

46th Annual General Meeting of the Irish Canoe Union

This report is presented for the information of members of the incorporated Irish Canoe Union and refers to proceedings and activities from 19th May 2006 until 31st December 2006 and is presented at the 46th Annual General of the Irish Canoe Union in Finnstown House, Lucan, Co. Dublin on May 12th, 2007.

Strategic Development

In 2005 the Irish Canoe Union embarked on its second Strategic Development Plan - which will span the period 2005 - 2009.

The main emphasis in the 2005/09 Development Plan is the implementation of tailored strategies for a number of specific operational areas such Clubs & Membership Services, Instructor & Coach Education, Olympic & High Performance Programmes, Award Scheme Development, etc.

Whilst the general trend since the introduction of the current Strategic Development Plan has tended to concentrate on consolidating the Canoe Union's position and governance, the Executive & Management has also remained focussed on achieving several other targets identified within the Development Plan.

The emphasis on consolidating the Union's governance was effectively tested during 2006 when the management of the Union's affairs underwent a comprehensive governance audit by Price Waterhouse on behalf of the Sports Council. Whilst the outcome of this audit was generally positive a number of recommendations in relation to the governance of our Technical Committees were highlighted as being in need of attention. I will be referring to this again later in the report.

Currently, the primary focus of the Executive & Management is on strengthening and consolidating the Union's membership by; encouraging greater participation in all aspects of canoeing; by promoting excellence in high performance canoeing; and through improvements in the Canoe Union's activities and support services.

During 2007, it is planned to place a strong emphasis on the development of membership services. This will be supported by a new integrated membership database and website, the appointment of Communications & Membership Administrator, and if funding can be secured a full time Club Development Officer and Coach Education Officer.

Grants & Finance

To implement and support current strategic development and the general day to day administration of Irish Canoeing, the Canoe Union has continued to be relatively successful in securing Core, Challenge, and Performance Grants from the Irish Sports Council. Members will see from the accounts that we have maintained a relatively firm financial footing as the end of 2006.

The role of the Sports Council as our principal source of funding cannot be underestimated. Sports Council personnel take a very active interest in canoeing in recognition of our ability to deliver world class athletes, and to develop increased sporting and recreational participation among the general public.

High performance canoeing is central to our funding as is the delivery of general sport skills and increased participation programmes. We must, however, challenge ourselves to match the high level of funding we receive from the Sports Council with independent sources of income that can provide resources for the development of our non-Olympic disciplines, the ICU Award Scheme, and our administration and management.

Sports Council grants are allocated under six headings, Administration, Hosting International Events, Organisational Development, Equipment, and Challenge Funding. Grants allocated under these headings are managed by the Sports Council's Participation Unit.

Each of the above grant headings finance a specific area or function within the Canoe Union. The Administration Grant finances general administration and staff salaries. The Hosting International Events Grant supports the Liffey Descent; the Organisational Development Grant is used for Strategic Planning, Coach Education & Development, and Challenge Funding to increase participation.

Detailed below are the details of the grants allocated for 2007, 2006, 2005

	2007	2006	2005
Administration	€182,807	€152,807	€145,530
Strategic Planning	€1,250	€0	€1,300
NCDP	€8,050	€0	€3,460
Other Core Activities	€30,000	€27,250	€9,400
Equipment	€0	0	€3,360
Hosting Events	€25,000	€22,000	€22,000
Additional	€0	€0	€0
Total	€247,107	€202,057	€198,050

In addition to the above, the Olympic & International Competition Programme received a grant of €307,017 for international competition and training camps, and €100,000 in direct grants to high performance athletes. A grant of €116,146 was also received for increased participation and high performance equipment. A further grant of €105,000 which has yet to be drawn down was received to refurbish the ICU Training Centre.

Code of Ethics & Good Practice

The involvement in sport by children can have an enormous influence on their development and can often have a deep impact on their outlook. This places a major responsibility on those involved in the delivery of sport to children. Not only must deliverers ensure the protection of the child but they must also ensure that their experiences gained through sport leave a positive and meaningful imprint.

All Canoe Union instructors, coaches, and managers should remain constantly mindful of the important influence they might exert on a child's development and outlook. All clubs and committees should ensure that they maintain a child centred focus within their activities.

The Canoe Union's National Child Protection Officer, Patricia McCormick, is actively promoting Code of Ethics Awareness Workshops. These workshops provide a practical approach to understanding the procedures and issues relating to the code ethics and good practices.

Governance

The way sporting organisations use public funding has rightly become more closely monitored. This requires organisations to focus on achieving better corporate governance, financial control, and more finely tuned budgets. Governance needs to operate in line with best practice guidelines and requires a regular review from a risk perspective.

When I presented my report last year, I made the point that there was a need to continue to improve our approach to governance. Whilst we "past the test" during 2006 when our procedures and financial records were audited by Price Waterhouse, a number of constitutional and structural changes were highlighted in relation to the appointment and operation of our Technical Committees.

The Executive will be committing a considerable amount of its time during 2007 to seeing through the necessary constitutional and structural changes with the view to seeing the Canoe Union becoming a "best practice" sporting organisation.

I would emphasis that the Executive views the Technical Committees as an extremely important and integral component in the delivery of the canoeing disciplines. Without the committed volunteer resources, and blend of knowledge, experience and enthusiasm within the Technical Committees, it would be impossible to ensure the delivery of the canoeing disciplines.

It is hoped that each Technical Committee will adopted a generic core constitution and governance policy thereby ensuring consistency across all committees. This will greatly assist the administration of the sport and provide a tighter legal and corporate structure for the Union.

Coaching Strategy

Our overall mission, "to create quality coaches for the next generation of paddlers" has been developed since our last AGM, to support all our ICF canoe-sport disciplines. As a consequence of the investment by the Irish Sports Council into the development of a competition coaching and with the expertise of Michael McGeehin, Fiona Larkin and Declan O'Leary at the National Coaching and Training Centre, a strategy has been developed.

The new competition coach structure is a supplement to the existing non-competition orientated schemes. It has been developed on the basis of both international benchmarking and on the basis of research evidence from our elite canoe-participants. For example, a Paddler Pathway Study has been conducted, comprising interviews with 20 of our elite participants across the spectrum of disciplines. This has informed the long-term paddler development model and integral to this is a multi-disciplinary approach to canoe-sport.

To fast-track both coaches and high performing competitors an assimilation route was designed. Significantly, on the weekend of March 3-4th, 32 aspiring coaches contributed to an assimilation course which provided learning opportunities on topics from coaching styles to paddler pathways. Presenters included former National Sprint Coach, Paul Byrne (the paddling session), Dr. Giles Warrington (lifestyle), and Dr. Edel Duffy (nutrition). While the input was generally very well received, lively discussion centred on safety issues. The discourse provided feedback for our Safe Coaching Guidelines and for the development of our paddler pathway model, with several key recommendations for our competition programmes. A second round of assimilation will be held at the same venue in November and it is hoped that by then our coaches will have completed their logged hours and first aid qualifications.

Furthermore, our existing "instructors" will have an opportunity to be qualified as "introductory level coaches" upon completion of an online module which will be launched on May 28th. This will provide them with information on the paddling session, our paddler pathway and coaching styles. It is hoped that given the opportunity, instructors will cross-over to competition coaching, now that a pathway exists.

The strategic objectives of the competition coaching scheme are three-fold. Firstly, it is vital to recognise our coaching talent by developing a pathway for ongoing coach development and continuing professional development. Furthermore, we must create a sustainable coaching structure that is accessible to our members and finally, we will endeavour to provide a pathway for competitors in canoe sport to become coaches. Integral to this process is the need to recognise the existing pathways in the "adventure" strand and their role in providing a same environment for introducing people to canoeing. It is by the fusion of both the adventure and competition strands that our future generations of athletes will prosper.

High Performance

The last year has seen 3 trends develop in our competition disciplines. Firstly, our Olympic disciplines of slalom and sprint continue to produce World Class performances with the support of coaches, funded by the Irish Sports Council. Secondly, the next generation of paddlers are displaying gold-edged qualities across several disciplines and finally, a healthy competition programme for juniors and seniors has enhanced the standard in both canoe-polo and marathon racing. Our family of canoe-sport continues to develop and the term high performance now applied across all the disciplines, the results of which will now be outlined.

Slalom: Neil Caffrey and Eoin Rheinisch continue to fly the flag at a World Class level in this discipline. Both have shown glimpses of their previous form of last year, with Neil 13th in the Europeans and Eoin finishing the season with a top 10 World Cup ranking. This year Neil has dominated both British races and was top Irish boat in an international in Brazil, finishing in 11th place. Similarly, Eoin showed his pace in the qualifying rounds in both Australia and Brazil this year. They both now focus on the forthcoming Europeans in Slovakia. National Coach, Han Bijnen, has been attending to the needs of several of our top performers including Eoin, Hannah Craig, Helen Barnes, and Ciaran Heurteau who are on the senior team for 2007 along with Neil Caffrey. While the absence of junior athletes is a consequence of the lack of competition opportunities in this discipline, investment in U23 and a 2012 squad ensures that we have a future in this discipline for the next few years

Sprint-Racing: Making an A-final in a Championship event is a major landmark, one that our 2008 prospects, Neil Fleming and Brendan Maloney, achieved in the Europeans last season. This season they hope to go one step further by qualifying an Olympic boat at the World Championships in August. With Gabor Kulcsar at the helm, both the K2 crew and the whole squad are gaining from full-time coaching. Recent form in Nottingham with seven paddlers making Men's A-finals and a sixth place for Brendan and Neil at the first race of the 2007 World Cup Series shows our ongoing potential in this discipline. Finally, a new website www.irishsprintcanoeing.com will enable all to track progress of our Beijing hopefuls.

Marathon: The performance of last season was undoubtedly the fourth place in the Junior World Championships in France, by Brian Keogh and Barry Watkins, of SLCC. Jenny Egan finished a respectable 13th in Senior, as did Sean Marchetti in Junior K1. The Liffey Descent brought out an increasing number of fun paddlers with over 900 paddlers attempting the annual pilgrimage. In the 2006 National Championship Series, the prestigious Ribadesella Trophy went to Salmon Leap Canoe Club, and they are currently leading the 2007 standings. A healthy turnout at the early season races, over 90 boats competed in the Celbridge event, for example, is creating excellent competition. In fact, the addition of our sprint racers to a number of marathon races is a welcome addition for our top end competitors. The committee under the guidance of former World medalist Gary Mawer are targeting the development of our junior racers. www.irishmarathoncanoeing.com

Freestyle: Incredible efforts in developing, training and providing coaching support to a squad of paddlers paid dividends for the team at their inaugural official ICF World Freestyle Championships. A team of 11 kayakers, comprising juniors, women and men were selected from a squad of up to 25 paddlers. Low water conditions made the normally green and clean waves of the Ottawa highly technical and the margin for error was very slim indeed. Web updates by the Team Manager, on the re-vamped www.irishfreestyle.com site kept audiences at home informed. In the end, Moe Kelleher finished 12th (was 7th in prelims.), Neil Gibson took 20th (17th in prelims.) but star of the team, Kim Siekerman finished a fantastic 8th. Kim was profiled in our electronic newsletter last year (November issue). The performance of the team augurs well for the future and conveys how an investment in time,

effort and organisation pays off, and for this the committee, team paddlers and volunteers should all be commended. www.irishfreestyle.com

Wild-Water Racing: A resurgence in activity in WWKC has led to a doubling and tripling of numbers in national races. As a consequence this year's team will be three times the size of last years who competed in the World Championships at Karlovy Vary, Czech Republic. We had representation in Women's Kayak, C1 and C2 last season, but the best result was 13th in C1 at Lofer World Cup. This year's European Championships and World Cup Series will see 10 paddlers competing with all classes, except C2, represented. Interestingly, former ICU President Michael Feeney manages the team at the European Championships in Bihac, Bosnia. Kevin Pierce took the National title in the kayak class and his marathon credentials should prepare him for the pace of the World Cup events. www.canoe.ie

Surf: The World Cup in Portugal was the focus of the attention in this discipline. A top ten finish was a great result for the team of four paddlers. Currently, the focus is on the World Championships to be held in northern Spain in the Bakio/Mundaka area from 19th to 28th October. www.kayaksurfireland.com/icusurf/

Canoe-Polo: At last seasons World Championships the Men's team was only a fraction away from a medal and that was playing with only one sub. Ultimately, the men took 7th (in a 7-8th playoff), the women were 13th after drawing on goal difference with two other teams in the latter stages and the U21 mens team were an excellent 10th. Bear in mind that most of this team have another two years left in this age-group so the next generation could be gilt-edged in the future. Squads are currently training for the European Championships, to be held in Normandy, France, in September. Canoe-polo continues to have good structures in place for organizing and coaching their squads, under the leadership of Adrian Barber, who was re-elected Chairperson. However, the biggest shift in canoe-polo is the development of those participating just below international level. With Winter leagues in Limerick, Dublin and Belfast, and more than 10 Summer competitions annually, the standard nationally has risen dramatically since last year. It is worth noting that over 400 paddlers took part in the Dublin league last season. A regional emphasis is also visible as the committee actively encourage events and clubs outside the Dublin conurbation. Enniskillen, Killaloe, and Galway are now competition venues and of particular interest is the Docklands Cup, which is part of a Dublin festival, a strategy that puts canoe-polo in the shop-window for children, adults and the media. www.canoepolo.ie

This is Olympic qualification year and that in itself present many challenges as we look to support those involved in their quest for the highest level of competition. Other challenges that we currently face are evident from the trends outlined. With coaching structures, we can develop World Class performance, with the provision of junior events, at least two disciplines have prospered-canoe-polo and marathon. And with a shared mission for development, tomorrows high performers are today's junior paddlers, together we can take up the challenge of high performance, the essence of competition.

Profile & Communication

Communication is a perennial issue which has seen some improvement during 2006/07 with the introduction of a regular monthly ezine produced by Tadhg MacIntyre.

The Executive & Board are very conscious of the need to maintain effective communication with our members particularly as activities change and develop. The Canoe Union's website and those of the various technical committees have more or less replaced the printed word as a means of circulating information.

The Canoe Union site is in many instances surpassed in terms of up to date information by some of the Technical Committee's sites. The effectiveness of the Canoe Union site as the primary communication tool has been examined and it has been decided to adopt a more holistic approach to communication that will involve integrating the website site and membership database.

It is planned to engage Servasport to develop a web based Membership Management System. This web based database will offer a multi-tiered system with access at four distinct levels; those being member, club, committee and national.

The new Membership Management System will enable clubs and committees to directly input and manage members. The system will be capable of managing members from club level through to national level and will enable clubs and committees to manage and communicate with members directly from a central members' database.

It is envisaged that the new system will provide a truly comprehensive communications tool for clubs and committees.

It is also intended to examine available resources with the aim of appointing a dedicated Communications & Membership Administrator, whose role will be maintain the ICU website as an effective and interactive tool for communications and to develop an electronic newsletter as a monthly publication sent to all who subscribe. The Communications Administrator will also have responsibility for liaising with the media to raise of Irish Canoeing in the national press.

Conclusion

It is appreciated that there are many issues that affect our organisation's ability to move forward. However, it is ultimately the relationship with our own members that will be the measure of our success.

We cannot be expected to be all things to all members all the time - those that do expect this will be disappointed.

What we are expected to do is acknowledge concerns, ideas and input; and, be ready to communicate openly and frankly about why we are moving in a particular direction. We are expected to be transparent in our decision making and to be able to stand by the policies we put in place for the good of the organisation's majority.

To this end we will continue to strive for success. My message to the membership at large is to work with us in a positive manner to move your organisation forward. The Executive is open to the opinions of the membership and we seek and value both the opinion and the support of all members.

I would in particular like to thank by fellow Board Members and to commend the vital contribution of the ICU professional staff and in particular our Chief Executive, Michael Scanlon, Training Officer, Conor Ryan and Administration Staff, Anita Gordan and Peg Smith.

I would also like to record the Canoe Union thanks to the many outside bodies that provide financial and advisory support. Worthy of special mention is our main partner, the Irish Sports Council, which provide continuous support and guidance. We are extremely lucky to have Finbarr Kirwan, Shane Keane, and Kathryn Gallagher in the High Performance Union; and Fiona Coyne and Diane Fay in the Participation Unit all of whom have been a continuous source of information and support - in addition to ensuring that the grants are on time.

Last but certainly not least - the volunteers that keep our sport running on a day to day basis. The hard work and dedication of numerous volunteers, instructors, staff, and committee members has positioned the Canoe Union well for sustainable growth and continual improvement. I believe the Canoe Union is a very positive and forward-looking organisation whose future looks assured if it continues to maintain and build upon its present direction.

I look forward to seeing each of you at the next AGM

Signed

Eamon Devoy
President
Irish Canoe Union

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