

Report on Scottish Canoe Slalom for the 2020 BC Slalom ACM

What an unusual year! Not a single ranking slalom has run in Scotland this year. A Virtual Champs at Pinkston in October was well through the planning stage when the current rise in COVID arrived in Scotland with tighter restrictions and so the event had to be cancelled.

My report highlights how various Scottish groups are trying to get back to slalom paddling and training.

All clubs involved in slalom in Scotland have been training on their local site but recent restrictions have hampered some of that. Some clubs have found introducing new young people to paddling difficult due to COVID restrictions

Strathallan's new training site at Bridge of Earn is operational. In the last few months it has attracted 15 new members to the club from Bridge of Earn.

SCA Performance Programme - Slalom

Throughout assessing the squad applicants the selectors kept in consideration these two principles

1. Not to close the door on any athletes who may be looking to progress into the squad
2. To recognise that current squad athletes have not had the chance to justify their continued inclusion in the squad

Last year's squad remains and there were 4 successful full squad applicants so a total of 14 athletes are in the squad as well as 4 athletes as official squad invites.

All four successful athletes have been progressing up the rankings in previous racing seasons and demonstrated a continued focus on their training throughout 2020 despite the lack of a racing calendar. Their applications showed a clear understanding of key athlete behaviour and will be a great addition to the performance squad.

The official squad invites demonstrated a track record and commitment to training that the inclusion panel felt justified support despite the lack of any races to allow athletes to shoot for the achievement criteria as in normal years. These athletes will be managing their own training programmes and coaching but will be included in squad activities albeit at a lower level of subsidy to the full squad members for the 2020-2021 season.

Within the slalom squad we also noted the performance profile and previous season's performance of 4 athletes justified special merit regarding flexibility of squad support to help them achieve their goals. This particularly applies in the case where athletes may have been aiming to transition on to World Class Programme Podium Potential support following the 2020 season. As recent junior international competitors, age group champions and athletes with a performance profile that puts them close to Podium Potential programme inclusion. They will be included in all squad activities but also be supported additionally depending on their performance requirements.

Central Squads

Central Squads started back after lockdown with paddlers in small 'coaching bubbles' of up to 6, working with one coach in particular, rather than the large weekend training days. This has enabled a closer coach:paddler relationship. In terms of squad activities, we are starting back with some limited squad weekends in small groups. Lockdown has made all the older coaches realise that their own time and exercise is important and are not willing to put in the hours that they have over the last 2 years.

Therefore the main aim at present is to enrol and mentor a new generation of young Slalom coaches. The squad will meet less frequently and there will be more coaching from the younger volunteer coaches such as Maddy Jennings, Michael Brown, Morna Campbell and Andrew Douglas. We have a training framework developed by the younger coaches so that club coaches can have advice about a programme to follow.

It has not been possible to bring new paddlers into Central Squads but most of the existing paddlers are continuing. We are pleased to note that 3 Central paddlers have been accepted into the full SCA Performance Programme with 3 of the older paddlers being added as invites.

Breadalbane

It should be noted that Central Squads no longer represents all development paddlers in Scotland as there is also a Breadalbane programme led by Sam Miles.

Breadalbane have continued normal paddling sessions and due to small groups and water space this hasn't been an issue. For land based exercise they have used online video call. Ideally they wish to return to the gym however with the current covid rates rising it remains on hold.

One of the main difficulties has been not being able to use the minibus and the restrictions on shared travel has made transport difficult for some members.

We have managed to get some new entrants paddling at the club on the river at Aberfeldy and are hoping to be able to carry them on over the winter in some capacity (weather dependant).

Moral for the paddlers has been quite mixed with it coming down to the individual and how much they had riding on the 2020 season. There has definitely been fatigue with the remote video calls and the restrictions in variability they give. Overall everyone has been doing a fantastic job of pushing on and making the most of paddling when they can.

In closing, I'd like to thank all volunteers working in Scottish slalom at club and national level, at grass roots and performance. Many thanks to you all in this very difficult year.

Chris Baillie November 2020