

**Georgina Maxwell: 00:13**

Hello and welcome to this episode of the coaching podcast. My name's Georgina Maxwell and I'm your host today and we've got a great line up today. We've got Mr. Chris Evans who's going to talk to us about all things River Play. So, there we go. Chris, how are you?

**Chris Evans: 00:30**

I'm very well, thank you, how are you?

**Georgina Maxwell: 00:31**

Yes, I'm great. Thank you for joining us today. What would be really, really, really good is if you could introduce yourself, your background of paddling and yeah, talk about yourself for a minute.

**Chris Evans: 00:44**

Sure, I'm Chris. I started paddling when I was eight or nine years old. Grew up on the Thames paddling and the thing with paddling on the Thames is there's lots of competition paddling. So quite quickly I was not pushed I think that's the wrong word but it was steered toward things like slalom and sprint and a bit of marathon as well as some of the recreational stuff. I got into coaching when I was, I guess, 17 or 18 and the two sort of sat side by side.

The competition paddling continued and I got into freestyle competition and that sort of blend of slalom and freestyle was the thing that spurred on trying all the freestyle tricks on the river, and it's just been really nice to see loads of that come back from my point of view. I remember seeing that in videos. This is what really lit the fire for Play the River. I remember seeing loads of this probably mid '90s in a video called Full on... if you remember that, that might age me quite a bit of just massive tailies being done in this amazing river in New Zealand. I just thought, that's what I want to do, that's what I want to do right there.

**Georgina Maxwell: 01:57**

Well, there we go. That's perfect so that kind of feeds into what we're gonna have a nice discussion about this evening. So, the first question I have for you Chris is how important do you think is play boating skills when it comes to river running?

**Chris Evans: 02:14**

It's an interesting one because they're not hugely necessary. There's a good argument that says that play boat skills come in when you get bullied around and when the boat's starting to lose its control so maybe you've been back looped or tumbled in a stopper or caught your boat to stand it up on end, and there's a good argument that actually says if you're on top of the boat movement and you read the river beforehand, then maybe you won't need those freestyle skills to get you out of trouble. However, the nice quote that I'm gonna steal, is when a river runner gets a bit of a kicking you go for your rescue kit. When a freestyle paddler gets a bit of a kicking, you go for your camera 'cause it looks cool. I guess it's nice to have it up your sleeve for when it doesn't quite go to plan. You've got the movements to go with it, you know where the boat's going to go to next. You know you've got the feel of how a boat may move and therefore you can utilise that movement and keep the boat travelling on the river. So, the next feature that wants to catch you out might not. You might find yourself in the right place, stable and ready to move around. That's the plus and it does wonders for your confidence.

**Georgina Maxwell: 03:33**

Yeah great, so I like the fact that, as a river runner, we're more pro-active rather than re-active but having a few tricks up our sleeves might be helpful at times. So, do you think your slalom background, back in the beginning, has helped your river running as well?

**Chris Evans: 03:52**

That's the last bit of the quote. So, slalom padders don't get their hair wet. Black and white. And that is a stolen quote. Yes, the slalom paddling has helped and a lot of the freestyle tricks and play the river stuff has come from slalom. You look at gates, it's dipping the back of the boat into the water to generate speed again, it's where it's

all come from. It's helped massively and it's actually something that I have gone back to more than once.

**Georgina Maxwell: 04:24**

So, for the listeners out there, we do have an episode which looks at slalom and how that's beneficial to white water paddling as well. So, you can stay tuned for that one. Okay, so how about we zone our conversation in a wee bit and the age-old tailie. I know some people that can get it straight away and some people that have been trying for years and years and years and they just still cannot do it. So, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions about maybe thinking about a progressional approach for those who are out there who want to go and have a play and use that eddy line. I guess you can break it down into a few things. Is the eddy line important? Is their size of boat important where they are in the weight range of that? How long their paddles are? But essentially what we want to know is how do you tailie?

**Chris Evans: 05:16**

Okay, people can tailie on flat water. I think there's video clips of that all over the internet, isn't there? And flatwater back loops are initiated with a tailie. So having those skills on flat is obviously going to help on moving water. And as a start point, this sounds really weird. Don't try to get the tailie happening because it is quite complex. There are quite a few pieces to get it to work. So instead, maybe go away from the thing that we're all taught from the first steps of white water paddling, which is inside edges. Have a play with your outside edges. Can you gain control with those? It looks a bit thuggish when you start playing with this. Can you get a 90° almost turn and shove and then back into your power again using your outside edges? So, my first step, I'm going to paddle up, wind my body up, drop my outside edge, pretty much half a sweep stroke so that my legs have lined up with my top half, and go again. And what you'll find is the more that you do that, and the more that you play with that, the more the back of the boat's going into the water.

**Georgina Maxwell: 06:38**

Do you think some people maybe struggle with the expectation of what their initial feelings are going to feel like?

**Chris Evans: 06:45**

Yeah, if we're taught inside edges, it's got to be an inside edge. As soon as you start playing with the outside edge, it's going to feel wobbly. But that's part of it. Knowing how much edge to put on, knowing the feel of that edge being caught and biting and wanting to tip, and actually for a tailie on moving water in fact on flat water, you don't need that much edge, you need enough to get it to go underwater to initiate it. So, the common mistake people make is too much edge.

**Georgina Maxwell: 07:19**

What would that look like if they had too much edge?

**Chris Evans: 07:24**

If you put too much edge on, the back of the boat goes into the water and the buoyancy of the boat kicks in. So, what it actually wants to do is pop back up to where it was. So, it's almost like the boat stalls, wobbles, and spins the other way almost in an unexpected movement.

**Georgina Maxwell: 07:45**

So, is there something we could be doing with our paddle to help counteract that then, is there a sweet spot?

**Chris Evans: 07:51**

So, if the sweet spot there, not necessarily paddle, because there's a few movements you could do with that. It would be initiating with that upstream edge, that outside edge, and then flattening the boat off because it's then in the water. It's that continued almost cork screwing movement into the water that gets the boat doing that spin. You'll get the start of that feel with that 90 degree outside edge turn and shove movement. You've got the feel of the boat going into the water. You've got the feel of maybe that going wrong and the boat rebounding and popping out of the water. You've got the feel of, it's gone right where it's gone into the water caught and now my momentum's I'm traveling because the buoyancy's worked for me. You'll get all these lovely bits of feel before you throw another element moving water into the mix.

**Georgina Maxwell: 08:52**

So, can we do that without the paddle then just by the wind up?

**Chris Evans: 08:57**

With the right boat and that would be a small one. Yes.

**Georgina Maxwell: 09:01**

So that's the next question. How important is the boat? The length of the stern and obviously the buoyancy in the back of the stern. I guess we don't need to suggest manufacturers but what we can do is just think about the shape and the length of that. What would be the most ideal?

**Chris Evans: 09:22**

So, if you were looking for that almost flat water clean, so without your paddle tail squirt, a small boat is going to be easier to do that in because it has less volume. However, you can get any boat to get the back of the boat under water, any river boat in that initial turn and shove movement. If you're paddling in say a big river boat, yes, it will be trickier, but it will still do it.

**Georgina Maxwell: 09:53**

So, are you moving your seat backwards or is it neutral?

**Chris Evans: 09:57**

Coming from freestyle where a lot of those movements come from the front of the boat, I tend to move my seat forwards. And I've moved my seat forwards because it moves me further forwards. And I have a tendency to be over the front of the boat. If I lean back, what I do is I push down through my heels because half and bottom half work in opposites. If I sit up and sit forwards as a big sit up what I'm doing is I'm bringing my knees towards me. That is what bringing the front of the boat up. That's what on moving water will get you looking at the sky.

**Georgina Maxwell: 10:37**

Do you need abs of steel for all of this?

**Chris Evans: 10:41**

Not necessarily. It obviously helps.

**Georgina Maxwell: 10:45**

Yeah. You're saying you've got abs of steel?

**Chris Evans: 10:49**

Not at all. A nice big wind up. The more wind up you can get, as in looking right behind you, the more that boat's going to want to catch up with you. If I'm quite rigid in my boat and I'm looking at the front of the boat the whole time, it's going to be all shoulders and all arms. So, as soon as I've got that wind up in and I'm looking where I want to put the front of the boat, I'm bringing everything, not just abs. So, big muscles in your back, your chest, those big ones under your arms, as well as your abs, legs, thigh, everything is now coming into play to help bring that boat round.

**Georgina Maxwell: 11:32**

So, in theory, anybody who's got a really good forward paddling technique, which is using all of the right parts of the body should be able to do a tailie?

**Chris Evans: 11:43**

Exactly.

**Georgina Maxwell: 11:45**

And those who haven't tuned into a correct technique which uses the whole system they will struggle more. Would you agree with that statement?

**Chris Evans: 11:54**

I'd agree, yes.

**Georgina Maxwell: 11:56**

And then the other side of that isn't just what's in tune I guess when we do a role it's the awareness you know so if we've got a good role so those people be more successful as well, I guess?

**Chris Evans: 12:09**

It certainly gives a bit of confidence behind it. If the rolling's working, you're not worried about putting too much edge in and tripping over the edge as you initiate your outside edges working. That's not to say, you've got to be rolling before this because I certainly remember trying this really early on because it was one of the first things I saw. I want to do that thing where the back of the boat went under the water. That was what I wanted to do because I saw it early.

**Georgina Maxwell: 12:39**

So, for our listeners out there, if you could give us maybe a couple of things to go and practice that's going to help towards this just very briefly so that they can just listen to this pause it, think in their head, go and practice and then come back for the next step. So, can you think of three steps they can try and they can practice?

**Chris Evans: 13:03**

You've talked about the forward paddling. A bit of momentum in is really helpful. That doesn't mean sprint the quicker I go, the more my boat's likely to rebound out of the water. So that nice normal pace of forward paddling a bit of momentum in. Initiate a turn and that initiate of the turn can be a flat boat and then a huge wind up sitting forwards. So nice big wind up. I'm looking behind me and I'm gonna initiate my tail squirt my talie with a push off of the back of the blade. And as that push happens, I've got a little bit of outside edge. And most of it is me pulling my knees round. That combination of the push and pulling my knees round. So, my top tips would be... Initiate the turn, wind up and look where you're going, nice bit of blade contact.

**Georgina Maxwell: 14:08**

Great, that was nicely summarised so, let's leave tailies alone now. And how about I'll open this question up to you then, is there any other trick on the river that you would like to discuss? or I could ask what other tricks are difficult to master? So, you've got two answers you could go for there.

**Chris Evans: 14:29**

Two answers. One of my favourite things is just a wave surf, you can't beat them.

**Georgina Maxwell: 14:35**

Yes. Are we going for carving?

**Chris Evans: 14:37**

It could be carving or it could be that simple.

**Georgina Maxwell: 14:40**

You choose this is your subject. Which one would you like to discuss?

**Chris Evans: 14:44**

Okay, just a nice soul surf glassy green wave soul surf. And the picture that I've got in my head there is the front wave at the beaches down in Pembrokeshire. That huge glassy green wave. You don't really have to do anything. You can just sit there all day long and surf away. Sun's shining, blue water, it's warm, all those lovely things.

**Georgina Maxwell: 15:07**

So, for those who haven't experienced that then or are in the process of learning to soul surf or to get on a wave. I think most of the time it's the confidence to get onto the wave that I've experienced, in the last minute they just don't quite power on because they're not quite sure what feeling is going to feel like. What advice would you give to those people who haven't yet quite experienced a full-on surf, but are definitely ready to get there?

**Chris Evans: 15:38**

For somebody who's come to me saying, "I want to get that wave. I want to surf on that wave", I will go back to ferry gliding. People don't often thank me for that, but I go back to ferry gliding. And what I'll use is the glide feel of a ferry glide. So, does the boat pick up onto the ferry glide and as it hits the moving water, glide and just surf across really nicely, effortlessly. No forward paddling is required. No bullying of the paddle strokes.

**Georgina Maxwell: 16:14**

So, what advice would you give to those who are ready to get onto a wave but not quite got onto the wave yet?

**Chris Evans: 16:20**

My advice would probably be, take it back to some ferry gliding and focus on the glide. And if you can get the glide happening with a ferry glide, not just I've got across the river without dropping any height. I managed to glide across and it was effortless and I didn't really need any paddle strokes. That's the feel of being on a wave. That's the angle adjust that's worked.

That's maybe picking up of a feature or two to allow that to happen. And if that's a consistent pattern, then it's time to think about dropping onto a wave. Because otherwise, the bully, I'm going to windmill, I'm going to put loads of power in, it's magnified because there's the energy of a wave to do that.

**Georgina Maxwell: 17:05**

So that sounds really good and maybe some cutbacks as well so that they can just start to get the feeling of edge transfer when they're out there. So when they're on to the wave then it's probably going to be a new feeling for somebody and it'll feel quite powerful or it might feel quite fast or unusual. Yeah, what's next?

**Chris Evans: 17:28**

With the right wave choice, hopefully not so if you're thinking about dropping onto that first wave, you want one that is obviously relatively small and it's consistent, so it isn't changing its shape. It doesn't look like it's bouncing. It doesn't have the white foam pile that appears every so often. It remains consistent. That's going to have consistent energy. That's not to say that the consistent energy won't build up on the edge of a boat and make you feel wobbly and maybe move your boat around if you've got the wrong angles, but it's easier to predict. There's a first wave that's consistent. It stayed its same shape. That's the one you're looking for. And if you're going to drop onto it, the classic thing I see people doing is they try and paddle up the green water that's creating the wave and they give it everything they've got. A boat's going to go heavy if you do that. So it will go heavy and it will then wash over

the top of the wave. So, instead the face of the wave, so the steepest bit, if you can paddle on to that and drop onto that, you have then got gravity pushing you down the wave. And that's the part that's quite easy to control. If you were to watch freestyle paddlers and they're doing all those massive wave tricks, they're three, four feet in the air with a huge bounce and all sorts of crazy spins, they are not at the bottom of the wave. They're halfway up the face, if not higher. That's where the controllability of your boat on that wave comes from.

**Georgina Maxwell: 19:08**

How important is would you say trim is when it comes to that? Because we maybe started to think about edges when we're carving perhaps. I don't know, you can explore that as well. So, yeah, let's explore edge and trim. Yeah.

**Chris Evans: 19:26**

Edge and trim, okay. We'll start with trim. Boats are massively rockered now. They're great big bananas, aren't they? and the nice thing that that has done is it stopped the need to lean right back. I mean, if I'm being honest, there wasn't one to start off with. So, for trim, to give you an idea, start neutral, sit up nice and tall in your boat. And what that nice and tall will do will allow to look around and move around on the wave. That then moves on to the carving. If you feel like you're washing off the wave, before you start putting all the windmilling in, the forward paddling to get you to drop back down, try leaning forwards. Try being over the front of the boat. That weight of the front of the boat might be enough to help you drop down the wave and back into a surfing position. I'm not saying don't use the lean back because it does have and that advantage is sometimes and that advantage is sometimes to pick up speed. So, if I wanted to carve off of a wave, for example, I can get the boat to drop down the face of the wave and then lean back and it's going to go up the green water and then I can carve off the end of the wave quite nicely. So, leaning back has its place, but I tend to encourage people to either be sat upright or very slightly forwards. So, over the front of the boat. Carving edge work.

**Georgina Maxwell: 20:53**

Yeah. Edging carving, what's that all about?

**Chris Evans: 20:58**

So, it's really easy on a wave and a wave surf to focus lots on what your edges are doing. So, I've got to change my edge to carve back again. And thinking just about your edges, what can happen is you can change your edge and you changed your edge early. So, it buries into the wave and you've capsized. So as maybe something else to try to help you with this, think about looking where you want to go. And I don't just mean I'm going to, just turn my head very slightly to look where I'm going. I mean it comes from your hips pretty much just above your pelvis. That's looking where I'm going needs to come from. Shoulders are turned into it. Body's wound up. And you'll find the edges happen naturally and the boat starts to do that cut back.

**Georgina Maxwell: 21:51**

Great. Yes. If you're well connected to your boat, all of that's going to follow with the head movement, isn't it?

**Chris Evans: 21:57**

Not just the head, it's the shoulders.

**Georgina Maxwell: 22:02**

Because you can definitely sit there in your boat and turn your head and nothing happens because I've tried it. But if you sit there and you turn everything, it puts you on an edge, doesn't it?

**Chris Evans: 22:13**

That's all your freestyle tricks. That's all your down river tricks. If you get your body in the right place, the boat's going to follow.

**Georgina Maxwell: 22:22**

Great. Thank you. We're still going and I'm going to ask you another question and this one's just what you like to do. What's your favourite thing to do on the river? So, you're out with your pals. You're maybe even creeking or you're running something pretty wild. What's your favourite thing to do when you get the opportunity to do it?

**Chris Evans: 22:45**

At the minute with some of the boats changing their shape. So, we've got the creek boats that aren't quite half slices. They're sort of somewhere in between a chubby half slice with a kind of bulbous back that you can dip. It's certainly brought back more of a slalom style. I mean, it never really disappeared, but you're definitely seeing it a lot more. And at the minute, I can't get enough of moving those boats around like a slalom boat. So, quickly whipping into an eddy, a tail dip. So, not quite a tailie - a tail dip. I'm back onto my forward power and I'm driving back out of the eddy again. It does feel really nice.

**Georgina Maxwell: 23:30**

There's something so nice about carrying the momentum through the moves, isn't there? Back in the day it used to be very stop start, didn't it? Into the eddy, plan your next move off, now move off and these days, it's just so much more fluid, I find. You're in, your out, it's great.

**Chris Evans: 23:49**

Yeah. There is something to be said for stopping, taking a minute, just allowing your head to get back into the right space. Certainly, if you're at the top of where you're comfortable, having said that, if it's a run that you're comfortable on and you want to move things forwards, keeping the boat moving just feels amazing. It really does. It's probably not a down river move or a river play move, but that's what I'm enjoying at the minute. Recently went to the Treweryn and in my half slice I was getting great big pop out full loops, full boat and me out of the water, that felt quite good I've not done that for a while.

**Georgina Maxwell: 24:33**

Are you pleased with current boat design? Where everything's moving forwards or do you still miss the early 2000s when everything was done in a tiny little boat?

**Chris Evans: 24:45**

I mean it's really interesting because I was lucky enough to work at a few centres where I saw people who had crammed themselves into tiny boats and you could see

that it wasn't going to do their bodies any good. So, things like feet turning outwards and walking like Charlie Chaplain because they crammed themselves into tiny boats and you can see that paddler now. So, I never really did the tiny slicey boat thing. I still paddled slicey boats but they were the bigger ones. And that helped me because I couldn't just bully the boat around. I had to use technique. So, it was a bit more frustrating. Yeah, it was a bit more frustrating. It wasn't working straight away as it was for others, but the technique was there. I love the way that river boats have gone. I think that's fantastic, they're bigger, they're safer, they carry speed. I like that we've got a range of different play the river boats available from, I guess, what you could consider basically boats from the 2000s. Some of them do look very similar to very long half slices and short half slices. I think that's fantastic. There's that range there to suit the right paddler. What I will say is if you're getting into this those boats that you've just mentioned from the 2000s, and actually we could probably go back to the '90's for some of them. if you were thinking, I want to get a boat to make my local run a bit more playful or I want to learn some of these things, but I don't want the expense, then you could pick yourself up a bargain and can I name a boat? You could get an RPM or something for a couple of hundred quid and that RPM will do tailies equally as well as some of the newer boats that are on the market.

**Georgina Maxwell: 26:44**

Do you think you'd have to spend quite a bit of time outfitting these older boats? My memory of some of these really older boats was just a very basic plastic seat.

**Chris Evans: 26:55**

Possibly. Yeah, you might have to get good with Evo stick and sticking things into your boat to get hip pads working for you and back rests made out of foam as well. So, if you're going to do that, do check them over. Some people have already retrofitted in back rests to make it work and decent footrests and that sort of stuff. So, there's bargains out there to be had, you haven't got to spend your money on the brand new latest down river boats, down river playboats, as good as they are.

**Georgina Maxwell: 27:28**

So, you made a reference to the way people were sitting in the boats with their feet and then maybe potentially creating an injury from that. Do you see anything in the

modern boat in these days that in the long term perhaps there might be some injuries from that?

**Chris Evans: 27:46**

I do actually. One of the concerns I have at the minute is boats just seem to be getting wider and wider and wider and is that putting a lot of pressure on hip flexes, on hips, and maybe putting you into a weird position that you're then putting quite a lot of power through to generate edge work, to generate tailies and carving on waves and so on. I see there maybe being some issues there where people have got quite an aggressive curve on their back from having a back rest overtightened.

**Georgina Maxwell: 28:22**

Things watch out for. Yeah.

**Chris Evans: 28:25**

Again, it's just things I see. There might be nothing in it, but it's certainly a few things that I've seen people getting out of some river boats where they're heavy. Maybe not tall, they're heavy. And like me, short-legged, which means to fill a large boat your knees are in a weird position and hip flexes are going to hurt.

**Georgina Maxwell: 28:51**

Well, let's watch out for that then. Finally, so we're moving on to our last thing now. You've just been sending it in Norway. Yeah, you had a nice time out there. Was there anything that you were personally working on with your own paddling? Or, was there any trends going on out there where people were trying new things? Yeah, what do you think to that?

**Chris Evans: 29:16**

That's quite an interesting question actually. I wouldn't say it was in Norway, although you're seeing lots of these. A few years ago in my early 20s, 20 years ago, I wanted to do nothing but kick flips everywhere. That was all I wanted to do because they look really cool, and I know that being upside down now moving quite quickly over a wave can leave you in quite a vulnerable position if you get it wrong. So, seeing a lot of the stuff that some of the best in the world are doing at the minute

with cobra flips, basically a kick flip off a waterfall, it filled me with dread. The things that can go wrong with that is just unbelievable. It really is. Having said that, a friend of mine, Ross, who's getting back into his paddling, didn't do it with a "I want to get back into paddling. Let's go for a spin somewhere chilled". It was "I want to cobra flip." So, I had absolutely no interest in them whatsoever. And all of a sudden, that mentality of spurring each other on and trying to do the next thing was back again. So, on a day's paddle on a local run that's considered easy to the point where people are it's boring, I don't really want to go there. I had a brilliant day trying daft cobra flips off of a rock falling on my head from about 4 feet. It was brilliant.

**Georgina Maxwell: 30:43**

Great. This is why kayaking's so good isn't it? Because there's always something to better yourself or play around with or get with your pals and inspire each other with as well. So, that's great.

**Chris Evans: 30:57**

Yeah, and it continued. I went up to Scotland for a week again thinking I've left it on that 4ft rock. I'm not really interested in doing any more of these. And surprise, surprise, got to the Etive and the bottom drop of triple step, we're doing laps on and trying to get cobra flips. I'm in my 40s. What am I doing? This is brilliant.

**Georgina Maxwell: 31:18**

That's awesome. Ace. On well, Chris, I think we're going to round it up there, but thank you very, very much for all of your knowledge, expertise, and all of your time you've just given to give us this podcast.

**Chris Evans: 31:33**

No problem. Thank you for having me.

**Georgina Maxwell: 31:35**

It was so nice to have you and yeah, thank you very much.

**END.**