

Coaching from the bank in Slalom

Putting Safety First

We all know that Coaching does not start in the Club two minutes before the session, it starts well before or at worst, in the car on the way to the session. Where do you start designing/planning your session?

Designing/Planning the session

Many coaches will always start at the '**what**' am I going to coach, a system that has worked for many over several years, but what if we turn this on its head and start with the '**who**' are we coaching?

How might this allow you to think of your session differently?

- What fatigue level might they be turning up with?
- What have they been doing since the last time you had a coaching intervention?
- What happened in the last session?
- How can you carry learning from the last session into this one?
- Where is their mindset?
- How has their confidence on the water been, have you noticed anything different lately?
- What are their expectations of the session?
- What is the environment you are trying to create?

If we understand and put the person first, this, added to the **PURPOSE** or the '**what**', will contribute to successful sessions. We know sessions need to be progressive, and that people stay focussed if they have a clear achievable goal - so defining this before the session is important and will allow us to challenge appropriately.

At this stage, understanding the 'who' and the 'what', we can now start thinking about where our gates would be best placed to allow maximum learning and how we might best protect our athletes if they capsize or get into trouble.



Safety Decisions

What are the questions we currently ask ourselves about safety?

How are you currently operating as a coach? When have you got this wrong?

We must never forget we work in a dynamic environment that is always changing. How do you notice if the river is rising, how do you manage this within a session?

There are many options to consider, however here are a few to think about.

- **Boat based** - Coach is in a boat and takes control of safety,
- **Boat based** - Coach supervises paddlers rescuing each other during the session when and if required,
- **Designated safety paddler** - (someone you can trust and who is competent and well drilled in all rescue techniques. Do we take their word or is this something we might have trained and practised within the club, once or twice a year? This could be a group member or a separate paddler to the group) - performs/supervises the rescues with coach watching/directing from the bank,
- **Coach on the bank** - (appropriately attired and with a throwline) group is efficient at self-rescue or able to protect each other if there is a mishap.
- **Designated bank safety** - Coach on the bank with an appropriately attired bankside rescuer. The rescuer should consider dynamic variables such as weather, weather forecast, water temperature, SRTRG protocols, etc., as well as what rescue equipment to have available and where they will need to be strategically placed to carry out quick efficient rescues,

Wow, lots to choose from and many decisions as coaches we have to make, have you ever thought about the process you go through when making these decisions?



Let's look at some examples of what might work where and when:

Boat Based

There are many reasons why we might want to be in a boat:

- Nature of the river does not allow for bank-based rescue or suitable places to coach from,
- Level of the group,
- Building confidence of the group,
- River hazards,
- Demonstrations,
- Supervising safety practices.

Other questions we might ask:

- What boat will I choose to deliver safe effective rescues?
- What other equipment do I need to be carrying?
- How might being in the boat affect learning?
- How effective is observation from a boat?

Designated Safety Paddler

When would this be most useful?

- Coach observation more effective from the bank,
- Nature of the river does not allow for easy bank-based rescues.

Other questions we might ask:

- How will we brief the safety paddler, what are the key points to get across?
- If they are independent to the group, where might you place them?
- If a rescue is required, what are the actions of the other group members?
- What will be expected of you, the coach, during a rescue?
- What will a great rescue look like in this situation?
- How can I use them to increase the confidence of others?

Designated Bank Safety Support - appropriately attired to complete rescues as mentioned above

- As coaches, how do we decide when they can paddle as a group with just bank safety cover? Is it a gut feel or do we have a judgement process as coaches?
- As coaches, how will we manage the bank safety?
- What do you want of the other group members if someone needs rescuing?
- What role are you, the coach, going to take if there is a rescue?



Coaching from the bank

A situation we probably take for granted and the norm, because we see it being done at international level, but what really allows us as coaches to be comfortable coaching from the bank?

- Good easy run off areas where paddles can rescue themselves safely
- Are the paddlers able to confidently self-rescue?
- How effective are the groups rescue techniques? Have they been trained in this? How often does your club practise this?
- What equipment do we need to be effective if required to help? If we decide a throwline to be appropriate for us to carry, have you practised deploying the line in the dynamic environment, what other safety kit might you need to keep you safe?
- Are the paddlers competent/confident at the task you are setting them and, on that feature, grade of water?

Now understanding the '**who**', understanding the '**what**' and recognising the hazards and the best way to protect our athletes, we need to think about how we might deliver our SAFETY brief within the session brief:

- What are the real key points we need to get over?
- What are the centre/club rules? How do they expect you to report an injury?
- What do the athletes need to know? How might carrying a throwline increase or decrease their confidence? What might they be thinking?
- What you expect of the athletes when a rescue is taking place?
- How do you want the athlete to re-join the group if they have a mishap?
- Where is the safety equipment - First Aid Kit, Emergency Phone, etc.?
- How will we manage the risk if water levels change, etc.?

It is no coincidence why planning is important, so we now know the '**who**' and the '**what**', so it is back to us now as Coaches and we can decide how we want to behave to create the best learning environment for our athletes.

