if they're absolutely struggling. We know the stern wants to turn into, sorry the bow wants to turn into wind, so we really need to get the boat downwind then what I would do is, I normally get them to reverse. The stern comes around. So now the boat is facing down wind, then they can move forward.

Yeah, so they're really struggling, they haven't got effective sweep strokes. They haven't got much edge and they need to make sure the skegs up. You just reverse and the boat will come into the wind backwards, then at least you've got the turn started. And that's the last resort. I try, if they're really struggling. I just say try that and that would normally work. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:11:17

When we're coaching, we coach towards them being independent and actually, if they're struggling in the wind, for them to remember actually, do you know what, if I really need to get this turned, to reverse is quite a different sort of headset isn't it. In terms of being able to think quite rationally about being able to paddle backwards in those types of environments.

Olly Sanders 00:11:38

Yeah. Yeah, I mean if there's chop and there's swell around, it's not their first choice is it. But I mean, it doesn't have to be very much, it can just be probably three or four strokes. Yeah, and then the back and then again, if they're going on a downwind run. That's, for a lot of people that's quite discerning. You know you can't necessarily see the waves coming behind, especially if you haven't got good trunk rotation. And you don't want to look behind. All they're focused on, is the bow in front of them. And then all you're trying to do is give them signals from that, to, if they want to surf. Don't you know, what you want to do is look at the bow does to give the indication of when you need to paddle, yes. So bow rising, or stern rising. Then you've got something coming under you, then the bows going to rise when you start putting in the strokes so we'll be indications, all the features that you want to think about it's going to give you the information to decide how you're going to do it down wind run, are going to be in that small box in front of you rather than, they're not gonna look behind. You can always tell by the head movement. It's just all focused fun. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:12:41

Yeah, absolutely. We've gone through quite a few different sort of how you would introduce and how you'd progress those paddlers and as the paddler develops, is there any other things that you might be introducing. Is the reverse paddling an advance skill, or is there any other skills that you would introduce as well.

Olly Sanders 00:12:59

Intermediate paddlers, you can always get caught out can't you. Crossing a bay and you get hit by some gusts and the wind picks up stronger than you think and even there you might really struggle to get your boat around. Depending on your boat as well. If it's an Aries or Delphin, you can, although you've got the issue of a bow that's very large that gets affected by the wind, but those sort of boats, they're gonna turn a lot quicker. If you've got a long boat, some people would struggle with I dunno a cetus or something like that or something with a long water line, you go look, the last case scenario for you to get this boat round, is gonna be reverse paddle. Because if you are working sweeping and sweeping. You're gonna get more and more tired. So just as a sort of defence strategy, just get the bow around then you go off so I don't think it's necessarily just a beginners thing, it's just one of those skills you have obviously to deal with the conditions.

Lee Pooley 00:13:55

Yeah, and we're seeing as well, aren't we? That there are boats or sea kayaks now with rudders on obviously they can aid with that or what's your thoughts?

Olly Sanders 00:14:06

I don't know what it is about this country, but we consider rudders cheating don't we? It's almost like it's been how many boats do you see on the sea with rudders, apart from the fast ones like Pace stuff like that, which is designed. You go anywhere else in Europe or anywhere else, loads of people got beginners rudders. And the arguments about oh they'll get damaged more easily or they, could be affected by the wind on the back of the boat, but it's the winds affecting it, you have the runner down don't you. And I've done quite a lot of expeditions with rudders, I love them, I think they're great. You don't lose all the room for the skeg box. So you either trying to pack a boat for long Journeys. You've got all that extra room. You've got less likely to get escape wire or rope damaged. Most of them are fairly easy to fix, the modern ones. There's not a whole lot going on and I've never really damaged one badly. I've been bent one and stuff like that. So yeah, I mean rudders is the ideal thing to have but skegs are also useful. But we just don't think, I just don't think people are aware of rudders very much in this country.

Lee Pooley 00:15:10

I've got a Taran, a Taran and an Aries and so, one with the rudder and one that turns reasonably well. Maybe I've selected those down to the level of my paddling Olly but both of them turn really well, rudder and as you say allows me to pack that boat up for booking some considerable journeys, but yeah, it does seem a little bit, it doesn't seem as accepted in the UK does it?

Olly Sanders 00:15:36

So I think it's just historical. I think you always, whether it's the boat designers have just never really embraced it. I mean I've had rudders put on P&H boats before when I've done trips. I've actually physically chosen to have a rudder put on. Unfortunately, when they did the mould, they haven't moulded one without a skeg box so we didn't actually win with that one. But yeah, I mean certainly, depends what you want for your paddling. In the UK slightly, we've got quite exciting water. Where traditionally we would have some fairly good rough water skills in the UK. Whereas, in the med or Norway, you're gonna have more Coastal trips to do. I'm not saying you're not gonna get exciting conditions up there. But generally, we've gone for a little bit more performance over here. I think that rudders have always been like we don't need rudders, we want a boat that's just got skeg. or not skeg. Or a skeg that doesn't work.

Lee Pooley 00:16:30

Yeah. We been concentrating on talking around, turning wind but also turning in swell is obviously, unless you get an absolutely gem of the day. There's always a little bit of movement around on that water. Would you approach turning in swell the same as wind or how would you approach that?

Olly Sanders 00:16:47

I think the fundamentals are the same you're going to give an edge. You're gonna create a wider stroke and a reverse stroke. I mean, I think I talk about timing with swell is that you want to time when you do your, you know I mean you're trying to turn the boat, when you do your initial forward or backstroke. you come up the wave so you've got, so you're not actually got your paddle doing nothing in mid-air, the boats right at the top. But you're trying to time so as you put the stroke in, the boat

comes up, so the less the boat in the water because you're at the tip the peak and then you turn left the reverse stroke likewise. So, you're coming down and you trying to get as much purchase on it as possible. And so timing the sweep and the reverse stroke as you come up the way that's the key to it for me. And also you know, I, a lot of people find that could be very unstable for them can't they. So just putting some form of stroke in, is going to give you some form of purpose on the blade isn't it? Which is good, you're gonna give some sort of support to make you feel bit more comfortable. Yeah, so it's similar how much edge they get will be dependent on how confident they are. How much they prepared to lean forward, give a bit trim to create as much as they can, is again going to be dependent a little bit about how confident they are. But if you've covered a lot forward and reverse strokes, in a more sheltered area and then you just build it up, don't you? Yeah. We're lucky here, we've got tide races so we can find some, some swell, even on a fairly flat day where the wind isn't gonna be affecting them so much. So the ideal thing would be to do turning in swell, without having another environmental factor affecting that, i.e. the wind so you could build them up on, and if you pick the right time the time you can get them on smaller waves before you get them on bigger waves. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:18:40

Yeah, yea a nice build up.

Olly Sanders 00:18:43

Yeah, a sort of progression. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:18:46

Yeah, I remember doing this particular bit with you actually Olly, I think it was middle Mouse if I remember rightly. Is that you are really encouraging us to use almost the peak of the wave to actually turn and that was really to get as much of the boat out of the water as possible wasn't it? So it was almost like a pivot. Is that what you're saying?

Olly Sanders 00:19:11

Yeah, yeah, but the problem was, if you don't get the timing right, you end up doing a sweep stroke basically in air, don't you? Yeah, so what I try and get people to think

about is when you place that forward stroke in, it's as you're coming up so you've got purchased water to work with and you rotate and as you're doing you turn your boat's pretty much up and then time you have reverse stroke as you come back down again. Yeah, and so that I think the time in the forward stroke is probably the key to that one. Once you've got the boat turning the reverse stroke slightly harder to time, but the forward stroke, as long as you can see the visual signals in front of you then you can time it, you can time it quite well.

Lee Pooley 00:19:51

Going back to a conversation around the wind and would there be any time that you do this backwards?

Olly Sanders 00:19:56

With swell on that one. I mean, yeah, but the problem is it's even more disconcerting for him to do a reverse stroke because coming up the wave. I think I would always encourage them to do the reverse stroke sorry the forward stroke, as they come this way so you can see it, and the reverse stroke coming around. But yeah, I don't think you'd get them to reverse paddle, or turn the boat round. I think you just try and use the swell features, rather than that. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:20:24

Okay, in my mind, as I was listening to you Olly, in my mind, I'm going, okay that's, we're talking about moving from a sheltered water environment, where you're able just to sort of nip around probably sit at one particular place and give them some feedback. But actually, as we progress and you talked about those progressions, we're working in quite a dynamic environment, how would you set up a feedback loop or how would you ensure that they are understanding what they should be doing and how do they rate success because in a dynamic environment on the sea. It's very different to being in an eddy on a river, isn't it? So, how do you go about that? How do you set this all up?

Olly Sanders 00:21:05

I think what I do, depending on how many students I've got obviously, if they can work in pairs. Is what I'll do is I'll give them a task and what I mean the whole reason

we want to manoeuvre our boats. I mean, it's obviously to play isn't it. But it's also to would be, even if you're not in a leadership role, you might well help is to sort out issues in it. That might be a rescue or a tow. So I would start with Towing. So what I would do is I would go get one of the team out in some chop. Yeah and tell the other one. I want you to get to him, manoeuvre your boat, clip him and tow him to the side. So within that ask, what they got to do. I mean the boat might not be facing the right way. They might have to come around the back. They might have to come up forward, do reverse, forward strokes to manoeuvre them so they can clip and tow. So what I would see in that is they've got task orientated thing. Haven't they? They've gotta deal with environment they come across, whether it be, wind or tide or swell and then they've got to think about are going to take that tow and the person that's the victim would be, just don't help them out. Whatever your boat's facing. They've got to decide where they're gonna take you so you see lots of things, you see good awareness, you see sort of strategy where they're gonna take somebody in terms of getting to the side. You see how they use the conditions to manoeuvre their boat and then swap over and they can either get themselves feedback or we get a couple of circuits. And I come in and go what were the key points to that. So I find that that keeps everybody active. I can sit in an eddy, ready to pop out if it all goes a bit pear shaped. And then depending on the environment, it can increase or decrease if your timed it right to sort of add to the session.

Lee Pooley 00:22:49

Yeah, and you also talked about earlier, is about the environment is really important. And actually, if you can pick an environment that builds over time, that almost gives that natural progression anyway, doesn't it?

Oilly Sanders 00:23:00

Yeah, you might then, you might give them a specific task going I want you to use a tow line here. To reallocate them to somewhere where you can get them, I could then go look. Here's the environment. That's where you gonna get, you decide exactly how you want to do it. It could be push you, pull you, could be a short contact tow. It could be anything and then you might give an actual proper wet rescue. When they've got, they've also got to think about how they deal with somebody in the water

without entering, so that seems to work quite well as an over exercise where everybody's busy.

Lee Pooley 00:23:32

Yeah, ultimately where you want to get them to is the rescue isn't it? The turning it just happens doesn't it? So, they should become quite autonomous and be able to turn their boat reasonably quickly to be able to then execute the rescue effectively.

Olly Sanders 00:23:46

Yeah, and normally within that choppy water, they'll be various points, that could be sort of more of a beginners level more advanced level, you can move people within those two environments depending on they're getting on. But we forget about coaching on the sea is a myriad of things, isn't it? It's not, not just about the boat and strokes, it's about having an awareness of the environment you're in and how quickly it can change. I think somebody's really really good when they're salty aren't they? You know you lick their face and you understand the environment they're working and that takes a long time to do it. So we don't, try not to get too caught in just necessarily paddle strokes. I'm always trying to talk about when we come back and review it. We talk about how the environments changed. Does it fit if the forecast we've got, which it often doesn't and also think you always need to look further than 10 feet in front of your boat. Don't you, which a lot of people do. You're looking to the next headland, you're looking round what the clouds are doing in the distance. Yeah. So you're anticipating things, you might pop round the corner because you never know what's going to go before everybody else around so it's all those things that I think just make it more interesting actually for people.

Lee Pooley 00:23:32

Yeah, absolutely. I think you do hear people about saying they're in tune but actually, in tune, it's not as you say it's not just about being able to manoeuvre your boat, it's in tune with the environment isn't it? And that takes quite a considerable amount of time isn't it. To just know what's going on and there's some cues as well isn't there just that will jump out you the more time you spend on the water.

Olly Sanders 00:25:21

Mmm Yeah, I always think it's like juggling balls. You're gonna juggle the ball of reading the environment, the whether, that's two balls and you've got to be able to have a good set personal skills. Then you got to be able to navigate and people can normally juggle two balls, if you chuck in a third and they're sort of struggling. You chuck in the fourth ball and they start dropping all the balls. You're trying to make sure that people are good in you know, they've got a concentrate on all those other skills to become really competent sea kayakers, And if you've got a weakness, you've got to work on that. It doesn't necessarily, you could be great in a boat can't you. But if you don't understand and you can't navigate then you're going to get yourself into problems.

Lee Pooley 00:26:00

Absolutely. Yeah, Olly, huge amounts of information there for people to dial into and take away to either experiment themselves or put into their own coaching and leading practice. Absolutely demonstrated that you absolutely got a wealth of experience. To finish off the podcast, you've got a massive pedigree of trips and adventures behind you. Have you got anything up your sleeves that you're planning for the next couple of years.

Olly Sanders 00:26:26

Well, I think the last trip I did was last year, went away for another month. I am going back to Greenland this year, but I'm actually working. So we've got two teams were taken to the sort of pretty remote area up in Northwest Greenland.

But I'm sort of coming, I've done a lot of trips in the mountains and on the sea and I'm sort of coming slowly to the tail end of my career I think. I think you've basically have a real passion for another trip. And the last trip I did, I thought I'll see how it goes at the end of this and how I feel and I thought there's so many things that can go wrong in your river environment. I've been really really lucky and you always feel a responsibility to the people you go away with because I'm the one who organized it. And I just went at the end of that trip going, gnarly trip I think I've had a really good time.

And at some point you're going to hand over to the next generation. I'm on the panel of some organizations now that give out money, just to encourage people to start having adventures and that's the issue is, we do struggle sometimes to people to commit to going away and having a proper adventure and but times have changed haven't they.

Lee Pooley 00:27:30

Yeah, I'm gonna ask a question, it may be an unfair question, but I'm going to ask it anyway and quite a difficult one. What's been your best trip, best expedition you've been on.

Olly Sanders 00:27:39

The best expedition. Probably the best trip, well the most momentous trip I think probably, in terms of adventure, was probably going away to North East Greenland above Scoresby Sound Simon Burke in 2012 I think anyway, and we just went out in the open ocean, which nobody normally does and we were climbing. We were trying to climb and paddle. And we were out, we just had lots of, I mean day 2, we had the polar bear ripping into the tent. And all that sort of thing and then we went out to Island to get away from the Bears and we had loads more encounters of bears and then we did loads of mountaineering stuff because the Rock and coming across different types of rock. It was all quite gnarly climbing, but we had some amazing views from the top of some of the island peaks of all the remoteness of the north and all the ranges of looking into the sort of ice caps and all that sort of thing and it just felt like we were really committed, and the end we didn't have any weather forecast or anything. we just had an epirob I think and then, just having that when I talked about that idea of what's going on in the sea, we picked up a change in the weather. A bit of a change in the ocean and I said to Simon I think, we need to get back into the Scoresby Sound because I think something's going on here and we just did a massive day that had taken us about three days to do. And literally, as we were getting in, the swell was getting bigger and bigger and we managed to just tuck in. Just as we got back in and set of ten up, it just started snowing and then it stormed for about four or five days. And I just remember, we'd been stuck on the open coast. The only option we would've had would been to dump the boats and try and walk

back over the mountains into the small settlement. So they're always just feels like that's a very special trip that we got away with.

Lee Pooley 00:29:27

Lovely. Well Olly, many thanks for your time, huge amounts within that podcast about, top tips about turning in the wind, coaching, etc., and also a bit of a glimmer into some of your adventures. So thanks very much and much appreciated. Take care.

Olly Sanders 00:29:42

Bye.