

Editorial

A central principle of the modern Olympics has been that they should be for amateurs, giving everyone an equal chance. Presumably this was less about ensuring a competitor spent nine till five every day in a factory or office and more about ensuring he was not spending the same time training, offering an opportunity not open to others. Plenty of people have found ways to circumvent this attempt to give a level playing field. Chariots of Fire gave a reminder that even having a personal coach was considered cheating.

A level playing field

about who could do what in sport and how they should come by their livings.

Meanwhile, people have tried every way possible to get ahead of their rivals, not least the equipment, richer countries more able to try new ideas than the poor ones are, certainly not a level playing field. Some ideas have been rejected while others have been accepted and the rules changed. The German Lettmann Perfekt kayak was much shorter than contemporary slalom rules allowed, brought up to legal length by a long point at each end, clearly with major safety implications, not least in team events, and the rules had to be changed. The British Harishok arrangement of buoyancy built into the spraydeck instead of using a buoyancy aid gave body freedom and a deck less likely to implode but tended to keep the wrong part of a swimmer's anatomy at the surface while swimming so it did not survive although there has been a recent attempt to partially resurrect the idea. The American Gemini C2 placed

On the other hand, even in the middle of the 20th century IC sailor Uffa Fox was refused membership of the Royal Yacht Squadron because he was in trade, somebody who got his hands dirty rather than a quality gentleman. Messages were mixed

the paddlers together in the centre of the canoe for low inertia when turning, rather than the previous banana boat principle of the paddlers at the ends of the boat for maximum steering leverage.

Sprint rules banned concave sections but it became possible to build a kayak with flexible sides which were straight when measured but concave when on the water with a paddler inside. A kayak with hydrofoils has produced very fast times but you are unlikely to have seen one. On the other hand, the kayak paddles with curved edges which I spotted in the back of a Swedish Mini at a World Cups marathon in Luxembourg in the mid 1980s are now used universally in marathon and sprint.

Equally relevant are the potential improvements to the competitor. From a diet, balanced for the required content, we move to supplements and then a big step to drugs such as steroids to build up the body, banned because of the long term damage. For those who can afford the time and cost, altitude training increases the red blood corpuscles with nothing illegal being taken.

One of the sporting successes of late has been the Sky cycling team who, it has been revealed, used legal medical drugs to prepare for events, not to treat for illness. They have been accused by a parliamentary report of crossing an ethical line. If you don't like this then we have a problem. Maybe the list of banned drugs needs to be modified while still leaving something for genuine medical cases. What they have done is only to take a step closer to the boundary of what is allowed, to give themselves an advantage. People will always push the limits. In the 1970s Austrian skier Franz Klammer said the winner of an Alpine race would be the person nearest to being out of control. In many sports there are those who try to be the ones nearest the edge, not those on a level playing field.

Stuart Fisher

A story to hit the national press was a BC coach who was alleged to have offered a paddler a place at Rio in exchange for sex. The name of the suspected coach circulated widely around the flatwater competition world. He was suspended from December 2016 and resigned in November 2017, at which point the union claimed that it 'brings the disciplinary process to an end.' Further management failings were alleged and failure to address reported issues claimed so an independent inquiry was commissioned in April 2017 by the union and UK Sport, due to report in October 2017.

Nobody seems to have seen that report. If it does exist, it is not in the public domain. There is little point in an inquiry if its findings are quietly shelved and nobody informed of its conclusions.

Wherever the coach is today, those with whom he is working need to be aware of his history in case there is a repetition of the action. On the other hand, if the name being bandied about is the wrong one, the coach needs to have his name cleared and the real culprit to be confronted. Obviously, the paddler in the case knows who propositioned her.

It is also being said that the union are more interested in covering up the activities of their staff at a time when several officials seem to have left by the side door with unanswered allegations about them. 'He no longer works here' or 'We've stopped doing it' are not adequate responses. Refusal to publish the outcome of an investigation or to take action is simply condoning what has gone on and placing more importance on their public image. In particular, the paddlers want to know that adequate action has been taken to prevent a repetition and a secret report does not do that.

Stuart Fisher

Sh... you know who

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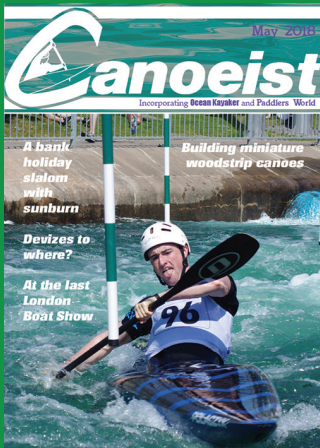
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Canoeist is the not for profit magazine of Paddlers International and the International Sea Kayak Association. Enquiries to governing bodies and associations should be addressed to them.



Cover: Eoin Teague of Annalong Canoe & Kayak Club tackles the tight stagger sequence in the Hornbill Cardiff Bay Slalom.

