

Lee Pooley 00:00:14

Hi. Welcome everyone to British Canoeing Awarding Body Coaching Podcast. My name's Lee Pooley and I'm the Director of Coaching and Qualifications. Absolutely delighted today to be joined by Ian Wynne. Ian, thanks very much for taking the time out to spend some time chatting to us today.

Ian Wynne 00:00:33

My pleasure.

Lee Pooley 00:00:35

Ian I think what's really important right from the very beginning is probably if you introduce yourself to the listeners, give us give something, give the listeners a bit of background to who you are and a bit of how you how you've come to where you have done in sport.

Ian Wynne 00:00:53

Sure. So as you said, my name's Ian Wynne and I've been around the world of canoeing for a very long time now, which makes me sounds older than I like to think I am. And I guess most of that time is spent in the world of sprint kayaking or flat water racing. That's kind of my specialty in terms of where I ended up focusing my efforts and energies and started my journey long time back at little Old Tunbridge Canoe Club in Kent.

And I think in some ways that kind of directed where I spent most of my time in terms of paddling environments, because the water there is just a river it's very flat most of the time. We were very fortunate that we got exposed to a bit of slalom, flat water slalom or during the wintertime, when the river was sort of running in or draining out, that sort of thing.

And we did a bit of surf as kids and all that sort of thing. So fair, fairly wide range of environments as a young paddler. But as I developed, it was more into the sprint and the flat water race, and that's where we sort of honed my particular skill set. And but I also came from a background of swimming that was my primary sport, canoeing was is always a bit of an add on.

I was just following my older brother really in the canoeing world and, and it was something else to do. But as a, as a up to probably the age of 18, 19, I was a competitive swimmer, very keen on it and moderately good and sort of national standards. And I think that that shaped a lot of my perception of training and I guess I only realised this later when you look back on your journey, but it really framed up for me the control and the precision and the timing of your training, because swimming, as you know, is you're in a controlled environment.

You know, pools differ, definitely, you know, you get nicer pools and slower pools and the rest of it, but it's the same time all the time. And you repeat it over and over again and you've got a really good closed feedback between what you're doing and what's coming out. So from an athlete's development that that shaped a lot in my early years and I was fortunate enough to progress through my journey as a young athlete and race for GB as a junior level, this is as a kayaker, world championships moderately good nothing exceptional.

And I knew I had a long term vision for my training, so I actually backed off as a junior and didn't sort of dive straight into the senior level. I saw that journey as being a lot of people would sort of fall by the wayside, even sort of back in those early days. And so I went off and studied psychology as a degree.

And as I was finishing my degree, I decided to put my energy back into racing and really attack the racing scene. And I decided in my degree, I had one year to go, 100% full out with training and see how good I could get. And after that, I'd have to go and get a job and do do normal stuff.

And that year took me to British number one in the K1 500 metre race and set me on a path of racing at two Olympic Games at the end of the day and then coming home from Athens with a bronze medal in 2004. So that one year of trying it flat out turned into quite a lot more. About six years of international....eight years of international racing.

Lee Pooley 00:04:23

Exceptional story that Ian and and yeah when your when your career as an athlete started to sort of taper off is what what did you do after that?

Ian Wynne 00:04:36

I'd always intended to come back and coach to some degree or give back to the sport in some degree, because I felt quite a strong connection to the sport. I felt it moved me as an individual from where I could have been to where I ended up. So there was always that intention. But I again, I, I guess I have this long term vision.

I knew I didn't want to go straight from being an athlete to being a coach. You know, you get off the water one day and you're cycling or walking along the bank the next day, and I knew I needed a bit more perspective on life. And it was time to give back a little bit to the family as well. So I really stepped away.

My wife's a chiropractor, so we went to open up our own chiropractic clinic and manage that. That was my role. I was doing lots of study as an athlete as well to further my education. So it wasn't just the psychology degree, it wasn't just the raw experience. I was training in strength and conditioning and lifestyle management and pursued at the time some very advanced strength and conditioning programmes from something called the Czech Institute under guidance of Paul Czech in America.

So I needed to round my education before coming back to to coaching. So I wasn't just an athlete. In fact, I was actually doing I had an in-house practical course, I think it was ten days after the Athens Olympics, because I was actually going on a course with Paul Czech himself and I remember doing the prerequisites to submit and pass some prerequisites, when I was at the Olympic Village in Athens, so furiously typing away on my computer, trying to get these modules passed beforehand.

And, but so once I'd done that, got this rounded education, I was actually pulled sort of back into the coaching team, back into developing with the British team. At the time, the performance director asked me to come back and provide some insight into the coaching and so that helped move that forward. You felt it was a bit stuck in where it was and so I was very honored to come back and coach for the British team at all levels, senior under 23 and junior level for most of the next eight

years or so, and trying to move people sort of beyond just the basic trying hard and provide that insight.

Lee Pooley 00:06:57

One of the you know, many of our discussions that we've had and this is what we're focusing on in this podcast on today is around Train Smarter, but I think it'd be really good to to to understand what you mean by train smarter Ian. It's easy enough to say isn't it?

Ian Wynne 00:07:14

It is. And I think we realised very early on when I was an athlete, our coaching motto with my coaches at the time, Trevor Hunter and Eric Farrell working with us there, was that that was their motto was Train Smarter. Like any frankly anybody can train hard. And there was plenty of examples of people absolutely beasting in themselves working incredibly hard but not getting very far.

And yet when you're racing against the best in the world, you can really see the difference between those that just try hard and those that are doing something different, something significant. So we really set about trying to understand the demands of the events that we were trying to specialize in at that elite level and unpick it. Look at the gaps that we had as individuals and be very honest to ourselves about what were those gaps and try and close that gap.

I mean, that's essentially the essence of it is what do you need to do? Where where am I? And what's what can we work on to do that and not be afraid of tearing up, I guess the the traditions of what other people have been doing in order to make some of those leaps. And and so the question always comes down to and you would have heard this across many different sports and other sort of areas, but in our particular context is well, is that going to make me faster? Will it make the boat go faster potentially? You know, is it going to help me achieve in my mind, K1 500 metre time that I had or the 4000 metres, which is what I sort of specialised in in the early days or the K 2000 and understand the requirements. What am I doing?

Is it going to help or is it actually going to hinder what we're doing? We see a lot of a lot of time wasted in training, doing things aren't actually moving you forwards. And and obviously in the context of this discussion, my experiences are about that performance and about a very focused performance on a particular event. But the principles apply across any any discipline, any event, any, any target you're trying to do, break it down into what you need to do that some are easier than others and look at the gaps and work out how you can fill those gaps.

Lee Pooley 00:09:30

Yeah, you know, I'm really pleased you mention that, because although our focus will be around, you know, the background that you've got obviously within flat water sprint, there are so many disciplines that can can benefit from this podcast and actually just considering how do we actually train smarter, how do we get faster, how do we make the boat go faster?

Or how do we if we save a certain amount of time or so? Yeah, although this conversation is going to be based around and you're probably going to give some examples within it. I think for everyone, this is about, you know, anyone could anyone apply these principles.

Ian Wynne 00:10:12

It's exactly that. It's the principle. So it's not a menu. You don't just take pieces off the menu and apply it. It's the understanding, the principles of what you're trying to achieve and applying those in your context. So, you know, I said I started my life in swimming and I think that's what I learned was the principle of pace management because it is very closed environment.

You get feedback every single time you turn in a swimming pool, there's a big clock up on the wall and it tells you how many seconds it's been since you were last there. So every single effort you do, you can regulate your effort versus the speed that's coming out. And I sort of honed into that and I was very good at judging how fast I could go or how much effort to apply during a swim session to achieve a particular time.

And I translated that skill from swimming into kayaking. Now there's way more environmental influences when you're in the boat, you've got the water temperature, you've got the flow, you've got the weather conditions, the winds, all of these different matters that you don't have in a swimming pool. But the principle is the same. You know, if I needed to race a 500 metres and I needed to do it in 1:36 to win the race, which was sort of the target time for Athens, then I knew I had to do each hundred metres in 19.2 seconds, and then I'd go out and I practice that and I'd do it so many times that you had a good sense of how much harder you have to go to maintain that speed during the effort with enough environmental exposures that you can accommodate a bit of wind, a bit of flow, a bit of heat, a bit of cold. So you build up this sort of mental model of effort versus output.

Lee Pooley 00:11:58

You make a lot of references to data and information. And so the question I have and hopefully some of the listeners are thinking this as well, is, so why is it important to obtain data and how do we as coaches know what data is important? Because I would imagine you could collect a whole raft of data, but actually is it of use?

Ian Wynne 00:12:24

Well, yeah. And that is one of the biggest challenges to training smarter is not is using the right data to inform your decisions. Yeah. And maybe in the early days you collect everything and you learn over time that actually this is irrelevant. Just get rid of it. Let's not focus on that anymore, but sometimes you don't know what's relevance until after the event and you look back and you can go, Oh, okay.

Yes, this is actually quite key information, but it just happens to be. And we used to do sessions on a Thursday and a Friday at the end of the week, which were really high intensity sessions. And we were logging this stuff and we were going, Well, hang on a minute, why? We're not always performing these very well. And it's because we were fatigued.

So if we put them at the start of the week and we were recovered, then, you know, we'd do them better. Sounds logical, but sometimes when you don't see that pattern occurring week after week after week because you're not recording it, these things don't jump out or it doesn't help inform that

decision. And I think I think that's why it's important to collect data essentially, because as you know, and I'm sure all coaches are aware of this, we're very good at kidding ourselves, athletes massively good at this.

You always want to sort of make yourself feel better or you can work in the negative as well. You know, we can be biased against ourselves sometimes subjectively. Coaches can be very biased subjectively in a positive or negative way. So for me, the data provides an objective feedback into that decision making process to keep you, keep you orientated in your decision and your discussions with the athlete or with yourself, the coaching yourself, what you're planning for yourself.

It's some methods to keep you honest and keep you bringing you back to the core point to what you're trying to do and not letting some of those biases lead you away from where you need to be.

Lee Pooley 00:15:04

Yeah, that's just just really interesting you say that because, you know, I think we are all in that. We are all in that sort of area aren't we. We, we tend to practice what we're good at.

And you know, but actually when you are talking about data and evidence you have to go with the evidence that's in front of you. And you talk about, you talk about collecting data over a period. So are you suggesting that, you know, that coaches start to look for patterns within that data?

Ian Wynne 00:15:09

Yeah, absolutely. And this is why in some ways, you collect whatever you can as often as you can, because you don't know and sometimes you don't know how useful it's going to be until much later down the line. Now, later on, maybe we discuss some some specifics around this. But for instance, when I was coaching, I would try, again sprint context here, but we would we would do a standard session and let's say it was six 1000 metre races in K-1 and we would pretty much do that every single week of the year, a few weeks out for when you travel into competition or it's not the right thing because of a particular an event.

But essentially you do that as often as you can throughout the year on a regular basis. So you have a you have a reference point, a benchmark you can come back to and look at. Now that might not make much sense if you just do it for one year or one month or two months. But if you do it for several years in a run long term plan and again, you know that your athletes are generally, say, February and March time, they're say 10% slower than they are in April time or in July time.

And that's when they're actually at their peak. So you can see how effective your training is. Have they moved the dial on their February 2000 metres time trials? Are they faster this year than they were last year? And therefore, something is improving and you can refer back to your training to see what that might be. But if you have a regular consistent benchmarking session in there, you have it, you have a reference point and it doesn't have to be flat out when we're doing these things.

When we talk about data collection, it doesn't have to be an absolute all out efforts a time trial necessarily it just needs to be a regular consistent event that you can log.

Lee Pooley 00:17:05

So some benchmarking. Yeah, some benchmarking is critical in terms of the during this data collection period, you've got to have some form of benchmarking. You know, identified somewhere within that.

Ian Wynne 00:17:53

Yeah. And I think a lot of coaches will recognise that and they do that probably already in terms of club time trials. For instance, in, in the sprint racing world of the marathon racing world, a lot of places have their their club time trial and have records going back a long, long time. They can refer back to.

As an athlete, you can reference that yourself, you know, the guys from sort of a decade ago and you have that sort of database, there of knowledge. But I would recommend doing that and doing it on an event which is useful for you that you are training towards as well. So potentially it wouldn't help you to go into a necessarily wouldn't help you to go and do a 20 mile bike ride as your benchmark session.

If you're trying to be a, you know, trying to be a K1 athlete, it'll give you information, but it might not give you the information you can use to refine your training.

Lee Pooley 00:18:15

Okay. Apecific to what you are that you're wanting to compete in?

Ian Wynne 00:18:56

It's specific to the skill you're trying to develop. Okay. So, you know, so you might have multiples of these and you flex them a little bit around the time of year, but again, it is will it make the body go faster? Will it help me? Will it give me information that feeds into this discussion around what skills do I need to develop to do well in this particular task?

And depending on your task, you know, your skill set and training and what event you're trying to train for as to which skills do you need to focus on?

Lee Pooley 00:18:55

Okay. Well, I'm thinking of some of the conversations I've had in the past with with coaches and athletes is that there could be a nervousness or reluctance to, to use metrics. Yeah. Do you have any advice on setting the appropriate climate for for them to use it?

Ian Wynne 00:19:18

Yeah. It can be scary I think because it is this objective feedback and you know, both as an athlete, you might not want to have in their face all the time, you know, sometimes they get a bit nervous about not performing or as a coach potentially you're getting feedback that this wide variety of

sessions that you're doing and all these different impacts you're trying to have maybe hasn't moved someone far enough forward.

But I think if you can always for me personally, it's removing the ego from the situation in the past many times about ego less coaching. So you're not trying to it's not about you, it's not about the outcome necessary. It's about the athlete and you trying to remove the ego, remove the judgment. And it is as simple as that is just feedback, that real application of the scientific method, you know, you think go the pure scientist, they're just doing an experiment, gathering data and then reporting on the outcome.

It sounds a lot easier than it is to do, but if you can set it up right with your athlete or your training group that you know, the reason we've got the clock on this, the reason we're monitoring these things is to help refine the feedback and ultimately we're going to inform that individual's mental model. And so when I first when I spoke about the swimming and the controlled distances in efforts, essentially what I was doing was building a mental model every single stroke, every single length of effort versus outcome.

So your athletes are doing that regardless of what feedback you're giving them, they're always doing it. So if they're doing that with a subjective or biased or non accurate information, they're building the wrong mental model, which is going to impede their performance when it really comes under the scrutiny of a competition or a particular task or challenge. So it's kind of the athlete is going to be uncomfortable maybe, but they require that honest information to build the right mental model and move past that awkward bit.

And the coach needs that to give the honest information as well to it to help frame that. And if you can remove the judgment, it doesn't matter if you're 10 seconds slower today or 20 seconds or 5 seconds, even though you're going harder, it gives you a useful point of conversation to explore in that really good coach athlete discussion.

So why? Why was it slow today? Let's have a look, water temperature could be colder, wind could be this. Maybe you didn't. Your technique wasn't as good. Maybe you didn't come to the session as prepared as last time. Conversely, actually, today, you're 10 seconds quicker. That's amazing. What have we done in the last week? Or maybe we've done nothing, but it's just a nice tailwind tonight so you're going faster!

Lee Pooley 00:22:18

Yeah, yeah. There's a couple of questions I've got from that. Is there is a there is a possibility in that if the if the results aren't coming through that you as a coach or an athlete that you want, you could look for justifications why. Which which is sometimes not useful. It it's almost going well there's a reason why I'm not and actually it may not actually be that truthful.

That and like you said, you know, you have to be really honest and sometimes brutal with yourself in terms of, you know, sometimes the evidence isn't exactly what you want to see, but it is the is the data.

Ian Wynne 00:23:44

It is the data. And if you can do it in this non-judgmental team, real team, in the purest aspect, is you and the athlete or you and the group around you working together to achieve an outcome that's your role as a coach and it's to support someone to achieve an objective and outcome. Essentially, there's all sorts of definitions and the rest of it that you're helping someone move from A to B, and if you're not giving them and they're not hearing or seeing that sort of line down the middle, the objectivity of it, you're not actually helping them move forwards.

And so there's good ways and there's bad ways around doing it. And I'm sure, I'm sure we've all got it wrong. Many times, but ultimately the person doing the sport, they are trying to refine this sense of input and output in terms of what they put it into something and what's the outcome from that in the environment. And if they're not getting the right information, they're going to be building the wrong model.

They're going to be building the wrong mental construct for them.

Lee Pooley 00:24:11

Yeah, yeah. No really, really sound advice there Ian. And as you, as you were talking earlier about, you know, you know, creating the appropriate climate for for data collection, I was thinking about, you know, what's your thoughts on how early you introduce data collection? You know, because if people are people are used to it at the early stages, then if it doesn't, it's not sprung on them. I don't know what your thoughts are.

Ian Wynne 00:25:23

So I completely agree. I mean, I think as early as possible because it becomes just part of the environment you're in. And then this will vary massively between the particular environments you're in terms of a club or the athletes or the particular sport you're trying to do. But there's very few things we do in life where we don't actually have some sort of feedback, some sort of objective feedback, some sort of metrics anyway.

And it can be as simple as a weekly time trial or a weekly time trial is probably the wrong word just because those very words tends to put people off. But a weekly sort of recording, you know, even if it's a non maximal 3000 metre paddles that sort of takes, you know, 20 minutes or something like that. But you're doing it at the same intensity.

You can see if you're getting quicker or something as easy as possible. How many strokes does it take you to cover? 100 metres, for instance? Yes. So some, you know, difference. How many how many how many strokes can you do in that distance and how few strokes can you do in that distance so you can assess the power per stroke?

It doesn't have to be a flat out time trial, but just something environmentally challenging or stimulating to build that feedback loop for the athlete. And obviously we haven't discussed it at all. We're just talking about concepts, but it's so easy now with technology to record something as simple as heart rate on sessions. Different people have different ideas of the usefulness of it or the distance you've traveled.

You know, when you watch or the speed or the time it takes you, it's so easy. Just to put that on. And you've got something you've captured already. Rather than doing a year's worth of training and having nothing to show for it on paper.

Lee Pooley 00:26:34

Yeah. And as you, you know the examples you give in that actually with what's now readily available on the everyday market is these, these, these monitors are actually very readily available and actually do most of the data collection for you don't they.

Ian Wynne 00:26:53

Yeah. Yeah. It's so simple now and you know cost effective as well. I mean, you can spend thousands of pounds on the highest end watch, but to be honest, those are some of the cheapest ones you can get, just as is useful for collecting something. And it's the most basic would be time and distance for most people. I guess in the context we're talking about how long are you out in the water for and how far have you covered?

Heart rates always interesting to some degree, simple things like that. And even just tracking at the earliest stages, just tracking. Sounds like a school with tracking attendance. Yeah. How often in a week or a month are you coming down and doing a session and this huge correlations between obviously just consistency of turning up versus some of the specifics of what you do.

So if you turn up consistently day after day after day, month after month, you're probably more likely than someone that turns up does an amazing session, doesn't come back for a few weeks. You know, so just being able to look at that at the end of the year and say, oh, yes, these people, 90% attendance. Amazing. This person all over the place.

Lee Pooley 00:28:07

Yeah, that's just some really valuable sort of things for, for everyone to consider that's listening actually you know it does obviously vary to to the person doesn't it. And what's readily available but actually some really interesting concepts. Ian before we before we wrap up I'm going to I'm going to I'm going to push you actually, I'm going to ask you, what are your five Top Tips to coaches on gain in and use in data for athlete development? You're only allowed five.

Ian Wynne 00:28:44

Okay, so first off, start recording now. Whatever you're doing, record something with your athletes, even if it is just that they're turning up. So sometimes you don't know what data you need until you have it there and you don't want to be a year down the line. Have an insight of yes, I really understand this now and I haven't recorded it for a year, you know, six months of training it we have lost so much data over the course of the last 20 years of people's training.

And we had some amazing athletes doing amazing things and there's just very little of that actually we can capture and use and help other people from their information. So start recording now,

Second one I think comes back to doing something consistently over and over and over again. So your benchmark session, whatever that might be. One thing that you could do and you can refer back to hopefully more than one thing, but a benchmark session you can refer back to if you keep changing it every week, if you keep recording different things, you've got nothing to actually compare back to.

Keep it simple. There is an overwhelming amount of data you can collect, as we said at the start. But keep it simple. It doesn't have to be really, really complicated. You can just do it on a pen and paper and technology makes it easier now to capture it. I used to cycle around the regatta lake timing all my athletes every single 20 metres, write it down on a pen and paper that I had attached to the front of my bike, with a clipboard on the front of the bike and I'll just scribble notes as I cycled along and then type them up later and all the rest of it.

But keep it simple. Or else you won't do it. And there are technologies that make it simpler now potentially. And I guess going along with that, leading on from that, it'll be a separate point, but don't get too bogged down in the details. You look for long term trends. So if someone is X amount slower this week compared to last week or lifts 10% more or moves a different way, don't worry about that one instance.

It could just be an outlier. It could be the conditions look for where we're on the long term journey with these athletes and look for long term trends there. Analyze over weeks and months and years.

Lee Pooley 00:31:18

Was that your fourth?

Ian Wynne 00:31:19

That's the fourth one, I think. I think the last one I might have to sneak an extra bit in. The last one is you don't have to be perfect as a coach. We're just like athletes. We are athletes and our sport is coaching. So we're developing as well. So you don't have to have your whole system set up, doesn't have to be perfect from day one.

You're learning this, you're trying it out and your team with your athletes and let's develop it together. In fact, you know, most of them might have more skills and insights in this area than you do. So lean on that and work it out together and grow and develop it. My little anecdote on that, my coach, when I was training, he wasn't the best at data and stopwatches and stuff and I kind of was as the athlete.

I knew my timing very well, like I said, from the swimming days. So I could do a time trial, finish my time trial. He would ask me what time it was and I'd be within a fraction of a second of what the actual time was. And often sometimes he got it wrong. And I'm like, No, no, I know you didn't start the watch.

I know you made a mistake on the go and you didn't want to say, you know, because I got a sense for it. And that happens, you know, sometimes the watch doesn't start. Sometimes you press the wrong button, just own up to it. You don't be perfect and just move on.

Lee Pooley 00:32:43

Wow. Okay. Some really top tips there. And I think what sprung to mind when you were when you were talking then is I think although although the focus and the conversation was around training smarter is certainly an element of coach smarter as well isn't it?

Ian Wynne 00:33:03

Absolutely. Like I say, I, I like to see everything is the same, same principles as an athlete, you know, we're just a coach and our sport is coaching. Yeah. So it's a treat yourself as you would treat your athletes, you know, make a plan about yourself, make what you develop in there. Where's your skill now? Where do you want to get to close the gap?

You know, and work on yourself as you would work on your athletes and expect sort of the same as well?

Lee Pooley 00:34:26

Well, Ian, thanks very much. As I said, you know, you've taken time out of your busy schedule to to record this podcast and really appreciate your time. And think would be good to just tell the listeners now that, you know, we are currently working on a on a on a resource aren't we that for people to be able to access around the train smarter aspects and you know the elements of actually using using mechanisms to capture data and what you do with that.

So that's something to look out for in the new year and yeah. Yeah. Many thanks again and really appreciate your your time today. Thank you.

Ian Wynne 00:34:16

It's my pleasure. Thank you.