

John Sturgess

Unfortunately John Sturgess passed away at home on the 8th January 2021 after a short illness. Whilst he had recently been poorly, this was a huge shock, this was not COVID related. John had spent Christmas with my family and was looking forward to the race season. We had spoken only the day before his passing, and he was in good spirits

John dedicated his entire life to helping others improve themselves. For 45 + years he was a fixture at slalom races throughout the UK and abroad. He has helped thousands of athletes from around the world, from grassroots to elite athletes, improve their performance.

The role John played in the early slalom career of paddlers that went on to win Olympic and World medals is phenomenal. Whilst others may have gone on to hone these elite athletes, John's enthusiasm and support when they were younger meant a huge amount to them and their grateful parents. He led numerous trips to the Alps for races and to experience bigger volume water. Knowing some of the paddlers on these trips, how they didn't lead to an international diplomatic incidents is simply amazing!

John was unique in that he didn't 'cherry pick' those he thought had a bright future, he was happy to coach everybody equally, irrespective of how they may translate his sage advice into a disastrous slalom run. Un-phased by this temporary mis match between his detailed instruction and athlete delivery, John enthusiastically told his subject to put that behind them and prepare for the next run.

After finishing his degree at Oxford University, John became a teacher. Whilst his subjects were history and business his true passion was sport and more specifically coaching sport. He was qualified to teach caving, rowing, sailing, rugby union, skiing and weightlifting. He loved the outdoors and was instrumental at introducing kayak and canoeing to PGL, firstly in Wales and then in France. I just wonder how many lifelong non-competitive paddles started their interest in our sport by a 'Parent's Get Lost' activity holiday, in my club alone there are 6.

His bank side meanderings and 'audiences' next to a challenging gate sequence will become part of the folk lore of our sport.

Many of us mused how he could provide such an insightful debrief of a paddlers performance when he had actually missed their entire run whilst distracted debriefing someone else on the riverbank. That said he offered sufficient for them to eagerly seek his guidance for their next race.

John was a private man who lived a generally simple life. He had a routine, or rather a series of routines for different geographical locations and 'woe be tide' anybody trying to negotiate some flexibility. If you're in the UK it's totally impossible to do anything until you have read the Daily Telegraph from cover to cover, obviously unless it's Sunday then it's the Times.

John's single indulgence was skiing. He got this love of Skiing from his parents, both dentists, who would have been there in the pioneering days of alpine sports. For 25 years he's owned a modest flat in La Plagne, France, which he visited for a fortnight every January. He enjoyed having company there and was a brilliant and generous host. He loved to show guests around 'his' resort, which he knew well. Having been numerous times there was a routine there also. I knew that at 0955 hours after leaving the Arpette chairlift, exactly where our next slope was going to be and the subsequent descents. Just never mention the linked resort, Les Arcs, he hated it with passion, although it was never clear whether he had visited.

John was a great skier and used his slalom mantra of do 'if you approach a challenging bit as fast as physically possible it will be OK'. It didn't always work for him and the more observant might have noticed on his forehead there was scar similar size and shape to that of Harry Potters'. This accident led to him purchasing a ski helmet the very next day.

Sturge will be missed by us all, he enriched the life of everybody he touched. A former Giggleswick School pupil extolled how his guidance set the foundation for generations of young people to become who they became.

There have been hundreds of messages of support received. Karen Crowhurst has kindly agreed to retain these and also act as a recipient for anecdotes about John. We all have a great story about him, and it would be wonderful to capture these whilst still fresh in people's minds. Please send them to Karen - training@yorkshireslalom.co.uk

John was not a sentimental type of guy and he would see flowers as very frivolous. He did make it known that he intended to support Yorkshire Slalom. Therefore, if people did want to make a donation then they can be assured it will be used to further the sport he loved and dedicated his entire life to. If you are making a donation in notes field please put 'John Sturgess'. The bank account details for donations are: Bank: Unity Trust Bank, Account Name: Yorkshire Slalom Committee, Account Number: 20380865, Sort Code: 608301

It is hoped, with appropriate permissions, that a bench might be installed at the Washburn, a river he loved. That would be a suitable location for people to sit and enjoy a moment of quiet reflection thinking about this great man.

The funeral arrangements are as yet unknown, however as COVID restrictions will apply, it is very likely that it will be a live streamed.

RIP John

Dave Rawding

Chairman KKC and long-time friend

Updated @ 1700 hours 13.01.20