

May 3/4 Charleroi 10/11 2/O 24/25 P/1/O 31/1 Amsterdam O June 7-9 Deutschland Cup 14 W P/1 21/22 Avranches 28/29 Deventer 28/29 2/3/O July 5/6 Hull 11-13 34th Franco Baschiroto Memorial, Castello di Porpetto 12/13 P/1/O 22-27 Belfast J 26/27 Turin Cup August 2/3 3/O	13-16 World Games, Chengdu 23/24 De Paddel 30/31 Gekko September 9-14 European Championships, Kalisz 20/21 13th Trofeo Ponterosso, Trieste 25/26 1st Torneo Costa Smeralda, Porto Rotondo Olbia DRAGON BOAT RACING January 22 Unleash the Dragons, Sarasota February 2 Broadwater Paddle Battle, Carrara March 15/16 W Fest, Toscolano Maderno June 4-7 ECA Nations, Spresiano	July 16-20 17th World Championships, Brandenburg an der Havel 17-20 ICF Club Crew Championships, Ruse August 9-10 World Games, Chengdu September 18-21 ICF Club Crew Championships, Ruse November 15/16 St Martins Summer Festival, Toscolano Maderno OCEAN RACING May 3/4 Exe Bay October 17-19 World Championships, Durban
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Editorial

For the first time since 1936 there was no British sprint team at the Olympics. Nobody at all had qualified. There was only one Briton at the world championships. Perhaps the surprise is that this situation has not arrived sooner. Enough people could see it coming, perhaps not the right people, perhaps only those concerned with results beyond the next Olympics.

Sprint pigeons come home to roost

This is usually the clubs. They gather new participants who include the stars of the future. The system only works if a club is worth joining. There is no better reason for doing so than the club already having leading participants. It is inspiring for newcomers to rub shoulders with national champions, even Olympic stars, in the clubhouse or on the water.

‘The system fails if talented paddlers are creamed off and taken out of circulation when they get good. Mixing with remaining paddlers who are quite good does not have the same kudos as mixing with the top stars.’

‘It is galling to know that if you succeed in bringing up youngsters from novice to the top level they will be taken away to some central pool elsewhere. Where is the incentive?’

‘At the start of this process there was a profusion of talent to be taken from the clubs. However, this has led to a gentle decline in numbers of those attracted into such clubs. We have been eating our seed corn, killing the goose that lays the golden eggs, if you like.’

‘We are talking of the top of the pyramid and that will only work for a while before the returns begin to diminish. It is like using an excess of fertilizer on crops with subsequent degradation of the soil. The emphasis is on medals now, not looking beyond the next Olympics.’

‘We need to return to a sustainable system which plans for the future, not just the next medal count. When we run into financial difficulties we can borrow from the future, building up a larger National Debt. It doesn’t work for sport. We can only draw from the existing pool of participants and that pool will only stop declining if the competitive sport environment is sufficiently attractive.’

These quotes are from my editorial of two years ago, unaltered, where I also quoted sprint chairman Tim Scott’s ‘Some funding bodies, governing bodies and coaches have seemingly felt pressurized into prioritizing medals ahead of their athlete’s mental health’ and was mindful of the likes of Rowland Lawler of leading sprint club Elmbridge, despairing at the destruction of the system that had been drawing in the future stars.

Living at home also allows some normality of life, relationships with family and friends, some outside interests to add variety to life, not just doing the same thing with the same people, day in, day out.

Ed McKeever, Johnny Schofield and Liam Heath had provided a rearguard line of competition, brought up through active clubs at a time when forward planning was getting increasingly poor.

‘We only have a pool of talent, from which the winners will develop, if there is a system for drawing in new blood.

There is only so long that anyone can continue this, especially if drawn into racing too early. How often have we heard that the results were disappointing but it was a young team, meaning that older participants have lost interest and moved on to other aspects of life?

Slalom performed better but the lack of suitable water for most clubs inevitably pulls the top people together. Para paddlers also do better but with far fewer potential participants worldwide.

There is the need for all of these disciplines to be managed by people who have the interests of canoeing at heart and hope to be in post beyond the next Olympic medal count.

Stuart Fisher

If you had a business with an opportunity for a unique product or service, which you had finally been persuaded to provide, and it sold out on the first morning, what would you do? Would you get straight on the phone and order more or would you pull down the blinds and sit on your hands?

CRT began running canoe trips through their longest tunnel this summer. They began by putting something

on social media. Then they put out a press release, not with any time embargo but to different publications on different days. Being canoe trips, you would expect canoeists to be among the first to be approached but narrowboaters were advised a couple of days before us, by which time all available slots for the year had been taken up by members of the general public, nothing after the middle of the summer, nothing next year, no reserve list for cancellations, no media preview sessions, nobody directly involved even answering correspondence.

We have long had concerns about CRT’s policy on tunnels, apparently instigated by those who have neither paddled nor portaged them, and have been uneasy about their approach to novice canoeing generally. We have questions about some aspects of these latest trips.

The trips are not cheap yet many people are prepared to pay for them. This should be a good little earner for CRT, who complain about being strapped for cash with declining support from successive Governments. CRT’s elderly heritage property is failing increasingly yet the towpaths, in particular, provide an important resource for public recreation and health and for wildlife. CRT should be reaching out for anything that provides new income, however limited, not prevaricating and twiddling their thumbs.

Stuart Fisher

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