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Canoe Slalom Pathways update.

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Tasmania November 8-11 – Hobart, Electrona, Broken Bridge, Mersey River , TAS Championships.

To coincide with the Tasmanian Championships in November, I was able to visit with the Tasmanian pathways athletes and coaches. I got my first view of the new flat water gate training site in Hobart. Tim Coward and Matt Dalziel ran a training session that I was able to assist with. It's great to see that regular gate training is possible day to day in between sessions at the Broken Bridge in New Norfolk. I was able to run a fun skills session at Broken Bridge where we experimented with putting some constraints on technique to learn new skills by paddling with one blade only in the kayak. This was a really enjoyable session that challenged the athletes. It was great to see the bottom section of the Broken Bridge now opened up and much safer since the work has been completed in removing the old damaged bridge. This means there is another section, which is really suitable for beginner and intermediate gate training below the traditional training site. Room for more people on the water now.

Over the weekend the activity moved to the newly upgraded Mercy River site with some great technique work on the Saturday and a well run and competitive Tasmanian Championships on the Sunday.

The athletes and coaches worked on building the level of the foundation skills, on increasing efficiency and consistency on all of the classic slalom moves. Athletes and coaches were encouraged to participate in C1 and K1 and build



skills through experimenting with putting extra constraints on their paddling to force them to come up with new technical solutions.

With three levels of training squads in the Derwent Canoe Club Pathway Hub, the potential for new talent is strong. It was great to be able to work with the Tasmanian Pathways coaches Peter Eckhart and Matt Dalziel, with great support from all of the volunteers and parents

Victoria November 20-25 – Westerfolds, Eildon

Although our first session on the Yarra was delayed because of the violent storm, we still got to do some great technique training on the site at Westerfolds. It was nice to see a big group of young athletes really excited to be training and learning. The venue there is ideal for developing foundation slalom skills and working on all the fundamentals necessary to be successful in racing.

There was great work being done during one of the regular gym sessions at Ivanhoe Grammar when I visited in the morning before school. This regular strength work and conditioning is so important in balancing and supporting the work done on the water.

For the Victorian Slalom development camp at Eildon, we had many athletes from Victoria and some from WA and New South Wales. One of the strong themes of the camp was the mastery of their foundation slalom skills at each level, so that athletes are very well prepared to step up to more complicated

skills. This idea of taking each step and learning it thoroughly is important so athletes are thriving at each level rather than struggling as they reach a new level.



We were fortunate to have the Pathway Hub coaches Emir and Zlatan along with

Warwick who was organising the camp. This allowed us to have some great meetings with all the younger developing coaches and debrief sessions after each days training. During these meetings we talked a lot about how we can all improve our coaching and some of their key



principles that the pathways program is encouraging.

Some of the key ideas that we are committing to as the National Pathways program are; encouraging young athletes to train and compete in both canoe and kayak. This is to broaden the scope of their skills and experience which will help her overall development and maximise their opportunities to qualify for squads and teams.

Another principal is that, we encourage all young athletes to train and practice to be ambidextrous in canoe, not just switching but competent on left and right. It is clear from the past few years of development in the canoe class that it is a massive advantage to be strong on both left and right side. This is something that is much harder to develop as an older athlete and therefore we will be encouraging training on both sides from the beginning.



As mentioned earlier the program is also emphasising building the best fundamental skills including forward stroke and foundation control strokes. Learning these and drilling them as well as possible at the early stage is the best start that can be given to a young aspiring slalom athlete.

We are also encouraging an experimental approach to learning, where athletes are able to challenge themselves and learn new skills without a strict and critical judgement. This will allow athletes to enjoy the process of learning and when guided well by the coach will lead to a fluid and natural style of paddling. This growth mindset to learning is well researched and allows young athletes to thrive and trust in their own ability.

The Victorian development weekend at Eildon was great example of how States can run training activity that is inclusive for the whole slalom

community and still provides quality coaching to all the athletes in the performance pathway.



WA November 30 – Dec 2 – Collie



I was very happy to be able to fit in a trip to Western Australia before the end of the year. Even though it is quite challenging to get a water release on the Collie we were able to get three hours each day and make the most of it. Andrew Pankhurst did an excellent job of getting everything organised and we had a group of 12 athletes working on the course. Nina Mueller join me in coaching a group and was a great help passing on her knowledge and experience.

We were able to make the most of the venue using different sections for technique work and running some full race length runs on the Sunday. This was all combined with some stroke kinetics on the flat water, which gave everyone some ideas on how to develop their stroke efficiency whilst training flat water back in Perth.

Clearly, there is some young talent in Perth and I look forward to seeing the progress from this group under the guidance of Zlatan in the future.



Tasmania December 6-9 – Bradys Lake NTS Camp

The December NTS camp at Bradys Lake was a great opportunity for the young paddlers to prepare for the junior team selection race coming up in January.

It was fantastic to be able to have some of the athletes billeted with families in Hobart prior to the camp. This is a great opportunity for the paddlers to get to know one another and also to make it easier getting to and from the venue from the airport.

We had a really high standard of coaching during the camp with Dave Crosbee, Ros Lawrence and Kate Eckhart working together with me. Over the camp we had six white waters sessions on the really high-quality white water course at Bradys. The athletes progressed really well over the three days with many breakthrough performances and confidence building first-time runs down the Cruncher for some.

On the Friday evening all of the athletes presented on their three favourite International athletes and what it was about their paddling which was so impressive. This was an incredibly interesting evening with some great insight

from the athletes as to what makes a high level slalom paddler. On Saturday



evening we were lucky enough to hear an excellent presentation from Kate and Rosalyn. They talked about their own journey from junior to senior team and some of the lessons and experiences they had had along the way. This was an illuminating insight into the drive and commitment necessary to make the transition from junior to success on the senior team.

At the end of my month of travelling the country to various camps and training groups it is clear to me that we have a lot of energy and enthusiasm to improve slalom in Australia. We have a good network of coaches who are committed to improving the technical quality of training and build the standard of young athletes.

It's also very important to recognise the contribution of all of the parents and volunteers in making all these activities happen. It would be impossible to run this sport without the huge volunteer effort and parental support that goes on, so thank you to everybody working so hard in the background supporting the young athletes.

Paddle Australia Pathways now has a draft calendar for National and State based Pathway activities in 2019. This can be found under the Slalom Pathways tab on the Paddle Australia website.

2019 will be an exciting year for the junior program with selection in Tasmania and the Nationals in Victoria followed by the NDS selection camp for some.

Wishing everybody happy Christmas and an enjoyable new year.

Mike Druce

