

F.I.T for Paddlesport

One thing I love about paddling is that quite literally everyone involved in it is motivated to improve their boating. It is hard to find a paddler who doesn't have a desire to get better, and for most of us we know that we can produce very rewarding performances on our "good days". Most of us also know that simply going out for a paddle is not necessarily the best way to get better and that we need to be a bit more focused in our approach. Through my coaching and time spent with paddlers on the water, one area I believe that many of us could work on (myself included) is our body.

Article: Chris Brain
Photos: Chris Brain or as credited

ARE YOU CALLING ME FAT?

No! Most certainly not, far from it! Anyone who is actively engaged with paddlesport on a regular basis is without a doubt taking positive steps towards their physical and mental health. What I am saying is that for many of us we focus solely on our technical skills as a measurement for improvement rather than looking at our physical fitness.

A scenario many people can relate to is that we feel like we reach a plateau with our paddling and we are unsure what to do to move further forwards or sort it out. Many paddlers will aim to continue the same routines at the same venues with a hope that they will improve. They will often keep reaching out for signs of technical improvement as they are usually very obviously measurable rather than looking at the other aspects of their paddling too. If we are going to push past this plateau we need to improve on more than just our technical skills, we need to check we are physically up to the task in hand too!

CAN I NOT JUST GO PADDLING?

Absolutely, of course you can! What I am saying is that to make improvements in your physical ability you might need to be a bit more tactical in working on certain areas to make some noticeable improvements. If, however you're not up for any formal training and you just want to get out on the water, why not try incorporating the following things into your paddling:

- At some point throughout the day try to push yourself as hard as you can physically, try and reach your maximum. Find a stretch of water and really go for it. This could be a piece of flat water or your regular river run, but try and do it as fast as you can. If we do this every time we are out, then it will affect our speed, endurance and maximum power output.
- Slalom paddlers are of usually very serious about their training, so why not create a course for

yourself? This could even be done on flat water, all you need are some definite markers or check points and try and move yourself around the course as fast as possible. This will of course affect your technical ability too and will get you linking moves and turns faster.

- If you are a whitewater paddler, why not get in a race boat? If you are into your open canoeing, why not have a go on a stand up paddle board? The list of craft available is endless but varying what you paddle can be a useful shock to your system and will ultimately work muscle groups differently. The changes and adaptations that you will make in balance, paddling style and flexibility will certainly have an impact on your regular discipline.
- Most things are better with a friend of course! You are also more likely to stay focused and on your task too, so get someone else involved with this if you can. It would help if they have similar goals and aspirations to you, but if you are both motivated to get out and paddle and you are going to help each other, having a training buddy is fantastic.



Training is always easier with a friend!
Photo: Patrick Beavis.

Set yourself some goals. Where would you like to be in 12 months?
Photo: Hannah James-Johnson.



If you're a kayaker why not get out in a canoe?



Set yourself a challenge, Chris Brain and Mike Harper midway through their "Great Glen in a Day" in December 2016.



You don't have to be in a slalom boat to train like a racer. Photo: Rachel Burke.

PADDLING VS TRAINING

As we start to get more serious about making improvements in our physical ability we might need to change our perception of what we are aiming to do when we get out on the water. Many paddlers just go paddling, which is great because it has probably got you to the standard you are at. However, as you can probably guess if you have read this far, what I am now suggesting is that we get out there and train. Of course, the question is how is paddling different to training?

When we train, we are goal focused and we set ourselves targets and outcomes. We also create a structured plan for our session and we have specific aims for what we want to do during it. When we go to go to a gym, we don't just wander round the gym picking up random weights every now and then, having breaks whenever we felt a bit tired and finishing whenever we feel like it. We have structured plans and do a set number of minutes or reps on a variety of machines or exercises that work specific areas that we have targeted, completing all of this in a specific time frame. If we apply this to our paddling our time on the water might look very different and will not feel like your average paddle, but if we are going to move forwards simply repeating what we have always done isn't going to cut it any more.

One key area that we might need to change if we are going to train properly for our paddling is the

image we have of ourselves. Next time you get on the water, aim to think and behave like an athlete, what would they be doing with this training session?

TIME TO GET F.I.T

To make improvements physically we need to work our body differently to what we normally do. In doing this we overload our body, doing above and beyond what is our current norm. If we do this our body will undoubtedly respond physically and will noticeably change/develop/improve. The F.I.T Principle is a simple way of training, adjusting Frequency, Intensity and Time.

Frequency is obvious, the more we get out the more our body will respond accordingly. Even just simply adding an extra couple of paddling/training sessions in a month will make a difference.

Intensity is all about trying harder! Can we add a bit more oomph into our training, pushing ourselves a little bit further? Have a go a reaching your maximum a couple of times throughout your paddling/training session.

If we change how long we are on the water and active for, it will impact our physical attributes. Remember though it's not about sitting in an eddy for longer, it's about doing more training. Look around, you'll often see that the best paddlers are the ones that get out the most and do the most on the water!



Could you be the Sickline 2017 champion?

HOW LONG WILL THIS TAKE?

We should see this as a marathon rather than a sprint, it might take some time to see noticeable (measurable) improvements. The best thing to do would be to focus on making improvements over either 6 or 12 months and work from there. To do this well what we really need to do is to aim to make a detailed plan.

PROFILING OUR PHYSICAL ABILITY

If we are going to create a plan to help us improve ourselves physically for our boating, we first need to assess where we are now and compare it against where we want to be.

Picture where you want to be in 12 month's time, be realistic as that will be more helpful to you and you are more likely to be committed to the plan and actually aim to achieve it. What do you look like in 12 months, are you paddling more challenging water? Are you lighter? Do you feel more flexible? Can you stay on the water for longer? Or is it just simply easier to carry your boat back to the car at the end of the day? Try not to focus on simply picturing your technical ability, but also your physical capabilities. Now create some measurable categories that you can look at and compare with your present self. These categories might be:

- Power
- Speed
- Endurance
- Flexibility
- Weight

Rate your current self out of ten in each of your categories and then mark where you would like to be in these categories for your future self. Hopefully you've identified the areas that you want to work on and if you have a target weight you've made a note of that too.

However, what we really need right now are some more precise measurements. For each of your category you need to come up with a way that you can measure where you are right now and then you will be able to use the exact same test in the future. If you are serious about improving the physical side of your paddling you'll want to be precise with your tests. Some examples might be:

- How fast can you paddle 100m (or from fixed point A to B) on flat water?
- How many strokes does it take to get your boat up to top speed?
- What is your top speed?
- How long can you sustain your maximum power output?
- How far can you travel in 1 minute?
- With straight legs can you touch your toes or put your fingertips/palms on the floor?
- Keeping your feet together how far can you rotate your upper body?

To do most of these simple tests all you need is a friend, a stopwatch and a maybe a tape measure and scales if we want to see how our body is developing. For most recreational paddlers, simple measurements and tests will be fine, but if you're serious about this



Why not try using a SUP as a fun way to improve your fitness?
Photo: Georgina Maxwell.

then test and measure as much and as accurately as you like. If you wanted you could go into real detail, using GPS to measure speed and distance, heart rate monitors and other advanced equipment too if you have it available.

MAKE THE PLAN AND STICK TO IT

Now you have a profile for where you are now and you understand where you want to be, you need to plan how you are going to get there. If you put a lot of thought into your plan and make it as detailed as possible it will be more useful and the investment of this time towards it will certainly pay off.

It is essential to this plan that you perform your tests again at scheduled points and that you have checkpoints and milestones to make sure that you are on track.

You also might be in the position that your goals or motivation changes, this is OK! Reassess your plan, change your goal if you need to and keep moving with it. If, however, for some reason you keep falling behind with your plan or you simply can't stick to it, then it's probably time to work out why!

WHAT CAN I DO WHEN I'M NOT ON THE WATER?

Keeping focused on your goal whilst you are not on the water can be a challenge but thankfully there is plenty that we can do that will help.

Taking part in quite literally any other sport on a regular basis will inevitably have an impact, but without a doubt sports such as running, cycling and swimming will help you improve your overall fitness.

If we want to do a bit of training at home all you need is a mat and either a watch or countdown timer. I use a timer on my phone and set it for 45 seconds of workout and 15 seconds of rest and usually aim to do at least a ten-minute workout (after I'm warmed up). Every time the 45 seconds comes around I vary the activity. It's easy to make up your own workouts, whether that incorporates planks, squats, push-ups, sit ups or burpees. There are numerous workout ideas and routines out there on the Internet and YouTube. Pick one (or more) that you wouldn't mind doing and go for it for 10 minutes!

If you want to get a bit more serious on your home exercises you can even start using things like skipping ropes, resistance bands, kettlebells, dumbbells or stability balls. Remember buying and owning these things won't improve your fitness, using them will!

Good luck!



Training at home can be easy, you don't need much equipment to have a big impact on your paddling.

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Chris would like to thank Red Paddle co, Pyranha kayaks, Immersion Research, VE Paddles and Go Kayaking for making fantastic kit and their continued support.

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