



HAPPY NEW YEAR 2009 We begin the first IBCPC newsletter of the year with a look at what the IBCPC philosophy for BCS Dragon Boating is and the policy on BCS events that has resulted from this. Then an article from founding member of Dragons Abreast Toronto, Eleanor Nielsen - the past impacts so much on where we head into the future and we hope you will all enjoy and relate to this article - regardless of whether you are a new group or well established.

THE INTERNATIONAL BREAST CANCER PADDLERS COMMISSION (IBCPC.)

Breast Cancer Survivors Dragon Boating. Is it about competition, participation, comradeship, or much, more?

Michele Hanton – IBCPC President, sets the scene.

The IBCPC grew out of an idea that resulted in the 1st BCS World Championships being hosted in Singapore in 2006. If you check out the IBCPC website, at www.ibcpc.com, there is information there explaining how the IBCPC came to be.

The IBCPC works with a collaborative approach and in conjunction with the support of IDBF and other stake-holders. The core reason for our establishment was to ensure that the Participatory side of BCS paddling remains the focus - Festival type racing, if you will and does not get lost in the Competitive side of things.

Participation v Competition. Thanks to the wonderful work of Abreast In A Boat in Vancouver (back in 1996) and Dr Don McKenzie the movement of BCS paddlers has spread far and wide. With this came some loss of the original focus of participation, as some teams became very competitive - not that there is anything wrong with that - but in the IBCPC we feel that those who wish to be competitive must 'play on a level playing field'. In other words under the same conditions as the sports teams, albeit, that for some it means in a special BCS category.

We know that this is what some BCS teams want, hence our working with the IDBF to ensure that this can happen. In this context, it is important to understand the difference between (a) Participatory events (Festivals) such as Vancouver 05 and Caloundra 07 and (b) the more Sport Racing orientated IDBF World Corcoms (eg Berlin 2005, Welland 2007).

The 1st BCS Champs in Singapore was in fact a mixture of both and this caused some thoughts about how to present BCS events in the future. As a result, the IBCPC agreed that the competitive side of BCS racing at World level would take place at each of the IDBF World Corcoms (Corporate & Community Championships) and that BCS Participatory Festivals would be held in the non-CorCom years.

The 2nd BCS World Champs will be held in Miami, Florida - from 24/26 April 09 and the next IBCPC Festival will be held in Peterborough, Ontario, Canada, in June 2010.

At a Participatory event we try to provide the 'experience of a lifetime' for all the BCS who attend because we know the reality is that from amongst the crews there will be women who, sadly, will lose their lives to this insidious disease.

So we roll out the boat and do everything possible to make it a truly memorable celebration of life - that means accommodating every request that we can, finding places in boats for individuals who do not have a team, finding a steerer/drummer that can coax an inexperienced team through the race and put a smile on everyone's face.

No protests are allowed at the participatory festivals as everyone is a winner. All get a medal and they are all the same colour - GOLD! There are no trophies for 1st but we do announce who placed 1st, 2nd and 3rd plus the times are posted - so folks that are interested can work this out for themselves.

At the World Corcom Championships in Miami this year, the winners in the BCS Division will have the right to call themselves the BCS World Champions. Whilst survivors crews will be able to also compete in the main WCorcom with a mixed crew of survivors and non-survivors, in the BCS Championship Division crews will be 100% breast cancer survivors, which includes the drummer and helm (steerer/sweep).

The Helm, if not part of the team must be on a team's roster before the Championships start. What this means is no just grabbing one from the shore etc - that is what we do on the PARTICIPATORY side of things where the focus is not on winning but being part of the 'experience'.

It is for the organisers in Miami to make decisions on what other 'add on' activities they will offer to the participants but it must be remembered that the BCS division is just one part of the entire event. The plus side of this is that your supporters will be able to race, in the main Corcom Champs and in this you can choose to race in a couple of categories.

The IBCPC view is that there are many psychosocial benefits associated with BCS paddling if the team is operating in a participatory model.

There are many benefits too, in the competitive model - but of a different kind and some of these experiences can be too harsh for the more sensitive survivors or those who are not at their best physically.

MEMORIES OF THE FIRST YEAR, DRAGONS ABREAST, TORONTO, CANADA

On a cool April evening in 1998, 30 nervous women gathered under the darkening sky at Sunnyside Beach on the shores of Lake Ontario. The final test was about to begin, but, were we up to it? The lake was so cold, the sky cloudy and grey. Some couldn't swim - the eldest, Marjorie, was in her '70's, only a few considered themselves athletic and several were still on chemotherapy. In spite of this, the mood was upbeat.

There was an air of excitement as we awkwardly climbed into the 2 ton teak dragon boat. The moment had arrived. We pushed off and with the command "Paddles Up" struck out on this new adventure. We stood out from the other young, fit, muscular crews - a strange collection of shapes, sizes, ages, united by a common experience and determination to show the world we could do it!

Our coach, Elaine Munro, was there to help us overcome our fears and hesitations. And somehow, the learning from pool practice was easy to transfer to the more forgiving waters of the lake. As the weeks passed, we somehow managed to resemble a team. As questions came up, we turned to the pioneers at Abreast In A Boat for tips.

Two important decisions made in the first year were to accept men with breast cancer as team members, and not to seek charitable status. Our reasoning was that there were many breast cancer causes more important to the care and well being of others and rather than competing for charitable dollars, we preferred to support a small number of organizations doing research or providing services. Our corporate sponsorship, which came from the public relations budget, not the charitable one, made it easier to take this position. We also worked on an initial team purpose - To raise awareness of life after breast cancer.

Excitement mounted as we neared our first festival, the Toronto International Dragon Boat Race Festival. We had seen a video of the Canadian men's team racing in Asia, and had practiced race starts from early in June, but what would it be like to really race??? And could we actually do it? 1998 was the last year the course length was 640 metres and while we used to paddle from Sunnyside to Ontario Place in practice, doing it in a race was an entirely different matter. Hearts in our mouths, we nervously approached the marshalling area for our first race - a women's division race. There were many sprints to the johnny's-on-the-spot. We were cheered enthusiastically in spite of our slow pace!

The first Toronto flower ceremony was held at this event. As is the custom today, each paddler held a pink flower high above the boat and on command, tossed them into the lagoon. A moments silence followed, and we ceremoniously made our way back to the docks. The impact of the flower ceremony became clear as other teams created a paddle archway for us as we made our way back to the tree we were camped under.

That summer, we experienced our only capsize, during a practice on a hot and windy evening, before we fully understood the command - "Feather"! A bedraggled crew was retrieved from the lake by the ever present safety boat. Mid summer, we were contacted by a new breast cancer team in Australia to ask permission to use the name, Dragons Abreast for their team. Knowing how hard it was to get consensus on a team name, we were pleased to give them permission to use Dragons Abreast.

Flushed with the excitement of participating in our first festival, we eagerly planned a bus trip to the Montreal International Dragon Boat Festival in July. We shared the bus with the Mt. Sinai hospital team, much more seasoned than us. It was like revisiting high school road trips - we sang, ate, drank, laughed and used the time to get to know our team mates better.

For most BCS paddlers there is nothing that comes close to the joy of the first paddling season. The experience remains always, the wonderful delight in discovering that despite the rigours of treatment, our bodies are still able to function and that by working together as a team, we are actually able to propel this huge craft through the water.

It is this special experience in the breast cancer and dragon boat world that the IBCPC is bound to protect so that those who travel the journey with breast cancer may also find comfort, joy, friendship and adventures with the dragon spirit.

In 2009 the IBCPC hopes to bring you regular articles and stories from around the globe. If you have a story that reflects the spirit that is the IBCPC we would love to hear from you. All submissions should be addressed to committee@ibcpc.com. May 2009 bring each of you peace and good health.

Take a look at this link http://www.dragonsabreast.com.au/Australia_2007/index.htm and also this link at <http://www.abreastinaboat.com/HTML/stories.htm#Paul> as they really do tell the story of what we mean when we speak of participation and the 'experience of a lifetime'

So why not sign up to receive the IBCPC news bulletins - self subscribe on the home page of the IBCPC web site - no cost involved, and also encourage other team members to subscribe so you get a 'feel' for what is happening around the world

Copyright (C) 2008 International Breast Cancer Paddlers Commission. All rights reserved.



Photo: Henning Wiekhorst