

Lee Pooley 00:00:13

Hi everyone, and welcome to the British Canoeing Awarding Body coaching podcast and my name is Lee Pooley. I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications for British Canoeing Awarding Body. And I'm delighted to be joined by Simon, Simon Westgarth on this chat today. And Simon is part of the White Water technical group and actually chairs that group has been chairing that group several years now. So hi Simon.

Simon Westgarth 00:00:36

Good evening.

Lee Pooley 00:00:37

Really, Yeah, know you're really busy and really appreciate your time. But I think what would be really quite good initially is just to start this conversation going is we are gonna dig into the particular subject around white water features and how to use them and Coach with them, but I think it'd be quite nice for you to give a bit of an introduction, a bit of a resume of yourself to the listeners.

Simon Westgarth 00:01:01

I've been kayaking for a long time. So the resume could be quite long if we were going to get into the details. I started as a scout. And then from there, I enjoyed slalom a lot. But I really enjoyed white water kayaking. So I had a first gap year went to Canada realized that the world is quite a big place and there are many rivers to enjoy. And then it kind of went from on for there through University, lots of, another gap year that kind of came a gap life where I was lucky to be paid by some of the main brands, the Dagger and Palm to travel the world and competing Freestyle as it was then, and extreme races and developing product and turn the gear for Palm and boats for Dagger.

And that just went on from there and I picked up a teacher's qualification and realised I was quite good at teaching people and that developed into coaching and then for the last 20 plus years I've run my own brand as a tour operator taking people to different destinations, mainly in Europe for the last 25 years and I've worked with some fantastic people developing them as well. And the clients now they come from

all over the world. So I grew up in fatuous Britain. I knew the main thing was not to rely on a single one market to spread the risk. And for example, I have nine people coming to Italy in the first week of May, three from California, two from Virginia, one West Coast Canadian, one Irish, two Brits, and then it's kind of from everywhere and then the week after it's three Germans. And then some people from Australia, so it's really internationalised what I've done in terms of attracting people and it's all about the destinations where you do the coaching and deliver the product.

Lee Pooley 00:02:46

Yeah, as you say, destinations are important, but they obviously come very much for knowledge and experience as well to learn from yourself. And I think that's why I'm really delighted that you're able to spend a bit of time on this podcast today is because with your experience, hopefully we can dig into it and start to understand, your thoughts and your philosophy about how you introduce people to the white water environment, get everyone to understand how to use features, etc. So before we start to sort of dig into the particular area of how to, why is it important for someone paddling in a white water environment to be able to recognize and use features?

Simon Westgarth 00:03:29

The fundamental point of the navigating your way down the river. Is that we manipulate the asymmetry of the white water to find the line. Very rare is White Water symmetrical, very few places in the world it's like that. Most of time is asymmetric. By its features and by the shape and the energy within the water it's expressed in that asymmetric way so paddlers, we can you spot the line, and effectively you manipulate that asymmetry to find a successful and safe line down the river.

Lee Pooley 00:04:03

Yeah, and there's obviously a whole host of different features. I mean you can go into lots of different books that have been produced over the years and they list a whole load of features off don't they, like for example Downstream V or diagonal stopper or whatever people want to call it. Do you go into those particular details, or do you approach it in a slightly different way?

Simon Westgarth 00:04:25

So getting away from the kind of Orthodoxy that is so bent up of categorising or labelling everything is it the principle is to understand what the water is doing, and why it's doing it and once you understand that and then it's pretty much predictable what the water is going to do and then therefore you can decide where you can take the kayak and what you can do with that energy expression within the water. So it's important. Of course you begin to label it and some people especially people start to get into white water. They can get het up on the grading and the descriptions of the features and especially if rapids have names, people can get, they can anchor their perception very much on the reputation of these things rather than solely looking at what the water is doing and understanding what's going on. So you can inform yourself where you can go and how successful you can be.

Lee Pooley 00:05:26

Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned about your names of features or rapids because they do come with their sort of reputation or stories and it does put people off doesn't it? Where actually, if they just understood the feature and understand what the water was doing actually the names irrelevant, isn't it?

Simon Westgarth 00:05:48

I know from my own guiding for many years we in Norway would have the guide book in the van and people were asking where we going tomorrow and then they reach for it and then we would know that people would get extremely nervous about what was coming tomorrow. So in the end we took it out the van and we'd say, oh we're off to a river tomorrow. What is it? We have a number of options. It's going to be like class three, four with some five maybe here and there. And there's a nice drops, pool drop and you can walk it if you don't like it. Or you can run it. It's up to you. That's where we're going tomorrow. And then all of a sudden that edge went, and I can even recall another story on the Grand Canyon where the first trip I ran there people have these laminated guide books on their boats, because the Grand Canyon run a grading system of one to ten. People's perception of oh tomorrow, it says there's a class four rapid. The rule of thumb, as far as I was concerned, you just halve it, so it was class two. But it was a Grand Canyon class four. I know and so

people they get really nervous about what was coming up because they would go with this kind of guide book writers description and the numbers they get their anchored into, they get attached to how they feel about these rapids. So we did an experiment by where we took the books away from them for the day and all of a sudden they paddle in such a relaxed manner. And so people can get caught up on this but in the end is, it doesn't matter about the grading system, you either go or you don't based on what is before of course when you're a beginner or coming into sports as an intermediate, you need some guidance. You definitely need some suggestion of where to go. But once you get to more advanced white water, it's simply down to deciding what's before you and then where you're going to go not in case.

Lee Pooley 00:07:45

Absolutely and those guidebooks are a classic aren't they, not only are they getting themselves worked up. It probably affects their sleep; it affects them waking up early because they're nervous because they've read something in the book. They tell someone else and then it just gravitates doesn't it, to something that's actually not much of an issue really. I think, looking back on some of the named rapids, they are a bit over-edged in terms of what's written about them. So you talk a little bit Simon about novice, you need to give them a steer in that particular area, so if someone was a relatively novice coming to you to white water paddle. How would you go about getting them to understand and work features to their advantage?

Simon Westgarth 00:08:32

First of all, they need to kind of be able to recognise what they see. So, you can look for a rapid from above and that would be generally your point of view as you enter the rapid. And you can look from there and you can see features and they will be markers as to what they reveal what's going on. Okay, but then also if you see that these markers and you can move to a different position. And then to another position you begin to kind of get a fuller picture of what's going on because often when you enter a rapid line, you've never seen before only from the above then it's a harder totally understand what's going on. And this can of course affect people's performance.

But if you have many points of view and then even see someone else successfully run it you can build up a fuller richer picture as to what's going on and whether it's technically difficult or not, but the important thing is that people begin to read what's going on by recognising key markers and within the white water that kind of reveals the underlying current or the lateral flows or other features that are in the white water.

Lee Pooley 00:09:40

And then yeah you say, sometimes it's good for them to see someone run it, prior to them having to go. Is that something that you would use. Would you demonstrate running it or what you make that particular choice?

Simon Westgarth 00:09:55

It would depend on what the drivers of success are. So if I'm looking for early success. Then we may have an example to underpin a relative relatively straightforward it is. So, I've talked about the features and where you see them and the markers, but of course you will have a tactic of how you run white water. And the tactics are, they're relatively small group of tactics you would have. So very rarely as I pointed out earlier when you describe white water is nearly always asymmetric. And therefore what you would do would mirror the terrain in that way. So no if the water was going around the sweeping right hand bend, you would know the water on the outside is going faster. And then the water on the inside is going slower. So you may enter the bend slightly on the outside, but that would give you the luxury of having a greater point of view that you could see further round the rapid. But the whole time is you enter the rapid, you would point your boat towards the inside and you would leisurely or rapidly paddle towards the inside, to where the slower water is, where you would suspect it will be safer. Now of course, not every rapid is like that but majority of bends would be, where the bigger feature may more likely to be on the outside of the bend. So underpinning the understanding, the what's going on with the water is then having a portfolio of tactics, where you can use to go down the river. So left to right, right to left. These are basic ones, enter the centre, push to the right, obvious tactics that are the work that the paddler must do. Now technique can make that look very pretty but in the end you need the tactics. So very rarely in white water do you point dead down river? Only if you want to go and have a lot of excitement

going over wave cranes or the white water symmetrical. Most of the time you're pointing to the right, or to the left where you intend to go and then you do the work to get there.

And maybe that's the end of the rapid. But the classic division in class three four, I always point out is most class three is point and shoot, start on the right, go to the left, for example. Whereas on class four you may start on the right go to the left and then back to the right you have to do some endeavour some work in the rapid. So there is a task to do in the rapid. The precision and the timing of that task is dictated by the demand, what the water is doing. But in the end it's just tactics.

Lee Pooley 00:12:37

You talk a bit about speed then as well Simon, when you see novices sometimes on a rapid is they either have got a phenomenal amount of speed and you say well I'll see you at the bottom, because they're paddling like a rate of knots or they're not paddling at all. So, how do you broach that subject with those relative novices, for them to understand the use of speed?

Simon Westgarth 00:12:59

There is a kind of dogma that the faster you go, you iron out the features, especially with the more modern boats with a lot of rocker that hold a good tracking line. The faster you go; you can just iron out the features. I got through it. The PLF kind of strategy if it were to want to use a better acronym and of course this works until it does not. And so, this will work probably up to most reasonable class three.

However, there is sometimes there's things in the rapid that unforeseen. Maybe there's other river traffic where you can't do that because people are in the way. And if you approach running white water in that manner, soon as you want to get on to harder white water, you almost have to relearn tactical approach. So classically it again always depends the classic coaches answer but it would depend on the nature of the White Water most of the time we tend to go slightly faster than the flow of the water, but it may be a point in time where you enter rapid and you're looking for particular markers and then you start to move. Or it may be the case, you know where the markers are coming and you can't see them until you enter the rapid and so it will always depends on the nature of the rapid and the task. Which you wish to

do when you're running that rapid. So paddling as fast as you possibly can may give you something to do. However, in the end you're not really in control of what's going on and it will work generally up to reasonable class three, until it doesn't and then it will be like a house of cards it will collapse on you. So you need a tactical approach and understanding and delivering effective tactics is how we run White Water.

Paddling as fast as you can is not really tactically astute.

Lee Pooley 00:14:47

Yeah, okay, you've talked quite a bit about, you've used the word markers quite a bit and for you to recognise markers, identify markers. Can you give some examples of what you mean by that Simon?

Simon Westgarth 00:15:00

Okay, so nearly all white water is made up of diagonal waves. Sometimes they're diagonal wave from the river right and the river left would join and make a collapse in wave in the middle as they join or sometimes that could be a stopper. But nearly all white waters made up of diagonals and this means that you see these and you either line up parallel with them or you cut through them perpendicular and pretty much that's how it is. So you may enter a rapid and you will see a diagonal coming off the left bank and that's the one you are going to take you left to right and you're gonna run it parallel with that diagonal and you'll see that because there will be curling wave on the upstream end of it formed by a boulder or maybe a piece of bedrock and then you'll see that and you're take it left to right. Sometimes there'd be a large hump in the middle where this will be the obvious horizon line, a feature for a stopper and you would know that generally, if the stopper has a break in it. So like a V or the hump is diagonal. I mean it's shape then you know, even if you go in the hole you're going to get kicked out the downstream end. So there are always features and markers, boulders. Of course in the British centric point of view that we have a lot of rocks in the river and those rocks, different colours different shapes allow you to see obvious markers, come down when you see the Red Rock you point the boat 45, right and you go left or right, some of these key obvious features allow people to kind of know what to do when to do it.

Lee Pooley 00:16:31

And you said that UK Rivers plenty of rocks in there and your spot on here, especially the sort of the influx of either no water at all or lots of water in the UK at the moment and white water paddling has progressed considerably over the years and it was a time and you probably remember it, we used to avoid rocks quite, to our peril and now we're seeing them being used as part of the river running activity. Is that something that you'd introduce?

Simon Westgarth 00:17:01

Absolutely because this is the modern (...) This allows you to deliver your tactics. However. Very importantly, not all rocks are the same. So often it's really nice to go to places that have nice rounded granite boulders because they're not sharp and ugly. However, you can go to some destinations that it's just rock. It's extremely sharp and a bit brutal and there you perhaps wouldn't use the rocks in the same way because they will affect the way the boat goes over the feature and can often deflect or slow you down, decelerate you, to your detriment so you can get hung up and stuck. So often the main thing about boulders is that as I talked about diagonals on the upstream side. There's often a pressure wave and in a diagonal deflecting off it now you can use the diagonal wave on the highest point to if it's deflecting left to right. You can come at it right to left and go off the diagonal wave or off the side of the boulder to land behind the back of the boulder and carry on or if it's a bigger volume feature. You can use that to avoid the main energy at the centre hole by driving to the left of it using this feature. So again, it's understanding what's going on. And then how you can use that now a diagonals, as I say does exist everywhere in white water and you can use the energy of them to cut through or to ride them parallel is quite an important thing and many people who come to Norway they get to use, see that because it's quite clean white water so you can end up really effectively getting on those skill set.

But again, for example, if you went to the French alps and you start to do for every boulder, you saw your boat wouldn't last very long and there's a reason why boat higher in France a lot more expensive than in Norway, for example, because the vendor hiring those boats and those boats don't last as long.

Lee Pooley 00:18:58

We'll move on to some progressive exercises in the minute, but we know with relatively novices to white water that it actually can look like quite a complicated space can't it? There's lots going on noise different features. Do you try to select quite clean lines and features initially or do you just put it all into the mix?

Simon Westgarth 00:19:22

You need to build from a basic beginning and understanding. Is that as I pointed out as if all the features are lateral, then your tactical approach has to be lateral as well. You either cut it or you cut perpendicular or you run parallel and then you have a whole host of exercises that underpin that those tactical approach and where once that's kind of ingrained then you can deliver that, then you can start thinking about the technique. You know, how much you edge here when the boat's flat the timing of the strokes and then where you aim, if you want to make an eddy, classically and in a (...) essential mind, you make the top of the eddy. Well, that maybe all well and good but most of the time it's a lot easier this to follow the water in that forms the eddy, you know, now if you follow it in and then there's room for everyone else is going to come in the eddy as well, then it also means you give you a fair run up to attack the eddy line when you leave. However, I grew up in Britain and the eddys are small so you tell beginners to aim high so they don't miss it. Yeah, in the end if their tactical approaches is fair and reasonable, they play around with the timing and make the eddy. What I try to do is not to overload. There's a lot of information you can partake with the learners. However, you want easy straightforward venues where you push through constraints theory to ensure that they can practice right and left. They can play around with how their approach angle when the air shift. They don't Edge the timing of the stroke so you play around, you begin to play around with lots of the different variables and so then they can have dominion over the type of turn when they turn and how they cross the early line because there is not one size fits all. You can start with the heuristics, 45 degree down is your classic approach, but when or if you edge and then there's stroke timing then these are all variables and this is why you play with novices and beginners and intermediates who are trying to build confidence. So they understand that they can change the shape of their turn and where they can go in the eddy or when they can get their timing of how they go left or right to make the line. Do they, do they edge slightly to the lateral to get to the effectively ride them parallel or keep the boat flats. The boat gets kind of

knocked around. these are all variables to play with and so yeah as a white water coach you often play with constraints theory a lot.

Lee Pooley 00:21:56

Yeah. It's almost a gift isn't it in that type of environment to play with those constraints really. Obviously you're a very experienced coach. As someone moves and progresses and starts to develop. Do you have any progressive exercises that you have up your sleeve that you would introduce to that more intermediate advanced paddler?

Simon Westgarth 00:22:16

The classic one is what would you like to learn? I want to learn to boof and then they kind of think you, oh okay, we have to go to the drop and they have to grunt doing several laps of running a strike lip drop however, there's so many variables to deliver a boof for example, in the end all a boof is is a forward stroke, precisely timed at the correct place. Of course arguably you need a nice forward stroke that is often a problem. And then where you do the stroke and the shape of it and how you move your upper body and all these are factors. So we found there's a lot easier to go to nice eddy lines that have a cushion waves on them that you have a boulder a large cushion wave with a diagonal wave and you're effectively teach people to boof off the diagonal wave into the eddy. And this often you can do round robin, or on, for example, the Sjoa in Norway there's lots of these features so you can repeatedly do it left, right, left, right. That's different energy the river more gradient here less.

So there's lots of variables from the environment and then you can play around with that. What this means is that allows you a progression that people can work on the time in the tactical approach, the timing and the shape of their forward stroke then they make the eddy and then eventually, once you get to bigger boulders, with clear diagonals that are actual drops then they can actually then start to boof into the eddy. So it's an obvious natural progression.

And of course with wave trains, you can run them slightly diagonally and then people can actually, every wave they can learn to boof off, because in the end it's all about the stroke timing rather than going to, you know, two metre drop and getting the perfect stroke off the lip. Most of the time when you get to that kind of venue you've

done all that work before so it's almost like graduation moment, where they come and it's a confirmation of all the work and endeavour they've done, on where it's easy, because in the end delivering it where it's hard. You have to practice when it's easy, absolutely.

Lee Pooley 00:24:28

That's just a really important message. Isn't it is you train in those environments, you can make those mistakes and become more precise with your paddle strokes and placements. So when actually you are in a bit more of a appreciate environment that actually it works but you did make reference to forward paddling and I just quite keen to get your thoughts on that is, people's forward paddle ability. Is it something you feel that sometimes you need to work on what when people are actually coming to a white water coaching session with you?

Simon Westgarth 00:25:00

Nearly everyone it's kind of brutal. So what tends to happen it would totally depends on everyone's background, but of course, there's a dogma, that forward paddling looks like this on flat water in a more touring aspect where people learn on flat water or slalom boat, that's half the weight, narrower and your knees are flatter. You watch the slalomist they don't push their shoulders forward as far as much as the stronger more kind of profile white water paddlers do and why it matters because when you're at the lip of the drop the stroke you do there, has to take you over the horizon line and down into the impact. So it's not like you can do two more strokes, you only have that affordance at that point in time to deliver that stroke. So the forward stroke at that moment has to be as effective as you can be. Yeah, so it's often the case. there's very little of the upper back articulation what I mean by that is that the driving the shoulder forward and actually changing the shape of your upper back so isn't just rotation in your torso if you drive the shoulder forward, you can actually feel the shoulder push forward a little bit like a boxer would a good punch. You see that their whole upper back changes shape and it's almost like the missing turbo for a lot of paddlers that allows you at the horizon line to deliver the move or when you hit the hole to deliver the move to get through it. And so looking at lots of video analysis. It takes people a second and a quarter, a second and a half, to get over a horizon line. It doesn't matter how fast the water is looking at all this video analysis. So if you're

struggling last half a second because you do it really fast what's going to happen for the more than 50% of the time when your boat is moving at that important moment over the horizon line. so, what tends to happen is there the nose kicks up and then soon as the paddler lifts out the water then the bow drops and even if it's got lots of rocker in the front it can kick up through but then the person's in the backseat or they're balances back and then if they're lucky they can skip out and if not, they get deflected back into the hole, so it's important the delivery of the key stroke. Boof is a keystone. Any aspect change would be you need key stroke to get you through the change of acceleration or deceleration as you go through it. So classically yes, the boof is the stroke you do at the lip of a drop but what you should be thinking about doing is when you land you do another stroke, to pull you all away as the boat decelerates.

And so this kind of matters as the boat to your upper body stays in contact with the acceleration and then the deceleration of the boat. Rather than you kind of boof and brace which kind of was what people were doing in the 90s and early noughties and then of course, that's like, I want to go and then I want to party in the hole, kind of approach but you often see (...) mistake is that people just go so fast on the boof, so early so fast and then they almost got time for a ghost stroke as they go down and then take the impact but then the balance is not in the good position and then they get deflected or stalled out. Strokes tend to take a long time and then having a nice forward stroke that allows you to hold blade pressure throughout the whole aspect change is to how you deliver that an effective, an effective boof or an effective keystroke and that takes time you can't, that takes a lot of proprioception a lot of development. If you develop your forward paddling, where it's easy, if you start doing that, coming into eddy lines, over eddy lines, over little wave trains, and then in the end, you start to have it when it really counts. Often, tell people when they want to start running class 5, it's important, it's not Hollywood, you've got to practice where it's easy. You've got to practice consistently where it's easy because when you get to class 5, it matters that you deliver it, it matters for your group it matters for your own well-being whether it's successful or not, or actually, you injury prevention or worse and your group of friends also have to endeavour to ensure your safety and well-being as well. And so, you don't want to Hollywood it you want to make sure that you have endeavoured a lot to ensure you can deliver.

Lee Pooley 00:29:39

So forward paddling's on the list for everyone really isn't it.

Simon Westgarth 00:29:43

Yeah, but it just takes time and over a period or so, I have people for six days and you see it in them on easier stuff and you see that they spend time on it and they work on it and then the delivery and you can see they run stuff that we run earlier in the week and then the line and the precision is just so much better. And I know for myself, I'm seasonal, I ski all winter. And so I know for myself when I first start paddling in the season, I have to think about this a lot for myself because very easy to reinvent and get over old habits, but equally it's easy to get new ones as well and new habits that are not that great. So I kind of think about it a lot. So I normally go to Slovenia to work for two weeks early season before I start Greek boating in Italy in May. I don't want to arrive there straight off the skis.

Lee Pooley 00:30:36

I think that's really important to hear as well Simon, that people do hear, even someone of your experiences to go, well actually, if I've been not in a boat for a while. I am gonna go to some places that maybe a slightly easier than you would paddle later on in the season to hone your skills in to ensure that, skill fade get your eye back in. Get the time and strokes. I think it's really important. I think UK is a classic isn't it, you have a reasonable winter season, let's say. Let's say it's a good winter season. So you have a reasonable winter season you finish in February maybe going a little bit into March you may not get back on the river again until end of October, beginning in November. That's a huge time isn't it of being out of a boat in that environment?

Simon Westgarth 00:31:25

Yeah, absolutely, so it's important that you ease into it. Yes it is like riding a bike, but you still have to have a feel for this blade pressure. I spoken about it before and this is as you develop your proprioception as a performer you're able to hold pressure on the blade which is the energy from the river whether it's going over the lip of the drop or driving into the eddy and that feel of the water on the blade. Is that kind of really difficult for me to describe in such a elegant way and yet when you feel it, you know

it, and this is how you get stability in the white water by pulling on the paddle in an effective way. Most good paddlers, they don't brace they pull on the paddle, and they're not pulling on the paddle really fast, they're pulling on the paddle where the energy is in the river to keep the dynamic stability afloat. And then I always find at the beginning of the season it takes one or two sessions to remember, recall that feeling, and that feeling's ingrained in the performance. So whether it's skill fade or it's just kind of recalling a familiarity with that proprioception and again as I say, I mean if you put me on the first river, here in Norway it's like Spring it about to start and the taps go on and they go on full. And so you ramp up hard pretty quickly. And so I definitely go on the easier section. Quite a bit before I start hitting it hard. And again, the main reason born is brutally cold because it's fresh spring snowmelt. But also it's just you don't want to get yourself into trouble early season when the river is really high. So it's just important to kind of re-familiarise yourself with that feeling of how it should feel. Yeah.

Lee Pooley 00:33:22

I think that's a really good way of explaining it actually and describing it is that recall isn't it rather than skill fade. The recall is a really nice way of describing it. In terms of you as a coach, how do you go about setting up structures of practice, so you could actually provide feedback in a white water environment because it's not as easy as on a sheltered water environment, it's moving there may not be laps that you do. You talk about that, having to run back up the bank which not everyone enjoys. It has its limitations. How do you set up effective feedback loops as a coach?

Simon Westgarth 00:34:00

Of course it depends on how the task is framed and what people want to learn and do. And so you can have some very easy structured sessions early on that sometimes we simply work on basic things that are recall and you build from there and you try to take that to a more challenging environment or sometimes you have to step back. It's having the structure of the white water that lends to this. So as I said in classic, I'm in Slovenia in early and late season. That's boulder garden white water. So it's extremely structured and it doesn't run away from you. So you're able to look at the white water decide a task, do the task and get feedback. On something, many locations, you can just attain back up and do it again, and

especially if it's early doors where it's on slightly easier white water. And then people end up kind of of course they ask for your feedback, but in the end is that it's often the nature of the task, the river often gives the feedback quite easily in itself. And so people understand the nature of their performance and then as you go further on so in Italy, it's very much pool drop. But we don't start on pool drop because it's very in terms of orchestrating success if things like run a drop, they swim, run a drop they swim, okay, all they remember is they swam. So you have to work on things where it's easier and so when you arrive at the tourist drops to run that not only can they paddler them. They can paddler them extremely well, and so it may be the case where we may go to some features that are park and play and you go there and then or park and huck and then you run several laps over a bunch of features that embed the work, the tactical work you've done so, I mean, I talked a lot about tactics, but this is one area that is, for white water is significantly under developed in terms of people understanding what to do. And I mean I know for myself from a British centric point of view is that we have a very small pool of rivers that people regularly run and it's almost that they want to learn the lines and down the river, almost like a Haynes manual, that kind of style. I need someone needs to show me the lines rather than understanding the tactics that underpin why the line is like it is and so often is there's a lot of focus on tactics and then technique delivers, help us makes the tactic look very pretty. Okay, and then you test so it's often like that, tactics techniques because often you wanted to think about something they're doing while they're delivering the tactic. It's a deflection so they're not worried about what's coming up. And this is one way to kind of orchestrate where people focus on what they need to do. Task driven exercises, if people have lots of little jobs to do. This job first and that job and lots of little past and need not have to worry about their ark of the day and what about big Joe Falls coming up at the end. Well that's not relevant. We're not there yet. We have to get there first and we get there. There's lots of good quality white water on the way and so you kind of build up this task driven approach and then this is how you get the feedback. How was your move left to right. Lots of people tend to struggle on tracking. This is moving the boat diagonally across the river and they don't recognize that sometimes a flow picks up. Sometimes it slows down. So the little details in the flow so often I talked about the beginning is what the waters doing. Classically in teaching features so it were, people get stuck in the orthodoxy. Okay, this is that, this is this rather than the details of what the white waters doing and as

people get better they begin to feel the feedback from the boat, if you're going across a whole bunch of Boulder Garden where there's Rocks Under the Water, so there's fast and slow jets. They can feel the boat getting pulled on the slower piece of water and then it gets accelerated on the next piece of water. But sometimes they have diagonally go across that to run the drop over on the right afterwards and they get the feedback from the flow. So this kind of task driven approach where they almost micro tasks. This allows you to position the feedback very effectively as people can see that were they successful, could they be more successful in what they wanted to do? What happened to the boat there? Why? Okay, and this allows you to have a reasonable structure of practice that doesn't get engrossed in the nuances of everything. Or the overview focusing on there's so much going on. It's really hard to kind of pinpoint. But by the time you get on that kind of white water, you should be this is the task, delivered the task. What happened? How can we develop it? What else could we do. Could we arrive with faster flow?

Sometimes people wanted to get better extreme racing. And so we look at where the energy is and where you can accelerate and keep your speed. So often is the case, extreme races. The people like to go as fast as they can where the water's flat. That's kind of pointless because there's a lot of energy lost. You can only go fast when the river's going fast. Where you can get the energy and you pick up speed and so this kind of identifying the class that needs to happen and getting feedback from the white waters the ultimate teacher if it were and myself as the coach you kind of frame the feedback and how the people feel about what happened and how they can improve it. if you were slightly left. Would you get more acceleration as you come into the rapid where you get a cleaner bow as you're going through and so this task driven approach is kind of underscored my whole coaching for a long time and people often talk about how do you deal with confidence? Well if people are busy doing these little tasks they have no time to think about being worried about what's coming up. But of course they need to be happy on to do the task. It's before them, so you're not going to go yeah, you just have to do this class three ferry above the class 5 drop, and you're only a class three paddler, so I know you won't be doing that. But the point is that the nature of the task and the variability, again, underpinned by constraints theory where you change one or two of the, where you change one variable at a time so I mean the reason why I like, referred to constraints

theory it's like scientific method, I remember when to be in this pupil at school in science class, you go in and you do a science experiment and you've got a conclusion and then you went on from there, but you were only allowed to change one variable. Otherwise you start changing all the variables then the experiments aren't related. You just had fun in the science lab and you could do that on the white water. But if you as a coach you change one variable. Oh now we're gonna do on the left, rather than on the right, okay, now we're going to do on an eddy on the outside of the bend rather than one on the inside. And so the athlete and the tasks change changes, are the same, but the environment changes so it's very good in terms of allowing people to build confidence and understanding the feedback. They're getting from the boat and the river themselves and you as the coach can frame and kind of challenge some of the feedback they give in terms of their performance.

Lee Pooley 00:41:11

Loads there Simon and I think this is maybe a little teaser, we haven't talked about it. But this might be, part one of a podcast around coaching white water, but phenomenal amount of areas for people to dig into, go off and experiment not only to support their own paddling but also support coaches that are coming into this particular environment and really appreciate your time. One more question more personal related really is I know that you've been skiing lately and the seasons coming up soon about to start. So what does your season look like for 2024?

Simon Westgarth 00:41:49

I'm going to, I'm not going to go to see the pictures on the spring tide and next, week after Easter, with some great padding friends of mine and then I go to Slovenia, for a week come home. Season will be running here in Norway by then, I'm three weeks in Italy back in Norway for all the summer. I'm going to come to wet westfest. I keep promising people I will come. I'm going to come this year. I'll be in Devon in October. I'm going to Zambezi in November.

Lee Pooley 00:42:18

Reasoning is really busy then.

Simon Westgarth 00:42:19

Yeah, it's always a long season. Lots of really early bookings. I'm really impressed I mean we're booked out for Italy. We we're booked out two months ago. So I'm really impressed out how solid it is. And Norway bookings are starting to come in and it's good. We have really good snow this year here. But of course that doesn't always mean really I can have great river levels, you know day after Easter. It might be 20 degrees and it all melts within a month, but of course in the end, we always have good water. Yeah, so it's always a good long season here. So I never complain. That's why I live here. Yes.

Lee Pooley 00:42:55

Well Simon wish you all the best for 2024. I'm sure we'll catch up again. But thanks very much for your time and we'll speak to you soon. Take care.