

Coaching Podcast

Canoe and Kayak – Momentum, Angles, Trim and Edge with Ollie Sandeman

Georgina Maxwell: 00:14 Hello and welcome to this episode of the coaching podcast. Today we've got a very special guest. We've got Ollie Sandeman. Thank you, Ollie. How are you?

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah, I'm very good. Happy to be invited to speak on the podcast. Although you'll have to bear with me. I am a little bit jetlagged. So, hopefully I'll make sense over the course of this chat.

Georgina Maxwell: So, Ollie, you've just been on a mega cool trip, haven't you? Where have you just been?

Ollie Sandeman: So, I've just got back from an amazing expedition down the Blood Vein River, which if you're a canoeist, probably needs no introduction, but it's a river that flows from Ontario into Manitoba. And it's a very culturally significant river in Canada for the history. For example, as soon as you get on, there's pictographs on the lake and a main sort of transportation route in Canada. So yeah, huge amounts of history and spectacular white water and spectacular wildlife. So, a brilliant trip.

Georgina Maxwell: 01:15 Amazing. And I've seen some pictures myself. And you even got a float plane out there. That's like the pinnacle of a canoe expedition. Surely.

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah, it's a pretty amazing experience, tying a canoe onto the side of the plane and then being dropped in the middle of nowhere, and just it's very easy on an expedition, I think, to become a little bit sort of tunnel focused. You're absorbed into the river and it's easy to forget quite how remote you are. Whereas when you've been dropped in by a float plane or you're picked up by a float plane, you do have that overview and the reality sinks in quite how remote and far into the wilderness you are. Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: 02:02 That must be just absolutely brilliant. We've just completely skipped the intro. So, we could just talk about your trip. So yeah, Ollie, fire away. Tell us a bit about your background.

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah, my name's Ollie. I've been working in paddlesport since I left college, so, yeah, 38 over 20 years. And I don't really do a huge amount else apart from white water, kayak, canoe, and a little bit of sea kayak. But yeah, white water and canoe are my main things really. So, yeah, leaving college, I did the seasons like a lot of people did. So, started in the Ardesch where many great canoeists start their journey and then took it from there really.

Ollie Sandeman: So worked here, there and everywhere, but based myself up in North Wales now and run a company that called Sandeman Canoe Company, but I am changing the name to Sandeman Outdoors just because I seem to have developed a bit of a reputation as a canoeist, but yeah, I'm multi-discipline.

Georgina Maxwell: 03:13 Excellent. Firstly, thank you for giving up your time and I'm so glad to have you on. I've been trying to get you on this podcast for a while now. So, we finally got the dates together. So, we're going to start this podcast talking a little bit about some of the pillars. So, you've got the acronym MATE. Do you want to explain that a little bit for us?

Ollie Sandeman: 03:31 Yeah. I think when you initially asked me, what am I going to talk about on this podcast, I was thinking, what did I wish someone had explained to me earlier in my paddling career? And I guess what's quite sort of strong in my concepts and the way that I deliver. And it's all about trying to really take the time to understand the environment and working with the environment to produce that outcome, and there is a little acronym that I do often use with people which is MATE.

Ollie Sandeman: It's really cheesy but it's just thinking about sort of first of all core concepts which a lot of people will already be doing which is thinking about momentum and angles, or if you want fancy terms sort of lateral momentum and then thinking about the trim and edge, so I can remember quite early into my coaching a coach talking to me about trim and saying, there are four rules to canoeing. Trim, trim and trim. We sort of laughed it off at the time and even now,

when you think, it's a canoeist talking about trim, you think, it's a boring canoeing topic and it's almost sort of dismissed a little bit.

Ollie Sandeman: But the way that I coach it really is not just thinking about trim in isolation, but it's more about changing the shape of the boat in the water and how you can harness the environment and understand the environment to produce the outcome. And the more time that you spend understanding the environment and the way that the boat interacts with the environment, the more I find that it encourages sort of a holistic approach to skill acquisition and often those skills come naturally to the student without you having to sort of prescribe a set, program of I'm going to teach you this, so, helps to create a more resilient paddler, I find.

Georgina Maxwell: 05:46 Do you think that trim and edge are intrinsically linked then or can you separate the two?

Ollie Sandeman: No, You can of course. But I think over the course of my coaching career I remember one student in particular who was a physics lecturer and the rate at which his paddling progressed was just astonishing. really sort of deep thinker. he'd be sat in an eddy for quite a long time. and lots of questioning coming at me, but as soon as he understood, the physics and how to harness the environment, a lot of those strokes coming naturally to him.

Ollie Sandeman: So I do talk about those things in isolation but I try and give it a bigger sort of concept of if we do this to our boat what's that going to what's the relationship between the pressure whether that be air pressure on the boat or whether it's the flow

Georgina Maxwell: that leads us into the next question then. So, we're going to pick this apart quite a bit about how does the environment affect MATE and then yeah, what's the sort of environmental connection that you need to have to make all of these things do what make you not work hard.

Ollie Sandeman: 07:06 Yeah. Yeah.

Ollie Sandeman: I think that's all it comes down to really is trying not to work hard. and I'll often say to people, we're trying to make the tricky bit easy. So, how can you make that tricky bit easy? Say for an example of a ferry glide for example. if we build

up the momentum early and get the right angle then we've already done a large proportion of the hard work. So paddlers will be often familiar with the concept of a glide phase. I know it's been talked about previously in some podcasts by Ken and the like where if the boat is carrying speed and heading towards our intended direction then do we really need to do much more or can we just sort of stop and wait and then think about timing of key strokes.

Ollie Sandeman: However, prior to that point, if we've got the momentum and we got the right angle, just before I get to the eddy line, I want to be thinking about, how can I change? What's the interaction here between my boat and the flow? if I'm crossing an eddy line and I'm still thinking about generating momentum at that point during the catch of a forward stroke, there's a high chance that I'm going to lean slightly forwards as I pre-rotate or I lean forwards for that planting of a blade. And if I'm leaning forward as I cross an eddy line, then I'm trimming bow heavy and the boat's going to experience more flow and wash me further downstream.

Ollie Sandeman: So, I'm trying to rather than these things being prescribed and saying this is what's going to happen. I want paddlers to really start thinking about exactly that what do I need to do in order to reduce the hard work and work with the environment. Another example. So, that's a moving water example. Changing your trim so that you stay heavy as you cross an eddy line. On open water, it could be the similar vein really where we're paddling across wind and how can we make that as easy as possible. So, if I change my trim to bow heavy, then what's the outcome?

Ollie Sandeman: On open water, paddlers will be familiar with the fact that the boat acts like a weather vein or if people have spent a bit of time in that environment in the wind, they'll probably be familiar with the fact that if they put their weight at the front, it helps the boat point into the direction of the wind, and if they put their weight in the stern, it'll turn and face downwind. So, I can use that information to think, if I'm going across the wind and all the boat wants to do is blow down wind and down the lake, if I paddle on that downwind side, then I'm using that force to my advantage. So, the boat is essentially being blown onto a loaded blade as I take that forward stroke.

Georgina Maxwell: 10:19 Whenever I think about trim, I think about moving a big bag from behind me to front of me. and I remember Ken teaching me about when I was paddling my OC1 about micro trim.

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah. Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: I still struggle to think how me moving back or forward is going to affect a 14 foot or a big long canoe. does it make that much of a difference when you're just you in your canoe?

Ollie Sandeman: I think there's a few things that I find when people are thinking about canoe. Often people will think that actually you don't have a huge amount of control over it because you don't have the level of outfitting that you do in a white water kayak. However, the boat will respond to everything that your body does, especially if you have got a kneeling port or a good amount of connectivity through how you outfit your boat. And the minimal, and subtle adjustments in terms of your body position really do have a huge impact on the way that boat performs. So on open water, an exercise that I'll get them to do is just play around with moving your trim.

Ollie Sandeman: Whether that be extremes of moving to the front of the boat or the back of the boat or just subtleties of leaning a little bit further forwards and leaning a bit further back and trying to get the student to pick a point on the side of the lake and get their boat to point there purely through changing their trim without using any paddle strokes. And then they'll gain an appreciation of how that micro trim is integral to what we're doing and a better understanding of then how they can use that to their advantage.

Georgina Maxwell: 12:10 So, I'm going to pull you back to the start of MATE with the momentum.

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah. Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: Thinking about gliding that boat or gaining momentum before you make the move for instance or moving water tying that in with the trim. How dynamic are you having to be when you're moving down a piece of graded water?

Ollie Sandeman: So often this will link into constraints-based coaching.

Ollie Sandeman: So one I'll often use in moving water is we're trying to achieve our outcome only using forward strokes and everything else is coming through changing the shape of the boat in the water and angles. So, I'll often might start with a session on flat water, which surprises quite a lot of paddlers when they've booked onto a grade two, grade two, three coaching session that the first thing we're doing is spending some time on flat water. And I'll get them to do exactly that to see if they can create a turn only using forward strokes.

Ollie Sandeman: So building some momentum and then as soon as they want to initiate that turn to lean forwards to engage the bow but at the same time rotating and looking towards where they intend to go. Often I'll refer to this as a jazz hands position. So I'm rotating round but leaning forwards at the same time to create that turn. And we can do it on, the paddle side or the off side. And as soon as they gain that appreciation that actually the boat is really responsive and we can largely achieve that outcome with just forward strokes, we can transfer that into that moving water environment once they understand the pressures involved and the hydrology of what's happening.

Ollie Sandeman: So, that initial concept of a ferry glide where you generate that momentum, if we've got our angle correct and we've generated enough momentum, there's no turning strokes required there. We cross the eddy line and we're trimming back. But as soon as we make that decision to turn, we're drawing back on that exercise of flat water of rotating and leaning forwards to engage the bow to experience more pressure from the flow. And it's the same thing as we come into an eddy on the other side. once people have spent a little bit longer thinking about it, they might think, I want to lift my boat up and over the top of an eddy line.

Ollie Sandeman: So, the timing of a forward stroke, bringing your body weight back to lift the front of the boat over the eddy line before then bringing our trim further forwards to sink the nose into the eddy to experience that recirculating flow in the eddy. So yeah, depending on the paddler and the environment obviously trying to start off in an appropriate environment, paddlers can achieve the whole range of an S turn of core white water manoeuvres whether that be S turns or ferry glides, but purely using forward strokes rather than any sort of fancy paddle angling skills.

Georgina Maxwell: 15:37 So sometimes there's an awful lot of stuff having to go into building someone's journey within once they start taking okay this is a performance sport, now I need to build these skills which is exactly what you're talking about and this might be a deep question and it might be a reflective question based on your own journey as well, how can the paddler really build that intuition so that the ability to just do the right thing at the right time. Is it just the thousand-hour theory? is it deeper than that? Or can we accelerate that somehow for the learner so that they can get there sooner?

Ollie Sandeman: I think again it's progression based on outcomes.

Ollie Sandeman: So if someone's I think often based in North Wales, I'm lucky that I get people traveling quite long distances to me and we're lucky in North Wales the fact that we've got fairly reliable white water, although it doesn't seem that way at the moment with the Dee being so low, but we got the Dee and the Tryweryn, whereas a lot of paddlers won't have that luxury. They might be using just a small little bit of flow at the run out of moving water at all. However, a lot of the exercises I might give where we're doing zigzags, for example, and it's the same thing. You're building momentum towards one side of the river bank and you're trying to generate that turn without doing lots of turning strokes purely through, even linking back to concepts like body boat blades.

Ollie Sandeman: Get changing the shape of the boat to achieve that outcome. And as soon as we're starting to promote those core behaviours, we can start to experiment in flow. However, I think once people are able there's a reason why momentum is at the front the core and the first part of that process is paddlers will benefit hugely on moving water being able to drive their boat and being able to generate that momentum.

Ollie Sandeman: whether you've got the luxury of a massive eddy, a small eddy, being able to have that relative speed required to reduce the amount of pressure that they're experiencing on the boat. So, an example I guess there's ways that we can amplify it. For example, I would be confident that with the right management and the right placement of myself, I could take a novice across a lake in a force four wind with very little existing skill. All they'd need to be able to do is forward paddling. I'd

need to set that up correctly to make sure that their trim was in the right place and so on.

Ollie Sandeman: However, actually with me sort of front loading and just making sure that their boat's set up correctly and they've got a good forward paddling stroke, they'll soon experience the fact that despite it being a moderate plus environment of a strong force 4, actually what all they need to do is paddle forwards because everything else has been set up for success. So there are ways we can amplify it and move that journey on quickly. But again, it just comes back to the right sort of safety structure in order to do that appropriately and making sure that it's an environment that the student is happy to be in. we're not taking them out of their comfort zone and knocking their confidence. it's learner focused strategies.

Georgina Maxwell: 19:40 Yeah. Nice.

Georgina Maxwell: I was going to ask you about going to remote places, with clients and you're out there, aren't you? And there is a lovely podcast early on actually about sort of that risk side of things. But for instance, what core skills does somebody need just to do. How long was your blood vein river?

Ollie Sandeman: 20:04 we were on the river for 12 and a half days. Typically, I think that's quite a nice period of time. One you can undertake quite a serious expedition. But people often struggle to take any more time out of their working lives or home lives than that.

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah, there is that.

Georgina Maxwell: But my question would be, there's various factors when it comes to a 13-day expedition with somebody...

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah. Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: who might be off the coach, straight into a canoe for 13 days. But that aside, the psychological aspect aside them core skills that need to be fairly consistent to be able to do a trip like that. what are they?

Ollie Sandeman: So, it's for a moving water trip, it comes back being able to generate that momentum and carry that speed in laterals in order to get over to

where you need to be. the blood vein trip we've just been on the river was 164 cubic m per second when we got on. The usual sort of level is about 60 I think. so it wasn't the type of paddling you really experience over here especially in the seam lines and the boils it was just huge.

Ollie Sandeman: So being able to drive your boat was an essential core skill. What you did when you got to the eddy wasn't so important. You were in the right place and out of danger. But yeah it's being able to drive that boat. And if they don't have that ability then obviously we'd be portaging or lining around those rapids. But yeah, I think it's the previous two expeditions in Canada that I've led which both are moving water is rather than slowing things down, it's the ability to drive that craft.

Georgina Maxwell: 22:12 Nice. Yeah.

Georgina Maxwell: So, I'm going to move on to sort of my second part of the question and we have been very canoe focused even though you're trying not to identify as a canoeist. yes. So, I have a friend up here in Scotland who is a canoeist and a kayaker, and he's incredibly good in a kayak, and I can see the foundations of his canoeing through woven between his kayaking skills. So, I'm wondering, and if you're able to help me answer this, what has kayaking or what is multi-disciplinary paddling different crafts taught you about each different discipline?

Georgina Maxwell: See what I'm trying to ask? Yeah. What a great

Ollie Sandeman: Mhm. Yeah.

Ollie Sandeman: 22:54 Yeah. Yeah. So I started my journey in kayak paddling a pyrhana sub 70 in the Italian Alps on the Dora Baltea whilst I was working for Acorn Adventure. So yeah, it was very, very much kayak start and it wasn't until I went to the Aadesh that I was like, "this canoeing is not too bad" but yes, I do do both. and when I was at Plas y Brenin, I'd be having the luxury of going for a DY, down, the Ferry Glenn and so I still do paddle kayak a high level. and the thing I think has it's really sort of taught me is you can't be quite as reactive in a canoe.

Ollie Sandeman: It takes a little bit more time to sort of think and visually map that journey of where you need to go to make sure that one, your 16ft boat or whatever size boat you're paddling can fit into the eddy a little bit more tactical line choice in

order to make sure that you're not going to swamp and So, I guess it's even in kayaking when I first started in comparison to how it is now, the thing that I'm constantly searching for is the ability to slow things down in that environment. Slowing things down and reducing the amount of strokes that are required.

Ollie Sandeman: And if I can link strokes and maintain sort of active blade pressure throughout, then that's ultimately what I'm trying to search for. And there is a huge amount of parallels between my canoeing and my kayaking. I've what I think is quite a sort of modern approach to the white water canoeing that I'm doing. taking big boats into silly places. but yeah, there's a lot of parallels there of carrying that momentum, searching for that glide phase, reducing the amount of strokes. but everything the start of this podcast has been talking about their parallels that I think about. but also I try and get my clients to think about regardless of what boat they're paddling.

Georgina Maxwell: 25:14 Yeah. Nice.

Georgina Maxwell: So, presumably I don't know. do you paddle grade four in a canoe?

Ollie Sandeman: Yes

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah. I'm going to say presumably there's a top out for canoe. So grade three plus into certain fours maybe, but kayaking grade four, grade five, h if we're thinking about the environment, how them two interlink with your approach to white water if it's in a canoe or a kayak, what are the parallels there? And does it continue through to the higher grades with the white water kayaking?

Ollie Sandeman: I think it's just like anything isn't it? The more time you spend in that environment, the more time you have to think. The one people often describe is driving a car. The first time you drive a car, it It's scary. Everything's coming at you at a million miles an hour and then after a while you're playing with a radio and so on and it's exactly the same on white water. There you got to have the right craft. So not that long ago paddled an athon down the Ogwen which is grade three four but it's a boat that's been designed for that. Outside of that, it's often a grade four in isolation where it might be a pool drop rather than continuous white water and even then you'll get questions of why aren't you paddling a boat that's a bit more appropriate to that

an OC1 a proper boat a kayak that's usually the answer but yeah I think it's just more time in that environment I'm very lucky I'm close to the Tryweryn and I'm gonna say it of course because I'm quite close to it but I think even now in my paddling there's value in me going out and on a day off and playing around in that environment. There's always something a new move to try or a challenge that a friend has set. And that's the only way that I'll continue to try and sort of progress my own sort of paddling and continue taking canoes to silly places really.

Georgina Maxwell: what else are you thinking for silly places to take a canoe?

Ollie Sandeman: 27:24 One that I've always looked at is the Glaslyn and taking a canoe down the Glaslyn. that would be definitely high up on my list. But the paddler, you mentioned Liam Green. I'm assuming that's Liam and...

Georgina Maxwell: I didn't mention his name actually but he quite correctly

Ollie Sandeman: Liam and I have got a course planned later on in the year which is aimed at sort of a grade three paddler. But whilst I'm up there, I'm definitely going to be putting a couple of extra days to go and paddle something with Liam and...

Ollie Sandeman: and where it takes us. continually trying to sort of push things as much as I can without breaking boats because, everyone knows how much a brand new, shining canoe is at the moment.

Georgina Maxwell: So, moving on to I think the final question but if you were Ollie now and you were the coach to Ollie starting out, how would you coach starting out and what would you share?

Georgina Maxwell: What knowledge and what would you build on early in young Ollie's like paddling

Ollie Sandeman: From a canoe perspective, I think I was that typical sort of young kayaker being like, canoes are for someone that can't kayak anymore. I definitely had that attitude. But I think I'd really like to try and find a way that I could attract more a younger audience to canoeing. I know that there are obviously younger people paddling, but I think since Acorn and PGL and places like that, the knock-on effect of Brexit, you don't really see that younger audience coming through apart

from through maybe, some clubs and outward bound. But canoes are so versatile you can sail it you can go on multi-day.

Ollie Sandeman: Expeditions. You can paddle it on grade four once you get up to that stage. It's something that I recommend everyone go and try. So, have patience with it and don't try and shake off that sort of stigma of the old boring craft because it's definitely not and for a kayak perspective, I think it' be again just trying to slow things down in the environment. Less is often more. Don't just think you have to muscle your way through the rapids.

Ollie Sandeman: Take your time to watch and just look and see the way the water behaves and use that information to your advantage and trying to achieve that outcome with minimal strokes.

Georgina Maxwell: And how exciting is canoeing on the sea?

Ollie Sandeman: 30:17 So, there's been a bit of an appetite recently and yeah, there's been quite a few people advertising some canoe stuff on the sea and again, you'll often get the sort of response of there's far more appropriate craft to be doing that sort of thing. But again, you pick your conditions and as long as you got the right conditions for it, it's brilliant. And again, it just shows the versatility of the craft. And canoes have been paddling on the sea for a very long time. It's just something that, we don't do a huge amount of over here. but again, I think that's been the really nice thing about the coastal canoe courses I've been doing recently.

Ollie Sandeman: It's often paddlers that have been paddling for a very long time and it's opening up their eyes to an environment that's completely new to them. And if that leads into more canoeing trips or them looking at sea kayaking with a different pair of glasses on, then it makes me happy. And yeah, it's definitely something that I'm going to be continuing to.

Georgina Maxwell: 31:27 Good job.

Georgina Maxwell: So, if there's anywhere you said the last question ages ago, but this is the last question. Is there any canoe trip that you could go on?

Georgina Maxwell: Where would you go? Is there something that you dream of? Or was that your dream? I'm done. Retire.

Ollie Sandeman: It's difficult now because I've got two trips to Canada this year. I've just been to the Blood Vein and I'm about to go to Quetico. Hopefully the fires sort of calm down a little bit, but I've got a trip with Spaces, a bit of a plug there with Josh Telling in September. And my time is limited really having two young kids and a wife but yeah, Canada is obviously one that I'm going to keep going back to because the environment whether it's Boreal or Taiga there's just so much to do over there but I would like to go somewhere like Mongolia and...

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah,

Ollie Sandeman: do a bit of canoeing over there. I know there's a few people that have been advertising trips there recently or certain places in China or maybe when it calms down a little bit, Russia.

Georgina Maxwell: You could save all of these amazing trips for the kids. I just had my two-year-old, first ever time in a canoe and she managed 10 kilometres. We were nearly two hours, she was sat in that boat just like prodding in the water with a paddle.

Ollie Sandeman: Amazing.

Georgina Maxwell: So yeah.

Ollie Sandeman: The first trip I did in Canada was to the Algonquin and we were quite remote and we just done a 5 kilometre portage with composite boats and the group were all pretty knackered after that understandably.

Georgina Maxwell: Amazing. Yeah.

Ollie Sandeman: And then we're sat having a break and then suddenly a family rock up and there's a mum who's got a 60 litre barrel on her back and a one and a half year old on her front and she just puts this child down and changes the nappy like nothing of it and yeah I just said to her, I was like, I take my hat off to you and she was like they don't know any different. So yeah, it's definitely yeah, something that as soon as I can, I'll be taking the kids out there for sure.

Georgina Maxwell: 33:54 Amazing.

Ollie Sandeman: But I don't know how they do about the bugs, though. But there we are.

Georgina Maxwell: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Anyway...

Ollie Sandeman: Yeah. No problem.

Georgina Maxwell: thank you so much, You've been an absolute star. Giving up your time, giving up all of that chat. So, thank you. We really appreciate it.

Ollie Sandeman: Like I say, yeah, nice to be asked and hopefully my jet lagged waffle made sense and there was some useful input in that chat for people to take away and think about.