

B **EIJING CALLING:** This month sees the final run into qualification for the XXIX Olympiad in Beijing. Our Mens Kayaks compete in the Pan-American Slalom Championships in Charlotte, North Carolina while the sprinters perform seat racing to see who will compete in the K2 class and K1 category at the forthcoming qualifiers. Next month, our slalom kayakers in the final round of Olympic selection take to the turbulent waters at the purpose built facility in Krakow, Poland. While the raging torrent at the US National white-water facility will be a huge test for all concerned, the process of selection is itself like negotiating a slalom course. While there are obstacles and challenges set for the athletes we hope that when the paddlers all reach the placid waters at the finish that they have done their best and can take some satisfaction from their performances. Even the word "Olympics" can generate significant tension as it represents the highest level of competition in canoe-sport. Yet, we don't just operate in four year cycles. World Championships, Continental Championships and international events are all threads that weave together to form the multi-disciplinary sport that we are. Remember that with any rapids ultimately in the course of a river there will be placid waters.



Eamon Devoy
President, Irish Canoe Union

S **PRINT STORY-WINDS OF CHANGE BLOW AT NOTTM:** Just as the Alps is a Summer playground for our adventurers, the regatta course at Holme Pierrepont, Nottingham is the mecca for our flatwater racers. The numbers are so vast that the deck of the HSS resembles a whos-who of paddling fame. This is the venue where all our flatwater Olympians cut their teeth and it provides juniors with a glimpse of World class racing that can become a vision for their future. Irish paddlers always fare well at the Spring regatta and 2008 was no different but a few surprises were in store. The K2 of Fleming and Watkins was the first surprise after the previous crew of Maloney and Fleming parted ways in November. Podium places abounded with Brendan Maloney showing his early season form with an excellent third in the 1000m event while Neil and Barry proved their form in the 500m. Sean Marchetti indicated he is a prospect for the future while the Irish juniors proved (as they have done in the past) that a good crew can beat faster individuals when they took the K4 race over 500m.

WILDWATER WAVES-SELECTION SCEAL: The final race of the season produced the biggest upset. A veteran of the 1987 Senior team and current Olympic team manager Deaglain O'Driscoll showed great form by beating National Champion Kevin Pierce on the placid conditions of the Boyne. At this stage of the season both Keith McGuirk and Liz Shouldice were confirmed as National Champions in their respective classes. Together with Tadhg MacIntyre (Celbridge Paddlers) they will compete in the World Championships with Cillian Duggan joining them for the World Cup events. Andrew Redmond will manage the team at the World Championships and brings significant experience to the role-he just missed out on senior selection this season. All the athletes have been abroad training and racing and with this preparation includes both training and racing stints on the Worlds course by the whole team. Last year the grade four rapids (Sean Mc Swears to it) took the wildwater racing field by surprise but for 2008 everyone, especially the Irish will be geared up for it. Note in the picture that the scale of the wave in relation to the boat is not illusory when it comes to Ivrea. The scene is healthier than ever with the junior prominent at all events and the dominance of WWKC apparent. See www.ivreacanoaclub.com



POLO PROGRESS-BANKING ON SUCCESS: The Irish Women's team after meeting their fitness targets selected a team for the World Championships. Coached once again by Mark Cummins, with Yvonne McCormack as team manager a team of six have been selected with the Worlds in mind. Fitness standards had been set across a running bleep test, a half-mile time-trial and pitch sprints. Game play was assessed over a three day squad weekend in chilly conditions over the Easter weekend. The team includes paddlers from three provinces with Munsters Edel Quinn, Ulsters Dymna Carville, and Liffey based paddlers Caoimhe Ni Chuinn, Maire Diggin, Louise O'Brien, and Ruth Dimond. Their preparation will include events in Holland, Belgium, the UK and Irish events. The Belfast cup is the next home based event on April 26-27th- see www.canoepolo.ie/competitions. The U21 Mens team are coached by the ultra-experienced Conor Walsh and both this squad and the Senior Mens have been providing opposition for one another in training. Go n-eiri libh.



SLALOM SCALED-UP THE CREEK WITHOUT A BOAT: Two third places in the British Premier division events were the highlight of the events held on the river Tay, Grandtully in Perthshire, Scotland. The Irish team used a Pan-Celtic international and two British Premier division events to provide high standard races for national team selection. The races were held in tough conditions-in one race a blizzard reduced visibility to 3 gates at a time-and in another gale force winds made the gates dance so the paddlers had to move in synch with the gusts. In Mens kayak both Neil and Ciaran qualified for the World Cup series, Neil winning the first race and keeping in touch for retaining the British title by taking third in the final race (behind Olympic medallist Campbell Walsh). Our women fared well with both Hannah Craig and Helen Barnes making the percentages so qualifying to race the World Cup series. The former paddler showed good pace and was third in one of the British Premier division events. While Helen showed admirable mental toughness coming through to qualify on her final run. Pauline Griffin was in her second year of slalom and found the going tough (one course had three upstreams in a row) but improved by the final race. The Mens kayakers were also looking towards World University Championships and the U23 European Championships and while neither Patrick Hynes, Eamon Rheinisch, Daniel Menton or Daniel Boxwell made the standard for direct selection for the Senior team their results indicated that they have significant potential (times but not penalties were within 110% of first boat). Ultimately, the provision of coaching support and a full programme for these paddlers is required to take them to the next level. Pictured are the British C2 of Tim Bailie and Etienne Scott who showed the extremes paddlers went to in order to view the course



appropriately. We must thank the organisers, particularly, for facilitating the Irish participation in these superbly organised events. Next up on the calendar for our athletes are the final events to qualify for Olympic selection in Mens kayak (see picture of Eoin Rheinsich) at the artificial course at Charlotte, North Carolina, USA. Neil Caffrey and Ciaran Heurteau will challenge Eoin Rheinisch for the place in Beijing. See www.usacanoekayak.org for updates.