

Lee Pooley 00:17

Welcome everybody to the British Canoeing Awarding Body Coaching Podcast. My name is Lee Pooley, I'm the director of Coaching and Qualifications for British canoeing, and I am delighted to be joined by three SUP Whitewater Paddler's, coaches and leaders. And I'm going to let them introduce themselves to you. And Tom let's start with yourself.

Tom Westaway 00:37

Hi there my name is Tom Westaway I run a white water SUP coaching company in the southwest in Devon mainly coaching of a Dart. What I mainly do is take pre-existing paddleboarders, and take them into a white water environment, but I've also had white water people who white water canoe or kayak who are trying to transfer over to SUP

Lee Pooley 00:57

Cool, and we also got Adam welcome Adam

Adam Burns 01:00

Hi you all right, I'm Adam Burns. I'm based up in Perth, in Scotland and so I run a little centre on the side of the river Tee and also a provider of white water SUP coach as well, for British canoeing

Lee Pooley 01:13

Thanks, Adam and last but not least Anthony.

Anthony Ing 01:17

Hi, my name's Anthony Ing, I run stand-up paddle board, UK up in North Wales and I've just been pioneering white water SUP for the last 15 years and just been trying to develop it into what we can sort of see now and develop it as much as I can with taking people out on the water and coaching, as well as behind the scenes with qualifications and guiding and safety. So, that's a bit about me.

Lee Pooley 01:42

Cool, right well then hopefully, some of you have guessed, we're going to be talking about Stand-Up Paddleboarding today. But we're not just Stand-Up Paddleboarding as the diversity of that actual discipline itself, we're going to be concentrating on, white water, and specifically, for those leading and coaching in a white water environment, so that's what we're going to be focusing on today. So, let's start off quite broad, and we'll get everyone involved with this is could you give me some examples or what your thoughts are around and what makes a successful Stand-Up Paddleboard journey in a white water environment and let's start with Adam.

Adam Burns 02:22

So, a big part of it for me, is that kind of continued dynamic risk assessment, we have got fins, and that's something we massively need to be aware of, and so, the ability to consistently risk assess what's going on base, especially on water levels is it's been a really key bit of me for making it successful.

Lee Pooley 02:42

Okay, brilliant. Thank you, Adam. Let's go for Tom.

Tom Westaway 02:44

So, something I'm quite big on is actually trying to make sure that the whole team have like a really good understanding of how the day's actually going to look and kind of setting in those ideas of what's going to happen. If something unexpected happens, you know like if someone's going to swim, how do we all manage that? Or it's going to be how long is this paddle going to be? Just all of those things, getting people, to be honest about how they're feeling on the day. I think that kind of really gets the ball rolling on making things work and be successful.

Lee Pooley 03:14

So, you're really working towards a real collaborative approach to descending the river or playing the river.

Tom Westaway 03:21

Yeah, I mean at the end of the day, you're all relying on each other, aren't you especially seeing as you know, falling off is quite a real possibility and again, separate from your board, you are relying on your team, aren't you? So, if you're on the same page you're all on the same level, that's definitely going to make things work a lot more smoothly.

Lee Pooley 03:38

All right, thanks Tom and Anthony.

Anthony Ing 03:40

I think fun I think that's the main thing. You know unlike potentially other crafts are out there, if you take a dip, it's just fun it's like it's another thing, it's part of the learning journey and I don't think it matters on where you're at in that learning journey if it's controlled in a fun enjoyable way. And you're in the right environment, then, getting wet and getting back on the board, and going again, is fun. And being out there and having a team that if you're just doing a session or doing a journey is out there to have enjoyable fun, safe learning is really cool and I don't think you get that in all aspects of all other sports, but you definitely get that in white water SUP.

Lee Pooley 04:26

Thank you. Good start. So, what we're going to do is let's sort of delve into sort of specific areas and you know there's been a lot of talk around the importance of height management and I'm wondering if you could give us, an overview of what does it mean around height management? What does it actually mean on the Stand-Up Paddleboard?

Anthony Ing 04:46

I guess, so, height management is one of the key safety skills that we can adapt and bring into the sport and so being able to control yourself between being on your knees, one knee one foot. So, a high kneel and being in a standing stance, but also being able to monitor that or manage that through moving water itself. So being able to drop into a height to keep your stability or even dropping down all of the heights before falling itself. So being able to drop down, all the heights, so you end up on your knees before and being in the water. So, for me it's safety but it's also success and it's really cool

to see more people being able to monitor their height through these moving water features and still they go in standing they end standing but they might have dropped into a one knee position whilst going through some features and pop straight back up again. So, we're still getting safe, learning and safe outcomes. Instead of the concept of standing until we fall and that's where we end up getting more falling in places we don't want to. So, for me, it's a definite key safety skill.

Lee Pooley 05:54

Okay, and so it's a predetermined approach, isn't it? That's what you're talking about. So you think about your own ability and you see say such as a feature and you would make that you would make a personal call, what stance you should be taking. Is that right?

Anthony Ing 06:09

Yeah, so I think the I think the environment that's around us and depending on what environment we're going on and depending on our ability, will then depend on what height we potentially might pick. But for an example, I might have run down a certain rapid a lot lower than I feel like I can a couple of times before feeling like, oh actually now I might go up to the next height and that then means that we're starting to get a real concept of managing height and being able to stay on our board. You know depending on the environment and depending on our ability level. In the end, you almost go down, rapids and go, oh I haven't been on my knee for ages, but that's when you've got to a point of Up there that you still if I then push myself to a harder environment, I have that know-how and I have that awareness of being able to still drop a knee. So, depending on your learning journey and depending on where you're at, probably depends on how much you are managing and monitoring height. But definitely, it's one of them key aspects that we sort of get into that sort of leadership and coaching from quite early on.

Lee Pooley 07:09

And from a personal paddling perspective then Anthony is that, what would be a good progressive exercise? So, someone's relatively new to white water SUP paddling and how could there be some progressions around understanding height management?

Anthony Ing 07:24

So, I do quite a lot of stuff again just on the flat water because you haven't got the environment to then cause any issues to start off with and just getting them paddling along on a low kneel. So, two knees down and then being able to transfer with their hands pushing on the board to go up to a high kneel. That's one foot and one knee, so into a high kneel position and then again using their hands to push on the boards, then going to a standing stance and you can build that until the hands aren't necessary and we can then use our paddle to gain more stability. So, we're actually then going down through the heights, using our paddle strokes, so as we do a paddle stroke, we can drop down onto one knee one foot. And then as we do another paddle stroke we can drop down onto our knees. So, it's a warm-up exercise for me and it's an exercise that is a flat-water exercise that You can get really good at before going into a moderate water environment and the great thing is yes, I know we're talking about white water SUP, but realistically any moderate water environment this works brilliant at. In a windy condition, just being able to drop a knee quickly, going out through surf, being able to drop the knee is really useful. So, it doesn't just work in a white water environment, so it's a really good skill to have

Lee Pooley 08:36

Brilliant. Okay, thanks, Anthony. And I think Adam, in terms of, you know, highly experienced coaching and leader in SUP white water, how do you go about reinforcing and reminding the people that you're leading or coaching, the importance of this height management?

Adam Burns 08:51

Yes, so, I guess a large bit of it for me. Is it being a key theme that's kind of running through from before we get onto the water and the whole time or on the water. So, to reflect a little bit like what Ant was saying there. Then a warm up for me, is usually quite a lot talking about different stances and getting people to think about dropping their height and thinking about taking me and how they might do that, and how they might use a paddle to support themselves with that. And then once you're on the water, then you know, in that kind of warm-up stage as well on the water. We're probably trying to use a little bit of flat water or a little bit of slow flow get ourselves comfortable and again we're reinforcing that and we're going, okay, well we might not need to take a kneel the time but actually we're reinforcing by trying that and getting comfortable and really trying to get people thinking about doing on both sides as well, because there's definitely this comfort of, okay I'm comfortable on my right hand side and that's grand, But that time that all of a sudden, I maybe go towards the left hand side that's the time that I'm going to fall in. So yeah, a key theme for me and just keep coming back to it regularly is really important as well. So might've done it on land, we've done it When we first got on the water, we've gone we've played in a bit and we're having a great time and there might be going okay cool, let's do some getting really comfortable. Let's do a little bit practice here while we're at it before we move on to the next thing.

And then again going into that whole, this is maybe a little bit of a harder stuff. So again, let's reinforce this by maybe, we'll go down on these Our first time, get a little bit, feel for the water, understand what's going on. And then we can then go down and be in a standing position, but then maybe we start to drop the knee and we can basically compensate for that, and then, as we get more comfortable, we can build ourselves up. So, it's again, that whole ability to build things slowly, rather than the necessary going straight for it and everyone's different. So, some people will really, really engage with that and will really enjoy that learning process going through, others will need to fall in a couple times before they realize that maybe there's credit in the conversation but yeah, the main thing for me is really driving It as one of the key themes of this session of the coaching of the leading of the trip and that seems to of got it into people's head quite a lot.

The other thing is kind of being that role model for people as well. So, I think it's quite easy for us to be like, well I can stand up down this rapid and I'm 100% confident that I'm not going to fall in which I think we can never be 100% confident we're not going to fall in but we can be pretty confident in our ability at times. And with that we get into that grey area where people were like, oh well if they're doing it then I guess I should do it. So not being worried to take a knee, being prepared to take a knee and showing good height management through rapids in preparation for rapids in eddies When we're waiting for other people. This again seems to really enforce people to go, okay cool this is not something that's just something we can do but, actually it's really something positive. That is just a part of white water paddleboarding, rather than anything else.

Lee Pooley 11:34

There are some really good top tips there, one of the things that you emphasize there is around role modelling and reminding ourselves actually why we're leading and why we're coaching. It's not for ourselves It's for the others that we are looking after and in responsible for so actually showing them good technique and good height management is actually the way forward because as we know,

there'll be lots of copying going on, isn't there? You know Crumbs you know Adam's dropped to his knees, I best drop to my knees, that happens quite, and on the river where you go as well, isn't it? They'll tend to follow you and follow your line. So that imitation of what someone does as a leader and as a coach is really powerful.

Tom, in terms of, how you operate on the water, you alluded to it a little bit in, you know, when you talked about what makes it successful and you, can talk to around you know, what's going to happen during the day and, collaboration but, as a coach or as a leader in a white water environmental SUP what sort of things would you bring into your safety briefing that probably comes from the complexities of stand up paddleboarding in white water?

Tom Westaway 12:40

So, I think People being stood up on boards, obviously there's a lot more opportunity for them to be falling from heights. They're going to have to be able to monitor their height properly. So, one of the first things that I end up talking about is like their personal competency and how they actually feel, can they move properly? Like I'm looking at that. Maybe they have some injuries and that's kind of like the personal stuff. Then the next thing is what sort of kit, they're wearing, some people wear lots of padding knees shin guards, elbows, you can talk around that sort of stuff. Some people wear it over Some people were underneath. And then kind of bringing into how the session is actually going to look not to really echo what Ant and Adam have been talking about already but the height management is like a huge topic. So, as it's a safety brief that's kind of when my sort of drill start and I go this is how we are actually going to be managing our height. Can you go from this to this to this and then they go through on the land and then some people like god never really thought about that. And then, suddenly you're doing some dry coaching and that's where they can, practice it quite well.

Another thing that we're going to be looking at realistically is how their board is set up. Some people attach their bags, and their kits to their boards. Sometimes it's done in a really good way sometimes it's done in not so good away, it could be that they've got an open gate karabiner or a wire karabiner if you are climbing back on your board and you end up, clipping yourself, that obviously wouldn't be such a good thing. So, it's making people aware of that, you've also got the discussion of leashes, particularly the river that I take people on people want to rock out with some leashes with me. It's not a definite, no, but I'll always have a chat with them, I'll be like, do you actually need this or is it just making your life a little bit easier and is it making you almost a little bit lazy falling off in an incorrect way? And all you have to do is pull your board back. Do you actually need your leash or shall we take it away? And let's look at a way that you can paddle in a way that is safe in a way that you don't need your leash. After we've done all that I'm probably going to be talking about, whilst were paddling down, it's like how we're going to fall off, are we going to be falling off the board running off backwards, are we going to be flying forwards, or are we going to be using that height management that we've been talking about? Are we going to aim to fall down onto the board? And even if you know it's onto the board then in the water you know That initial impact has been taken up. Buy an inflatable object, maybe not a rock on the bottom of the river.

Keeping with it. It's probably right. This is how we swim, just doing all those classics defensive swimming, maybe they keep their paddle. Maybe they don't. This is kind of something that kind of like, well those guys were saying earlier, it's something that you can play with early on, but I think over the main thing about my sort of safety brief is it's done right at the start. But it's also done throughout the whole day. There may be some things that you change for certain rapids, it's like Adam was saying, if I'm going to go down a rapid where, I know I can stand up and they've probably stand up, but if they swim It's going to be a shallow nasty swim. So, I'm gonna get myself low. And that's like an echo of the safety brief isn't it, if I'm low and I'm giving a signal, get low, it echoes back to the team and that kind of, it just reinforces it.

Lee Pooley 15:46

Adam how does your safety, what do you include within your safety brief as well, so we've heard from Tom is there anything different that you might do or anything specific that you want? That you would emphasize.

Adam Burns 15:56

I think realistically a lot of it's quite similar to Tom. I'm talking about a height management, I'm talking about our set up of boards. I'm talking about what we're gonna do if a swim occurs. If a swim occurs, then we're gonna have that discussion and actually refer back to a lot of our answers at the beginning. Mostly what I'm going to talk about, is if someone takes a swim and then this is cool. This is what we do. This is part of why we're here to do it. And we shouldn't be we shouldn't be trying to make it a big deal or something that actually doesn't need to be a big deal. So actually, we're encouraging that and we're going cool well, every time I fall off the board were probably getting a little bit better but part of my brief is definitely driving to people, we're going to try and keep hold of that paddle and once were in the water then if we can grab hold of the board the great, but let's make everyone else aware as well. Were a team and if were in a position that we are playing somewhere and it's fairly, a place where were all fairly comfortable, fairly safe. If we can support each other, to pick up any boards and paddles that need to, then that's great. That's part of learning as well.

So, a lot of the brief there is around going, well what happens if someone swims? First of all Were a team let's look after it. And we're here to have a bit of fun, but then what happens if someone swims and it's a little bit harder to deal with. And that bit of the brief is very much very similar for every craft I do and most environments such as, let's get everyone to a safety point and let's focus on getting the person safe and then let's get the bits pieces back together and then we can carry on having a nice good day. And yeah, for me, that's really one of the key bit's height management, and what happened to someone's limbs, how we're setting up our boards and having a chat about rocks and the river and what kind of things they need to be aware of when we're paddling the river as well.

Lee Pooley 17:36

And Adam, just digging into that slightly, you said that a couple of times now at the beginning of the recording of the podcast and just then, is you talk about and setting up the board and what sort of things are you considering when setting up boards?

Adam Burns: 17:48

So, a part of it's been height depending what rivers, or what rivers you're paddling. In Scotland we've got big wide-open rivers. We've got kind of creaky type stuff. We've got stuff which even when it's got lots of water in it, it's still full of rocks and we've got other days where actually, I want the biggest fins I can on because it's gonna help me in the rivers. So, a large part of the setup is what Fin possibilities I've got. Some boards come in and you've got a fin option and that's what it is, other options you've got everything from one and a half inch fins up to nine inch fins possible, being able to put in these boards. So, one part is especially fins. Another part is looking at what kind of bungees we've got and where, are they in a place where they're useful to us, or actually, would we be better off to take these off our boards and how are we setting up, like Tom was saying how we setting up our kit appropriate to that.

For me as a leader, another bit is, what am I doing about a spare paddle like there's times that a spare paddler will be in a bag and away, and every other times that I'm like actually the ability to have a

quick grab paddle to be able to pass to people, actually might be really advantageous. So having kind of conversations about that as well and now the kind of main bits for me is where we're storing stuff, where we are positioning ourselves on the board based on how much weight we've got on the board and what kind of things are we're looking to put in place.

Lee Pooley 19:03

Brilliant, thanks, Adam. So there's been quite a lot of talk at the end of, you know, where we just sort of picked up with Adam. He talks quite a bit about, what happens when you fall in and inevitably, it's gonna happen, isn't it? You're coaching or leading people on a standard paddle board and even though they might have good height management, there is probably a higher chance that there gonna, people are going to end up in the water which as you've all said, it's not a bad thing. And actually, that's part of the sport. What I'd be keen to explore and maybe the listeners would be keen to hear is what actions and decisions do you make to ensure the safety of others and the paddler in their equipment when someone does end up in the water?

Anthony Ing 19:45

I think obviously, what's key is the safety of the paddler and that we are coaching leading in the appropriate environment for that paddler. And I think that that does tick a lot of boxes if you're in the right place to gain learning and to have a fun experience, then you will have time to collect kit. You will have time for the paddler to self-rescue to do that. When, so, so, environment is a massive thing, for me, making sure that the paddler is in the suitable environment for them to get the outcomes that they're trying to get. Whether that is that there working on something very advanced, or working on something very basic, that's all in concept to where they are on their learning journey. So, deep water, eddie lines that are comfortable. So that if you do take dips, if you are having these, it takes time to learn how to monitor height well. So, when you don't want to height well, the outcome of that is how you get there, no problem on you get let's carry on if you're environment isn't set up correctly and you're on very fast, hard eddie line, shallow water, you know, And you're trying to do the same sort of skill set. When that then happens, you have very different outcomes. You have someone that hasn't had a fun, enjoyable day out of the water they've hurt themselves and that's not what we're here to do.

So, I think the environment's key to it. But also, the technology and equipment has changed, so dramatically in the last 10 years. There are loads of different board options, there is loads of choice and I know everyone out there doesn't have that at their disposal but I think as a coach and as a leader, having the awareness of someone's turned up on a 28 touring board that they go out on every single day, actually we're going out on moving water, Let's push the width of it like we talk about the fins, let's make the Fin Shorty, let's use a board that is built and designed to be in that environment. And as soon as you push, up to 36 wide, then you're gonna have more of a stable platform that person's gonna, get enjoyment out there and have more success.

I think that said I think as a coach and as a guide we can be in the appropriate place. So how we lead and how we coach people to keep them safe on the water. We do have to rethink, we have to think about where we are and what we normally do and if we have a swim, are we in the appropriate place to be able to deal with our client or our student or the person that peer paddling group. Are we in the right place to be able to help them out? Or are we, haven't we even thought about if something happened on this moving water on this rapid, where am I? And, can I be useful? So, I think positioning usefulness as a coach or guide so that picking up then helping them out is easy and isn't that you're then on the back side, trying to rush to then help them.

Lee Pooley 22:47

Thank you. Tom, have you got any other thoughts? So, you know, Anthony talked around positioning and can really consider in the position that you're in as a coach and leader to be able to cover certain aspects. Is there anything else that you you'd be thinking of if someone had fallen from their board and ends up in the water?

Tom Westaway 23:05

Again, this is kind of a little bit subjective and I really depends on what kind of client I've got, but in some ways of progressing people and again, don't take this as this is what I do for everybody. For someone I've been working with for a while and it's like cool, this person I know they're sort of getting into that sort of comfortable stage where they've sort of come off their board now and they're a little bit like, okay, I'm in the water but I'm not entirely sure what to do. Sometimes maybe I'll bring myself alongside them, with the intent of maybe being there to help them if needed. But then sometimes they just need that sort of calm voice in their ear being like you were right swim through this bit when it calms down maybe try and bring yourself back on and sometimes that can be enough for them, they go through the madness and then they get themselves to space where they can get back on their board. They've got their paddle and then they've self-rescued their self.

Later on, down the line. When they fall off again, then they've kind of taken care of it themselves. And then suddenly you've done a little bit of footwork and now all of a sudden, they're sort of looking after themselves a little bit more. That's just like some of the little things that I would do maybe to try and encourage, maybe make my life easier. If people can look after themselves as they fallen off that's amazing, isn't it? And it's also, they've developed as a paddler.

Lee Pooley 24:16

Yeah, absolutely. Tom and I think, we all as coaches we work for redundancy and if we can make paddler's independent, I think that's a really important aspect. And actually, bringing that into your coaching at very early stages, I think is something that is vitally important.

Really enjoyed listening to the perspective. Because I'm not SUP and I'm white water paddler but I'm not a SUP white water paddler. So, it's been really interesting around height management and how briefings may change and how the approaches, because it is most certainly different, isn't it, in terms of what you're dealing with and the complexities that SUP brings within a white water environment. I think before we bring it to a close, some of you have a little bit more time to think about it, but I've got a question for you. So, if there was one place, one place you'd either return to or wanted to visit to SUP, white water paddle where would it be?

And Adam, you get the short straw, you've got to go first.

Adam Burns 25:11

I can never say it, pronounce it correctly but, the Soca in Slovenia, that's my aim next year.

Lee Pooley 25:20

Yeah, Soca is a wonderful, wonderful place and the colour of the water is absolutely fantastic. So really good choice there. Tom?

Tom Westaway 25:27

Mine might not be so picturesque as such but it is still an amazing place to be. Last year, I paddled the upper dart on a paddleboard. It was done with kayak support and it took a long time you know we had to think about everything. But rightfully so, but I do have sort of plans this year to go back to maybe bring a different board. Maybe go over the same team, different sort of mindset and maybe try and push the sport there to be in that sort of grade three grade four environment that's where I would like to be going back to really

Lee Pooley 26:00

Tom, I don't know if everyone would agree with me but actually the times that I've been on the upper dart and there are some really beautiful times that it's especially, this, getting around this time of year when you got all the trees changing colour etc. It's actually a very idyllic spot so thank you for that. And Anthony, what about you?

Anthony Ing 26:20

The local D run I'd have to say. No, no, I love being on the D. I'm on it every day, but I think getting out back to Norway. I haven't been to Norway and yet on a SUP. And I remember going there a lot as a kid and paddling some incredible rivers, and they're waiting for me to go down on the SUP. So, I'm going to be out in Norway soon. So, let's get out there and let's next season and see what it gives.

Lee Pooley 26:50

Brilliant, okay. Thank you Adam, thank you Tom and thank you Anthony for your time, thoroughly enjoyed talking to you and I hope the listeners have really sort of benefited from listening to your experiences and your experience and expertise. You can all of you find other podcasts available on The Coaching Podcast from British Canoeing Awarding Body, and thanks very much for listening and speak to you soon.