

Coaching

Rapid Education – Key concepts in WW kayaking

Another look at observation...

You may remember, in the first article we looked at how to observe, analyse and reflect on what we and others actually do on the water. I mentioned a system of observation, known as the three Bs – Body, Boat and Blade. The idea behind this is that if we know what each of those elements is meant to be doing during a stroke, we can identify the times they are not doing what they should be.

This is all well and good but the river, as we saw last issue, is an ever changing environment. No two bits are ever the same. Therefore, the idea that we use set 'textbook' strokes on the river, each with its own body, boat and blade actions set in stone, is ludicrous. So while we need to be able to appreciate the importance of the three Bs, it makes far more sense to think of moving about on the river in terms of these three core concepts:

BALANCE ACCURACY TIMING

In short, how we stay upright, how we get to where we need to be and when we apply certain elements, such as power.

In my opinion, being able to balance the boat, while moving about on the river is the most vital ability you need to paddle on white water. It needs to be automatic. If you are concentrating solely on staying upright, you are not able to focus on getting to your chosen destination – you are not in control.

The type of balance needed is twofold – the ability to stay upright in general and the ability to decisively weight the boat during a particular move. Sub-conscious and conscious balance, if you will.

Sub-conscious Balance:

Remember the first time you sat in a kayak? How wobbly did you feel? I'm willing to bet that you can now sit in your boat and feel really stable without having to

think about it. This is all down to the amount of time you have spent on the water.

White water tends to be lumpy and tricky to balance on – a 3D environment. The most important factor in keeping upright is:

Developing body tension:

You need to be able to flex at the waist, not unlike a belly dancer. Check out photo 1 below.

This allows the boat to ride over the various lumps on the waters' surface. If you are stiff and do not let your waist flex, the boat will stall on the various watery shape and trip you up. Try this exercise – Find a jet of water, maybe with some waves on the way

down. Drift sideways down it with your eyes shut. Concentrate on feeling the flex at your waist. You can develop this into spinning the boat in circles on the way, again feeling the flex and twist at the waist. Make sure you pick a jet with no obstructions! Photo 2 below should help.

It's important to realise that you need to be springy at the waist, not floppy. You'll notice as you paddle white water that you develop a certain default posture, generally sat upright, slightly forwards, like in photo 3 above:

If you are too loose at the waist or time a blade placement incorrectly, the lower body and boat will not spring back to that neutral position, leading to overall instability.

Conscious balance:

Sometimes you need to weight your boat in anticipation of certain water features or to get the boat to grip the water better. Hence you make a conscious decision about the boat's balance. There are two ways we can move our weight to balance the boat – front to back (trim) and side to side (edge or lean). We'll look at side to side first.

So, how do you tilt your boat to one side? By edging, right? And I'm guessing you'll tell me that's when the body stays upright and the boat tilts to one side, yes? OK, have a look at photo 4, which shows edging and photo 5 which shows leaning. Tell me what the difference is.

So what's the difference then? The body is tilted over in both



Photo 3: posture



Photo 4: edging



Photo 5: leaning



Photo 6: forward trim



Photo 7: backward trim



Photo 8: old school box

Still not convinced? Trim back and try hip flicking the boat from side to side. Now try that trimmed forwards. See the difference? If you lean back excessively, you lose your body tension, losing your balance in the process! This leads us to...

The Box:

We've already mentioned this – remember that default position I mentioned? Some people add in a low paddle like this and call it The Box as in photo 8 right. 'Get you down anything, that will' they said. Well, yes, provided you don't want to actually drive the boat anywhere in particular and just like bobbing down stuff.

While you will generally stay upright using this form of box, you'll rely on the back of the blade for support, which is really limiting and you'll

develop the bad habit of bracing on landing drops, which will get you into all sorts of trouble – more on that later. The Box really came about as a way of protecting your shoulders from dislocation. A more accurate way of approaching it is this: keep your blades in front of your shoulders!

Something to bear in mind about your body: Try sitting in your boat on the flat. Imagine a beam of light shining forwards out of your chest. Twist at the waist and point the beam to one side, along with turning your head to the same side. What has happened to your boat? It should have tilted to the side you are twisting towards. Now try to get the boat moving, turn and twist your body as above. This allows you to see where you are going, drive the turn and balance the boat, all in one. Check out photo 9 below.

The final point. You need to be able to balance the boat while moving about. Try tilting the boat then paddling about – forwards and backwards. Make sure you practice on both sides...

In summary – being able to balance your boat on white water is vital. Knowing how to consciously balance the boat is all down to experience – get out there and try it. Being able to maintain balance sub-consciously is about separating the upper and lower body. Keep forward and stay springy at the waist!

That's all for now. ●

To summarise:

Being able to balance your boat on white water is vital. Knowing how to consciously balance the boat is all down to experience – get out there and try it. Being able to maintain balance sub-consciously is about separating the upper and lower body. Keep forward and stay springy at the waist! That's all for now. Next time, we'll be looking at accuracy. Take care kids...



Photo 9: light beam

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