



*PITTSBURGH
PADDLEFISH*

TEAM HANDBOOK

© February, 2021



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I. Introduction

What is Dragon Boating?

Dragon Boating is a paddling sport which uses fiberglass, canoe-like boats. A dragon boat is 41 feet long, 3.8 feet wide, weighs approximately 550 pounds, and has ten benches. A team consists of 22 members. There are 20 paddlers with two in each bench. A drummer is perched in front to keep the paddling tempo and a steersperson at the helm to keep the boat going in the right direction. The dragon boat goes forward rather than backwards as in rowing. And we do not row, we paddle!

History of the Dragon-Boat

Some say that an ancient Chinese legend led to dragon boat races as we now know them. The legend goes as follows:

Qu Yuan (ca. 340 BCE - 278 BCE) was a poet, scholar and diplomat during the state of Chu. When a power struggle erupted between the Chu and the Qin, Qu Yuan spoke against the corruption of the Qin. In 278 BC, learning of the capture of his country's capital and because of his despondency over the turmoil, he found a large rock, and, with a firm hold, threw himself into the Miluo River.

Popular legend has it that villagers carried their dumplings and boats to the middle of the river and desperately tried to save him, but, were unsuccessful. In order to keep fish and evil spirits away from his body, they beat drums and splashed the water with their paddles. They threw rice into the water as a food offering to Qu Yuan and to distract the fish away from his body. However, late one night, the spirit of Qu Yuan appeared before his friends and told them that he died because he jumped into a river. He asked his friends to wrap their rice into three-cornered silk packages to ward off the dragon. These packages became a traditional food known as zongzi, although the lumps of rice are now wrapped in reed leaves instead of silk.

The act of racing to search for his body in boats gradually became the cultural tradition of dragon boat racing, which is held on the anniversary of his death every year.

II. Paddlefish - Who We Are

Team History

Dragon boat racing began in Pittsburgh in 2002 with the purchase of two dragon boats by the city of Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority and were used to help celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Pittsburgh's sister city relationship with Wuhan, China.

A series of informal events was held until, in 2003, the Pittsburgh Paddlefish dragon boat team was formed as an affiliate organization of the Three Rivers Rowing Association (TRRA). TRRA has two boat houses and facilities for year-round training; one at Millvale, PA on the Allegheny River and the other 1/4 mile downriver on the opposite side of the river at Washington's Landing.

In addition to two dragon boats, we also have use of five outrigger canoes (OC's). The four single OCs and one double OC are used for training and recreation.

Training

Since the inception of the Paddlefish, we have competed locally, nationally and internationally with some degree of success and a lot of fun. The team works out at TRRA facilities during the winter (rowing and paddling ergs, weights and core circuits) to maintain a year-round high fitness level in a competitive, but friendly, environment. Our training sessions are highly structured and are meant to develop both stamina and core strength while being conducted with the idea of having fun while being fit.

How Team Operates

The team operates under a Steering Committee, the functions of which are to act as the administrative body of the organization relative to finances, policy recommendations to the membership, event and race scheduling and any other matters affecting the purpose of the organization. Below is a listing of the committee positions and their function:

The Team Captain acts in conjunction with the team Coaches and is responsible for scheduling team practices, determining Dragon Boat seat assignments and helping to ensure timely and effective team practices and event participation. The Captain also usually acts as liaison to the Three Rivers Rowing Association.

The Coaches are responsible for determining training sessions and working with the team Captain helping to ensure adequate practice training activities for team members to be competitive in team races.

The Communications Coordinator coordinates the team's internal communications between the Steering Committee and the membership, acts as Secretary of the Steering Committee, prepares meeting agendas, maintains meeting minutes and posts updates to the "Paddlefish Update" e-mail as well as e-mail pertinent information to team members, all in a timely manner.

The Equipment Coordinator(s) are responsible for maintaining an inventory of team equipment, organizing equipment repairs, advising team members and the Three Rivers Rowing Association of equipment needs, organizing individual and team purchases of equipment and attending Three Rivers Rowing Association equipment committee meetings.

The Logistics Coordinator is responsible for all event registrations and travel plans, including fees, hotel accommodations and equipment needs and is the primary contact with event and race directors.

The Membership Coordinator is responsible for acting as the primary contact person for prospective members, collecting paddling waivers from members and transmitting them to TRRA, maintaining and distributing a current roster of members, and maintaining the team social media accounts and website (with the social media and website responsibilities permitted to be assumed by another team member).

The Treasurer collects dues and fees, pays team expenses and provides quarterly financial reports to the Committee.

The Event Coordinator is responsible for planning and coordinating events related to the teams' recruiting efforts and assists in programs that fall within the teams' dragon boating expertise and interests, along with coordinating appropriate team volunteer and social activities. This position requires communication with TRRA and other external organizations.

Dues and Costs

In order to be a member of the Pittsburgh Paddlefish, an individual must be a member in good standing (dues paid) of the Three Rivers Rowing Association (TRRA). When joining the Paddlefish, a new member must submit a Membership application to the Membership Coordinator and pay the applicable Paddlefish dues. The amount of dues for both entities will be on their respective websites.

III. Positions in the Boat

Each of the twenty paddlers along with the drummer and the steersperson has a specific function in the boat, and the boat has to be balanced both for weight and strength. Distance from the water, the rate at which the water is moving and the race strategy all determine what the role of each paddler is at any time.

The *Steersperson* controls the boat by means of a long steering oar which is fitted through an oarlock at the back of the boat. The steersperson will stand to do this, using a stable stance. The steersperson has responsibility for the overall safety of the boat and is in charge during the time the boat is on the water.

The *Strokes* are the paddlers in the front bench. The strokes set the pace for the boat and every paddler must follow in perfect time with the strokes. At the front of the boat the water is not moving, and the strokes are normally paddlers who have a long reach to get the water moving towards the paddlers behind. The strokes also need to have good stamina to keep the pace steady and consistent throughout without tiring.

The *Drummer* sits on a small seat at the front of the boat and drums in synch with the front paddlers, as an aid to the rest of the boat to keep in time. Drummers sometimes are not used in practice sessions but are required for racing. During most races the drummers must drum throughout the race, after the first 50 meters. They also encourage the paddlers and may call out for increased stroke rate or short bursts of speed during the course of the race.

Divisions of the boat: Front, Engine Room, Terminators

The *front six* paddlers (first three benches) set the pace for the boat. The water is slower and further away from the paddlers at the front, and paddlers need to have a long stroke to start the water moving.

The *middle eight* paddlers (benches 4, 5, 6, 7) are the *Engine Room*. This, as the name implies, is where the heaviest, strongest paddlers sit.

The *back six* paddlers (benches 8, 9, 10) are called the *Terminators* because, in racing, they are normally the people who are called on towards the end of a race piece to increase power and "bring it in". The water at the rear of the boat is moving very swiftly and paddlers in the back seats need to be very strong.

Seat assignments are normally done by the Coach and/or Captain for each practice and for racing. During paddling, the steersperson has overall responsibility for the safety of the boat and may change paddlers into different positions to balance the boat or for any other reason.

IV. Dragon Boat Terminology:

A. General Commands:

Sit Ready/Are you ready? Paddles are across the gunwale and angled forward in preparation for commands.

Paddles Up: Paddles in position above the water ready to paddle. This is the command normally used to start the boat in a non-race situation.

Take it Away/Go: Start paddling, following the lead of the strokes.

Let it Run: Stop paddling and let the boat come to a natural stop. *The most welcome command in paddling!*

Push Off; Using a hand, push off from the dock. Paddles should never be used to push off.

Back it Down/Back Paddle: Paddle the boat in the reverse direction. Normally used during the lineup for the start of a race, or when pulling away from the dock.

Draw: Use the paddle to pull water towards the boat in order to change the lateral position. Often used during race starts to line up the boat, or when launching from the dock. As with all strokes every paddler should be in time. The draw stroke often is done by 1st 2-3 benches or last 2-3 benches on a side.

Hold the Boat/Hold Water/Check the Boat: Place the paddle straight down in the water parallel to the boat in order to stop the boat quickly.

Hold Hard: Same as for "hold water" except that the paddle should stay in the hold position until told to release. Used when the boat must stop very quickly.

Paddles on the Water: Paddles are placed perpendicular to the boat with the blade flat on the water, to increase stability of the boat.

Racing starts: Commands used during starts may vary in small ways from those above. During a race, paddlers in a boat respond only to their steersman's calls during maneuvers which are usually necessary to line up the boat. When boats are lined up the calls used are typically. "Are you ready, Attention please", and then an air horn is sounded indicating to go.

B. While Paddling:

Note that individual coaches may have slightly different commands. Generally, these are the standard commands used:

Build: Gradually increase the strength/stroke rate of the boat in order to increase speed.

Power/Deep/Press/Focus: Usually used when a series of stronger strokes is needed, e.g., "power 10" or "focus for 10" means to do 10 really strong strokes before going back to original rate/speed.

Stretch it Out/Another Inch: Use rotation and reach to get the paddle a little more forward during a stroke, keeping the pressure on the blade through the water.

Finish: Command that is used during a race to indicate that the finish line is near (usually about 50-75 meters away) and that paddling should be at full strength in order to finish the race.

C. Anatomy of the Stroke:

Rotation: Rotation of the paddler torso in order to extend the lower arm and move the paddle in a forward position.

Reach: To lean forward extending the paddle so that it goes into the water at a point as far as possible in front of the paddler.

Entry/Catch: The position of the paddle as it enters the water. The angle of entry into the water should be between 65-80 degrees.

Pull: The movement of the paddle through the water, using the rotation combined with a downward press with the entire arm from shoulder to wrist.

Exit: The exit is initiated when the paddle reaches the knee and should be completed by mid-thigh.

To see a video of how the stroke should look, paste the following into your web browser & enjoy:

<https://vimeo.com/73337191>

D. Other Useful Information:

Loading/Unloading the Boat: During practices, the Paddlefish load and unload from the front, 1 bench at a time. When loading/unloading for a race, **listen** carefully to the dock masters (those individuals in control of the dock where the boats are launching). They will give directions for their preferred, most efficient method.

Racing Commands: On the way to the starting line of a race, either the steerer or drummer will call a few power strokes and maybe a practice start or two, especially if the steerer is unfamiliar with the team. Each paddler should be focused, attending only to our boat and listening for instructions/commands. As the boat approaches the starting area, there may be instructions from the race “starter” as well as the “steerer”.

Follow the instructions of the steerer as he/she is bringing the boat to the starting line. Depending upon conditions, this could include commands such as “strokes forward/back/draw/hold”. Then, in the midst of all this, the starter may give the directions to start the race, which may include, “we have alignment”, “attention please”, “are you ready?”, “go”, or a horn blast. **BE PREPARED!**

**WHEN RACING THERE SHOULD NOT BE ANY TALKING IN THE BOAT.
FROM THE MOMENT YOU GET INTO THE BOAT UNTIL YOU UNLOAD,
FOCUS ON THE RACE AND LISTEN TO YOUR DRUMMER AND STEERER.
DO NOT TALK....AT ALL!**

V. What Do I Wear In The Boat?

Dragon Boating is a water sport and you will get wet! We will be in the boat as early as mid-March to early November so dressing for the weather is important. The best clothing is quick-dri or other wicking fabric. During the warm weather months quick-dri shorts and top are best. Boat shoes or water-proof sandals work well. Rubber flip-flops can become slippery when wet. Many dragon boaters wear the popular boat shoes that Keen, LL Bean, and many other companies now make.

When the temperatures are cool it is best to layer. Once we get going you will want to be able to remove clothing as your body warms up. Again, think in terms of fabrics that

will keep the water away from your skin. On really cold days a hat can make all the difference.

Paddling gloves are an option to help protect your hands from blisters and secure your grip on the paddle. There are many kinds of gloves on the market: full gloves, half gloves, gloves that are made for various water temperatures, etc. Talk to team members for suggestions if you plan to purchase a pair of gloves.

In the summer, be aware that a hat is good protection from the sun along with sunscreen. Any hat will need to fit snugly, so it stays on your head while paddling.

There are many sizes of paddles at the boat house. When you begin paddling you will be advised about the size of paddle that will work best for you. Trying out various sizes is the best way to discover which paddle feels most comfortable to you. The boat house paddles are made of plastic or wood. As you become more involved in the sport you may wish to purchase your own paddle. Generally speaking, lighter is better. During a race you want all of your energy to go into moving the water, not the paddle. And, of course, don't forget the sunscreen!

VI. Racing

General Information

A dragon boat race is typically 500 meters. However, often a qualifying race will be 200 or 250 meters. National and International races will also have 1000-meter races. There are often 2000-meter races as well.

The divisions of a race are: Youth (12 to 18 year old), Mixed (men and women, with no more than 12 men in the boat), Open (men and women, no limit on number of men in the boat), Women's, Men's, Masters (all paddlers are 40 or older, can be a mixed, open, women's, or men's boat), Grand Masters (all paddlers are 50 or older, can be a mixed, open, women's, or men's boat)

Where Has The Pittsburgh Paddlefish Raced?

We have raced both locally, throughout the east coast, and even internationally. Races we have been to include Philadelphia Pa, Washington DC, Ithaca NY, Princeton NJ, Baltimore, MD, Toronto, Ontario, Richmond, VA among other racing venues.

We have hosted races in Pittsburgh and we also have participated in national races in Tampa FL and Chattanooga TN and international races in Malaysia and Canada.

Some of our team members have participated in world competitions in Germany, the Czech Republic, Australia and Hungary. Several of our team members even went to Venice, Italy to participate in a long-distance race.

What I Need To Know About Going to a Race

The Logistics Coordinator of the Steering Committee is responsible for all pre-race planning. This includes completing race registration and arranging lodging. In order to defray the costs of attending races we usually travel and room together, However, this is not to say that significant others are not encouraged to come. We love a cheering section! Team members are responsible for their own travel, lodging, and food expenses. Race fees may be subsidized, in part, by the team but if not, they are the responsibility of the team member (the team Treasurer collects any necessary race fees and pays the race organizers). The Logistics Coordinator will relay necessary information to the team including signing of waivers, hotel accommodations and provide any assistance necessary in connecting ride-shares and roommates.

Get a good night's sleep the night before a race. It will be a long day. On race day, eat a good breakfast before heading to the race course. During the day it is best to eat light. Fruit, peanut butter, and, of course, plenty of liquids are a good way to replenish your body after a race. The majority of the day will be spent sitting around waiting for the next race. We normally begin to line-up for a race 30 minutes before the race actually begins. There is little time in the boat to warm up so doing a good land warm up before going to the staging area is vital. Running, fast walking, anything that will get your heart rate up. We usually do a group warm up just prior to the race as well. You will be amazed the impact a good 30 minute warm up will have when you are in the boat paddling your heart out!

Staying out of the sun will help you to reserve your energy for the race. We have a canopy and tarps that we take to the races and try to put them in a shady spot. Some additional items you might want to bring to the race site are: a chair, something to read, an iPod, plenty of water, light foods, dry clothing, a jacket or sweatshirt if it might be cool, and anything else that would help make you comfortable throughout the day. Many of the races provide paddles and personal flotation devices (pfd's). However, if you do not have your own, take one from the boat house before leaving town. We have extra pfd's with our paddlefish logo that you will wear on race day. Bringing a paddle you are comfortable using will eliminate any unneeded stress on race day.

VII. Paddlefish Throughout the Year:

The Paddlefish practice year-round, three times a week on Monday, Wednesday and Saturday. The "on-water" practices are generally from late March to early November. TRRA has a "Safety Matrix" that helps us determine when it is safe to be on the water. This matrix includes the weather, water temperature and flow and other general conditions. During the winter months, the practices consist of workouts on paddling ergs, a core circuit and weights.

Otherwise, here are a few of the specific events:

- April** Paddling Camps: Over the years many of the Paddlefish have attended one of several Dragon Boat Camp and Outrigger Canoe camps in Florida. It's a fabulous way to begin the water season. Typically, the camps take place in April. The various camps are run by very experienced and knowledgeable people in the dragon boat and outrigger canoe communities and include varied paddling techniques and video reviews from on-the-water.
- May-
Oct** Racing Season: Throughout the racing season we practice on the water, participate in out of town and local races, and help out with Dragon Boat events initiated by the Paddlefish or sponsored by TRRA. As members of TRRA, we sometimes volunteer for rowing/paddling events as well, such as the Head of the Ohio, dragon boat scrimmages during the Pittsburgh Regatta, and Learn to Row and Paddle opportunities with groups such as Venture Outdoors.
- Oct.** Team Dinner: This event is the beginning of a new year of training. During the dinner, a new Steering Committee is elected for the upcoming year.
- Nov.** Tale of the Channel: This event marks the end of our paddling season on the water. It is generally a day to be a little less serious, maybe even ridiculous, and sadly say goodbye to the paddling season.