

All Things Coaching with Lowri Davis

Transcript

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Georgina Maxwell: Hello and welcome to this episode of the coaching podcast. We have Lowri Davis here with us today and we're going to explore all things coaching. So hi Lowri, how are you?

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Lowri Davies: Hi. Yeah. How you doing?

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Georgina Maxwell: I'm good, Thank you for joining us today. We've got some exciting topics to discuss today. So before we get into that let's have a little bit about your background.

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Lowri Davies: Sure Okay. So, yeah, my name's Lowri Davis. I've been paddling since I was a kid, really. My parents both paddled but I didn't really get into it until I was a teenager. I would say primarily because there wasn't such a thing as small gear back when I was little. So the wonderful stuff now with the kiddy kayaks and the kiddy gear just didn't exist. In fact, actually, I would say women's gear didn't exist. So, it was medium to large male kit was just the kit that was available.

And so was of having a go when I was a kid, it was all right. We would sort of go in mom and dad's kayaks out on the lake on a holiday or something and give it a go. but it didn't excite me any more than when we went and rode bikes or walked up a hill or went climbing or something. So it was just kind of like one of those things that occasionally I would do on a holiday. and then when I got a bit older, I think sort of 14, 15, and I got bigger, was around the same time that kit started getting a little bit smaller. So all of a sudden then when I sort of went out in a boat, I was able to make it sort of do a bit more and it suddenly became a bit more interesting. so, then I got really kind of hooked. and I was really fortunate to be in a really active and supportive canoe club in York. with lots of paddlers who were willing to take out enthusiastic teenagers that wasn't just me and a few friends and my brother as well who's three years younger.

So, I think that was quite important as well, sort of having a gang to be learning with that made it really fun. and then yeah, I just kind of got really into Started playboating. So, I've been doing freestyle since I was about 16. sort of went along to an event at my local white water course and just immediately felt really welcomed and just loved it. So, was encouraged to try out for the got on the British team as a junior and yeah I've been sort of competing most of the time and I have had a few stints where I've sort of focused on either my coaching or other parts of my life a little

bit but I've been on the British team most of the time since then which is now quite a long time. and then at university I carried on paddling, did loads of white water. and then whilst I was at university I got on the four borders expedition which was the British university kayak expedition of the time which was an amazing opportunity. and sort of gave me the opportunity to try more and more white water.

And I think it was whilst I was at university that I really started getting into coaching as well because through the university club obviously there was a lot of beginners as there tends to be in uni clubs and as one of the people who kicked before I got to university suddenly I found myself kind of vaguely in charge and yeah so that's sort of how I ended up initially coaching and then people started asking me for freestyle coaching as well. So, yeah, and that's kind of how I got into the coaching thing. And I just loved being able to help people experience the joy of kayaking the way that I've been fortunate enough yeah, so I thought, maybe I'll give this a go. And no better time to give something like that a go than when you're young. And yeah, I thought, I'll see if I can make this my job because that sounds really cool. and the rest is kind of history. I've been coaching full-time now since I left university in so pretty much since then, I think. So yeah, it seems to have worked.

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Georgina Maxwell: I feel like you've been kayaking forever and...I graduated in 2008 and I just remember your name being thrown around all over the place and so I'm a bit starruck today to have you on here. so yeah great thank you. So how about we kick off the topic with coaching culture and what are we teaching? How is this helping or hindering our learners? Do you want to talk about that?

4:52

Lowri Davies: Yeah, of course. so I think what's really interesting now that I've been coaching for so long, I know for sure that my coaching has evolved over time as I've sort of seen what works well and what doesn't. and I think now I sort of have had the advantage of over time seeing also what's working in a club setting and also And I think there's loads of really cool stuff happening in clubs. There's some really amazing clubs with really positive cultures, plenty happening for all levels of paddler and really good progression pathways and all of that on a voluntary basis. I find that actually quite incredible and, hats off to those people who are putting so much time and energy into the sport on a voluntary basis. but then I do also see kind of people who've come through clubs that have I guess less progressive cultures in varying different ways.

And one of the things that I see is people coming to me where they've kind of got themselves stuck at a certain point. either their paddling level has sort of got stuck and they just don't seem to be able to progress any further or they're just in a point where their confidence got really low and that's what's hindering their progression. so I'd say often what that's rooted in is people having internalised some hard fast rules that might have worked as a beginner for a certain environment but just isn't working

for the environment they're trying to step up into and so I think from a coach's perspective, it's just really important to think about what it is that we're coaching and how we're coaching those things so that we're not creating rules in people's minds about what angle they should leave an eddy or always being straight downstream or straight to a wave or always leaving and Eddie at the top for example. and there's all sorts of things that we hear on the river being told they are absolute gospel when actually the truth is Whitewater is quite a dynamic environment and I'm sure the same is true in the sea that's very dynamic environment and I know from a freestyle perspective one feature is not the same to another feature.

So although there are concepts, what would be really important for our learners is to understand those concepts and understand what variables there are and what options they have in terms of things that they can change to adapt to the environment that is going to change. always go at 2:00 and always have an edge when you're ferry gliding and that sort of thing. How about we find somewhere suitable that has enough power that people can feel the difference if they change these variables that we're giving them. So if they change the angle that something different is going to happen but that it's not so powerful that the difference that happens is a W-Funk and some kind of negative experience. But they need to be able to feel for themselves what the difference is between going at one angle to another angle or putting edge on or not putting edge on and what does that look like and how do those things interplay with one another. So, if they put on less angle, does that mean less edge or more edge to get to the same place? And if they're trying to get to a different place, would they have a slightly different approach? And Let them try explore it, like let's approach this with kind of curiosity and fun. and people I think will learn so much more that will then leave them in a position where they have a broader understanding that will allow them then to be able to approach a variety of different settings, different venues, different whether that's, different rapids or slightly stronger eddy lines or bigger eddies, leaving Eddie that has a feature somewhere.

So maybe leaving at the top of the eddy or might not be the right thing. Actually leaving in the middle of the eddy might be a much better thing to do. and that also I find this leaves them with far greater confidence because they've got some agency first of all they're able to make decisions for themselves. They're not just getting rules that they then have to follow. And the problem with these rules is that we're giving them a correct and an incorrect. And that isn't necessarily true. What we have is a selection of variables that we can change to create different results. So the problem with the correct and the incorrect is that some people will really stress about getting it wrong and what's going to happen if I get it wrong and some people will have kind of quite a catastrophic idea of what might happen when they get it wrong. Whereas if we've facilitated that exploration of this is what happens if you put this much angle or this much edge or it also helps them to then approach new scenarios feeling like they've got a selection of tools in their toolbox and then they can have conversations

about okay here it looks like the river's going a little bit faster. Does that mean I might want to be leaving the eddy pointing a little bit more upstream immediately?

Then that's a different conversation than somebody who's just looking at something and being like whoa that is so much faster. My god, I don't think I'm going to be able to hold my angle on that. Does that make sense?

11:13

Georgina Maxwell: That absolutely makes sense. And I'm particularly interested in how it affects people's confidence later in their journey. When we had a little chat before we came online here and I had a group once that when I went around the team they were Next one. What would you like from today? Confidence. And he ended up having to ban the word. When you think about what confidence is on the water to me I don't know what you're talking about. Maybe it comes from these hard and rigid fast rules. And what do you think?

11:52

Lowri Davies: I don't think it's necessarily the only place that confidence or... lack of confidence comes from. But I do think that feeling like you have an understanding of your environment and some agency within it. So talking to our learners early doors about how to read white water, what different features might look like, how that might impact, what happens and different tactics for approaching them so that we're developing that whole picture rather than just giving them kind of quite rigid strategies for doing particular tasks which leaves them with gaps in their knowledge and understanding.

12:33 - 17:17 MISSING

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Lowri Davies: It also means that if you spin out when you're trying to do a line or do a ferry glide or whatever and then end up at a funny angle, you've just come out of a 360 spin and put yourself back onto a particular angle and got yourself to a particular target, whether that's that Eddie or, that rock that you were going to touch or whatever it is. So now you've also learned to control a spinning momentum and dynamically put yourself onto an angle that's going to get you to a target. And isn't that really like coming down a rapid and being slightly offline and spinning around backwards even and having to sort it out? And that's giving people coping strategies as well. And that's going to build their confidence. But in the process you can have a right good laugh, you can have some fun.

18:13

Georgina Maxwell: So, yeah, developing people's reactionary skills and that's part of it sometimes, isn't it? when things don't go as planned. Yeah, it kind of got me thinking when you were talking there about can easily blame the inexperienced coach for not having built up these different methods of coaching, but it was making me wonder does this happen? Are we teaching things and preparing people to be

independent as advanced paddlers, whatever? I guess that's a whole different subject.

18:45

Lowri Davies: I think it is related, though because I think that sort of does underpin some of what I'm saying. I think if you can coach people in this way then they will become more independent more quickly and that will foster better confidence and better decision making and that's better for everyone people are going to have more fun on the river making better decisions sort of I guess comes in a variety of categories but it's going to be for everybody's benefit if people are more independent group members because then we're a team rather than there being really dependent relationships within the group that's going out and that's even true in that coaching context, especially as a coach early doors it can feel like I am the coach today. I've got this hat on that says I am in charge. which means that I need to be doing all of the talking. I need to be setting the activities and the people need to be following my directions and...

we can have this idea that unless it's coming from us we are not doing our job but that actually is almost inversely true especially I think it's more true in the early experiences because there's a safety element and we need to give some information to help people along the way, then people are not going to get in a kayak for the first time and immediately just be like, "All right, what happens if I go over there?" and that's going to work. If that was true, none of us would have a job. but I do think as we're getting to people being moderately experienced and for the environment they're in. So this might be even like session three or four down the little jet at the canoe club. or this might be, a year of kayaking and we're now talking about general white water skills in a grade two two three environment, whatever that is. it's like I have a bit of experience in this environment and now I need to get skillful in this environment. and that's a broad range picture, isn't it? we can kind of go back to that kind of TTP idea of it's not just about that technical picture of I must have my paddle at this angle or put the stroke in at this time. It's so much more than that. is having a broad understanding of the environment that we're in, the decision making about whether or not we're going to run the rapid, what line we would want to take, what that's going to look like. how us as a team are going to approach a particular river or all of that's just as important and that's going to also build somebody's independence and confidence. I know.

21:48

Georgina Maxwell: Great. Yeah. Fascinating topic and I think we could probably continue talking about that for hours.

21:54

Lowri Davies: I definitely am quite geeky on this stuff.

21:55

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah, me too. When you could just thinking of examples in your head the whole time. but I think we should flip to a different subject if that's cool.

22:04

Lowri Davies: Yeah, of course.

22:06

Georgina Maxwell: And I'm going to ask you what's important to performance and...and particularly you mentioned when we were having a chat before what's happening inside kayak, what's happening under that spray deck. Do you want to talk about that?

22:19

Lowri Davies: Yeah. Yeah. So I think early doors again in sort of coach education we talk about the fundamentals. We talk about an activity: the transfer of power, the posture and the feel. And I'm not sure that when we then are going out into the environments that we're working in whatever white water in the sea slalom in freestyle that's always being transferred. and I think what does that actually look in practice? So connectivity for example. So conceptually, I'm sure everybody who's coaching understands that we need decent connectivity to perform when we're paddling. but what does that actually mean?

So, in a whitewater kayak, yeah, the feet need to be touching on the foot plate, but how much are they touching on the foot plate? How much of the foot is touching on the foot plate? could we maybe build up the foam in a shape that's going to support more of the foot when you push on your foot? and I think tighter doesn't always mean better. I think more connectivity is better. So what I'm generally aiming for when I'm outfitting a boat or when I'm helping somebody else to outfit their boat is to have So what I mean by that is as much area of the body connected with as much area of the kayak as is reasonably possible and that will spread the pressure point. So firstly that's going to make it more comfortable. and more comfortable is going to be better full stop.

So, you're definitely going to have better performance if you're comfortable, especially over time. If you're going off to do a river that you're going to be sitting in your boat for 3 hours, if you've got a dead leg after 10 minutes, you cannot expect the best performance like full stop. And then if you try and get out of your boat to affect a rescue under time pressure and you've got a dead leg, we all know what's going to happen there and it's probably looking like a face plant. So there are real good reasons for making sure that we've got a well outfitted boat.

so I kind of use the idea of kind of a hug pressure. If you've ever heard that before, so what we quite like is to have you good pressure across the knees and the hips

and the feet kind of a generic hug pressure. And then when I'm going to add pressure to this situation. So I'm coming up to a bigger rapid and I want to engage to make sure that I can have a good posture and can transfer power into my boat. Then I'm going to increase the pressure from a generic hug to a bear hug squeeze. Yeah. So, what that might look like is pulling the knees up into the thigh grips a little bit to create that kind of bear hug squeeze kind of pressure. and what you'll find if you do that, is that that will tend to sit you up into a better posture, which will help your core to engage, which will also mean that whatever you're doing will transfer into your boat because you are now more connected to your boat.

So rather than your legs being a little bit flippy floppy around, which means, by that the water as soon as it touches your boat, the boat is moving and then you are going to have to do something in response to that. And then what you do in response to that is going to impact on your boat. So there's a gap there whilst your body is connecting with your boat to try and do something in response to what's just happened to your boat. Whereas if you're already in connection with your boat, then you can immediately respond. So if you think about kind of hit the front of your boat hits a diagonal wave, what's going to happen is the boat's going to try and turn. if you don't want that to happen, you're going to probably put in a paddle stroke and you're going to push against that pressure that's created by the wave. when you do that,...

you first got to move your body to connect with the boat to push against it, or you don't, then the water's going to win. Does that make sense? Whereas, if you're already connected, as soon as you put that paddle stroke in, whatever you do when you pull on that paddle stroke and tense up your core, push through your boat, with the lower half of your body, that is what's connected to your kayak, then that's going to get pressures of the water. So, that's going to help you to stay in control.

So being better connected is going to not only allow better performance, but it is almost certainly going to result in higher confidence because you're going to feel more in control, less like you're getting battered around by the waves in whatever setting you're in. you're going to feel like you can respond to that. So, I've seen huge performance and confidence increases with people when I've just spent 10 minutes with them at the start of a session and explored what's happening inside their boat. So, I'll just get them to do some fairly easy activity like something easy for them so they're not thinking they don't need any cognitive load in terms of what they're doing. So, an easy ferry glide or an easy Eddie in and out or something like that.

and then I'll just ask them questions about what is happening inside their boat as they're doing that. And then that tells me what it is that they do to make that thing happen. Because sometimes it can be different. Some people might be like lifting a knee. Other people might be, I don't know, putting a weight on one bum cheek or pushing through a foot or, there's all sorts of different things people might be doing. On its own, that's just information. It's not right or wrong, but it gives me information because I can't necessarily see that because it's inside a closed opaque kayak, but

it's really easy to just get drawn in by the stuff we can see on the top and forget about the stuff that's happening underneath when actually like that what we're ultimately trying to do is move a kayak around. Right? So, what we've got to be able to do is affect that kayak effectively. Yeah.

So, yes. So, I'll just ask some questions and then I'll also ask questions that will give me a bit more information about how well connected they are. So, for example, if you push through your foot, what happens to your knee? if you really push on your foot plate, your knee will likely disconnect a little from where it is sitting in a thigh grip. But how much does it go completely straight? Does the knee lock out? does your heel ever touch the foot block? because if it doesn't and you're pushing as hard as you possibly can, probably you're not tight enough in your boat. Probably that foot block could do with being a little bit closer. And by the way, just because the manufacturer has put holes in doesn't mean those are the only possible settings. We can use foam to make a much more intricately designed shape.

Obviously if it's a personal boat really because that's pretty hard if it's in a club setting, you can move the foot plate and you might be able to put some hip shims in and also shims on the seat to raise not where the person sat. That will make a big difference. And I think another thing that's worth thinking about is that as you change one thing, it will impact another. So if you pull the foot block up, then as described,...

The knees are going to go more into the thigh grips, which will also change the angle that your hips are at. So the hip will become at a wider angle, which will probably push to the hip pads more or certainly the front edge of the hip pads. So, the hip pads might need to move or be adjusted. I find quite often with female shapes, you might need to move the hip pads back and up a little bit to give a bit more space for where the hips are. especially in a boat where you've had to move the foot block up quite a lot and the knees are at a wider position because your hips are really wide then, which then means that your legs are sort of coming out from your hips at quite a wide angle.

And if the hip pads are in the standard place that comes in a standard whitewater kayak that's probably not designed for a short lady with big hips, then those hip pads or the front edge of the vertical part of the seat may well be digging into the top part of your thigh the edge of your hip. which is a very likely place to give you discomfort and dead legs. So explore putting those hip pads in different places. just move them back or not, it might be the opposite. but really explore what works for you to create as much connectivity as possible with that kind of hug pressure.

And when you start transferring power, so if you were to pull on your knees up into your thigh grips to help you be better connected at your thighs and in a better posture, do your feet disconnect off the foot plate? Because if they do, you've now lost a point of connectivity. So it's finding that really happy medium place of having

good connectivity all around...but still being able to change how much pressure you have in those different places for the different movements we need to do.

32:18

Georgina Maxwell: I'm so glad you have addressed this. It was only last week I was working on grade four and this particular individual had never had any input on outfitting and without that.

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Lowri Davies: It's crazy, isn't it? I see it all the time. I'll generally quite often start advanced sessions like all sessions but even advanced sessions, I suppose I'm trying to say with a quick look and sometimes it ends up needing to be a deeper dive because if any of that stuff is wrong, you can change all the rest of it. But there's a reason that we call them the fundamentals because if those things aren't as well adjusted as they could be, we're getting massive losses through the chain.

so yeah, it's the biggest thing that we could change that's going to have a holistic difference to performance.

33:12

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, my top tip is from the dagger hip rest, they're kind of wedge shape they are perfect to wedge that little gap between the heel and the foot plate. Yeah.

33:25

Lowri Davies: That is true. Yeah, totally. And yeah, I think that is another thing is so from a freestyle perspective, I so often get told because obviously the boats are smaller and they often don't have an adjustable, so you have to make your own foot plate essentially. it's made out of foam or occasionally bean bags, but we can do that's a whole conversation. but it requires you doing something to make that foot block the right shape for you. and it does take a bit of work. But quite often what I hear is people have taken that out because their feet are in their opinion touching the end. Which firstly is quite uncomfortable because basically what you've got there is your toes are wedged into some plastic. and then maybe your heels are touching one another to kind of hold that position. So without support in between so sort of in the arch of your foot you've just got some really savage contact points there and then you try and do any movements I'd like to let me tell you doing cartwheels or loops you are going to be pushing through your feet and if you are not able to do that without pain obviously you're not going to be able to perform that. So, if anyone has a playboat listening to this, please think about where your feet are positioned. So, start with your bum needs to be in the right position in your playboat so that the trim is going to be balanced. So if you're having to slide your seat all the way back right from the start, your boat is not going to perform as well as it could do. So, that's about finding the right boat for your body shape. And there are all sorts of different boat shapes. so if you're having to slide your seat all the way back, maybe try some

other boats. and you might find one that works better for you. Once you've got the seat in the right place, then make sure hip pads and knees. So,...

pull your knees right up into the thigh grips. and when your knees are pulled up into the thigh grips, that's the position where your feet need to be. So, they'll probably be kind of hopefully toes outwards a little bit. and you'll probably have your toes further down the kayak than your heels, which will create kind of a triangularish gap at the end of your boat. What you want to do is essentially fill that space. So support your whole foot as best you can. So then you've got the pressure spread across your whole foot. It should feel relatively comfortable. and genuinely if you do this playboats can be the most comfortable boat to be sat in. I've often been more comfortable sat in a playboat because it's easier to get more of your body connected to your kayak in a playboat than it is in a bigger river boat. Which means that that pressure is spread across a bigger area.

So if you do it actually a playboat I know most people will not imagine that this to be true, but a playboat can genuinely be more comfortable than a river boat. Is that going to be a sound bite?

36:42

Georgina Maxwell: Excellent. that that is really good stuff for everybody out there. And of course, moving into winter clothing, probably have to revisit your outfitting.

36:51

Lowri Davies: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Totally.

36:52

Georgina Maxwell: Life changes, revisit your outfitting. It's not a one fix and that's It's done. It's definitely a movable piece, isn't it?

37:00

Lowri Davies: Yeah, definitely. Yeah. ...

37:01

Georgina Maxwell: So, we don't have long left And, I was actually going to ask you one last question. So, that's what are you currently working on with your kayaking at the moment? if we're thinking about performance and I'm guessing and I'm not guessing. I know that you're always striving for perfection whatever you're trying to do in your own time, but what are you currently working on as a move, as a play thing, What are you working on?

37:31

Lowri Davies: So what I really love with kayaking and particularly sort of having a playful mindset when you're kayaking and when I say playful mindset, it doesn't have to be playboating. so that this is sort of looking at the river what can we do with this kind of mindset. So for me that's not nothing new. That's just kind of how I've approached my caring for quite a while. but that's what I love and that keeps things

fresh because even on the same river you can always find new challenges and new things to have a go at.

So yeah, across the board that I think is kind of like where I'm at. so recently I suppose what have I been playing around with? so I've been playing around with some tomahawks because they're hilarious. and hammering off drops. and what just taleies, there's endless amounts of fun with tailies and trying to different boats and trying to get as many rotations as you can out of your tail stalling it out trying to...

then link a ty on one side of the river can smoothly out of that one into a ty on the other side of the river. it's much fun,... but also you can just turn relatively benign sections of water into addictive levels of fun. at least mate,...

39:02

Georgina Maxwell: What I'm getting from this podcast is we need three types of ...

Lowri Davies: You should see my garden.

39:12

Georgina Maxwell: Brilliant. Right.

39:13

Lowri Davies: Something new for me. Surf K.

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah.

Lowri Davies: I've literally just bought a surf kayak,...

Georgina Maxwell: Excellent.

Lowri Davies: Which is exciting.

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah. It's definitely becoming a bit more hip,...

Lowri Davies: Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: Isn't it? Yeah. Great.

Lowri Davies: Yeah, basically I've been convinced by the bug.

Lowri Davies: But yeah,...

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah. Yeah.

Lowri Davies: It's really cool. It's really fun. And obviously coming from that freestyle background as well, there's definitely a lot of crossover. but also it's so fun being a novice at something. Obviously there's crossover but the first couple of times in surfboard I was like I do not know what I'm doing with this thing. This is really funny.

and it's just really fun to be at that stage of the learning process isn't it? Where it's quite a fast learning curve.

Lowri Davies: And there's just much to learn. You're like, "yeah." It just makes you hungry for it,...

Georgina Maxwell: Keeps giving.

Lowri Davies: doesn't it?

40:05

Georgina Maxwell: This sport just keeps giving. Recently I've been doing that much kayaking, my left eye won't stop twitching.

Lowri Davies: Absolutely. Perfect.

Georgina Maxwell: We're gonna end on that note. Thank you.

Georgina Maxwell: Thank you for being an awesome guest.

Georgina Maxwell: It's been lovely having you on board. Thank you very much.

Lowri Davies: Thank you for having me and...

Lowri Davies: Thank you for letting me get on my soap box and...

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah, we'll see you soon. Bye.

END.