

Document No	DN-0011	Version	1
		Approved by board	26/09/2019
Pillar Area	Development	Scheduled review date	2021

INTRODUCTION

The Legend of Qu Yuan – why we beat the drums during dragon boat races

The Tuen Ng (*Dragon Boat Festival*) traditionally commemorates a heroic gesture and a tragic event, which took place in ancient China more than 2000 years ago.

The government of the Kingdom of Chu was a corrupt one, and after jealous rivals falsely accused him of treason, a well-loved statesman, warrior and poet, 'Qu Yuan' (*pronounced Chu Ywan*), was banished. In despair and, perhaps as a final act of protest against the government, he threw himself into the Mi Lo River and drowned.

The Chinese people have never forgotten this desperate heroic act and when fishermen raced their boats to recover his body before it could be devoured by fish (**beating drums** and throwing rice dumplings into the river to distract them) they founded a tradition that continues to this day.

Each year, on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month (*usually June*) crews of competitors re-enact that frantic rush to save Qu Yuan, by powering long narrow boats with the ferocious heads of dragons mounted on the prow through the water, **to the frenzied, rhythmic beating of drums**. It is not known how the dragon boat prow came into being, but it is thought that over the years, they were added to ward off evil water spirits. This probably arose because the combination of the 5th lunar numbers is thought to be a bad omen and dragon boat races held, at this time, would ward off evil spirits; protect the health of the people and ensure a good crop each year.



The drummer serves a vital role on a dragon boat team. They are the 'pulse' or 'drumbeat' of the team.

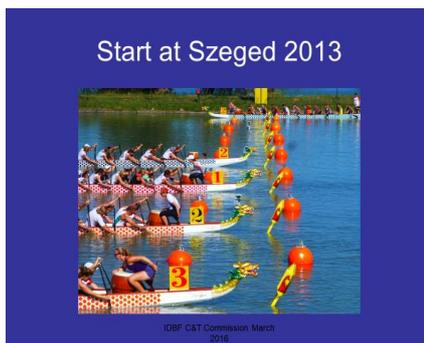
1. Overview

- The role of both Drummer and Steerer and their skills are essential elements of any dragon boat team's performance
- Many clubs focus only on putting the lightest person on the drummers seat without consideration to the skills and benefit an experience drummer can bring to the team
- Race calls should be scripted, which are understood by paddlers and communicated by drummers and steerers at crucial times with a controlled tone of voice
- Drummer must be knowledgeable and confident to elicit the teams trust and response. The best drummers have studied, gained wide experience, relate to paddlers pain, know the racing rules and regulations and understand technique



2. Working together Head & Tail

- A good drummer is worth their (light)weight in gold
- Drummers and Steerers must work together as a team. They become as much a part of the crew as any paddler and in many cases, more irreplaceable. The best crews have drummers and sweeps who work together, understand each other's expressions and gestures – they often have a signal system which they communicate front to back. Depending on experience and knowledge one may be chosen to lead and the other follow.
- Drummers provide support to the steerer and the paddlers
- Drummers communicate with the crew by relaying the commands of the steerer
- A drummer must understand the race plan, work with the crews to follow it and sets the tone for the entire boat.
- Common perception is that you want your drummer to pump people up and get them motivated, but what you really need is someone to calm the team down and maintain the team's focus. There is no lack of excitement on race day, especially with a competitive crew.
- At the start line, the drummer keeps the team focused, relaxed and their heads in the boat during what can often be a chaotic moment of lining up multiple boats.
- Drummers work with the paddlers to keep the rhythm and timing, change pace as required throughout the race – Start, transition to race pace, lift, take it home
- Drummer will work with the steerers to help line the boat up on the start line. Different techniques may be called for in the instance of a free start, pontoons or automatic gates



3. Drummer's profile

- The drummer should be light weight
- Have a personality
- Possess race experience
- Ability to project the voice (without yelling and high-pitched trills) – ideally in deep, calm and controlled tones
- Confidence to echo the steerers calls
- Possess tactical knowledge
- Motivational skills are essential
- good balance and core strength
- Ability to Multi-task - watching the steerer and paddlers while keeping good rhythm
- Ability to keep time with the strokes (or alpha stroke)
- Maturity to 'read' the situation and to take leadership if needed
- Initiative to make calls that may be needed, e.g. eyes in the boat (the steerer can only see the back of the head of paddlers)

- The skill to keep the boat calm, controlled, focused and positive
- Confidence to take on a role if a steerer is preoccupied, e.g. if conditions are difficult the drummer may need to count in the transitions for the start



4. Drummer's role when it comes to safety

- Given the set-up of a dragon boat, the steerers cannot see what is going on behind so rely on the drummers to provide feedback and communicate if there are any issues.
- Whilst concentrating on their own crews, drummers need to be aware (visually and hearing) of what is going on around them should they either be asked by the umpire to respond or take evasive action.
- The drummer will need to take on a leadership role, if for example the steerer is overboard, as they will need to give instructions to the crew, till the steerer is back on board. Or if there is a boat crossing out of their lane and into the crews lane as the steerer may not be able to see the impending collision.

5. What to do prior, during and after a race

- Drummers and Steerers must communicate with each other prior to race to ensure both understand what the race plan is going to be, what the calls are going to be and when, and what to do if the weather conditions are going to be challenging
- Drummer's must use the same language as the coach and steerers so the paddlers understand the calls (as they will have been training to specific calls)
- Remember that it is the steerer and drummer in control of the boat. Be calm and composed, speak with controlled authority
- Be encouraging and keep spirits up
- Use positive not negative language, e.g. heads up (not 'don't slouch'), stay long (not 'don't shorten up')
- The drummer will be last on the boat, ensure the drum and drummers seat are all screwed on tight before leaving the boat loading area. Hold the boat while the crew loads into the boat. Double check there are drum-sticks to use.
- Listen to the steerer, as they may ask the drummer to move left or right if they need to balance the boat.
- Upon returning to boat loading, the drummer will be first off (wait until the boat is stopped and steady before hopping off). Hold the boat till the rest of the crew disembarks.

6. During the race tips the drummers should be aware of?

- The Umpire will raise a RED flag if the drummer has not started drumming by the time they reach the 50m. If the drummer sees the RED Flag behind their crew, start drumming immediately
- The umpire will raise a RED flag if they believe the crew is not in the centre of their lane and not observing the 2m between paddles. If the drummer sees this, indicate to the steerer to immediately to rectify their racing line
- The umpire will raise a RED flag if they believe the crew is wash riding in the wake of another crew. If the drummer sees the RED flag, indicate to the steerer to immediately move away.
- If there has been a false start of equipment, the umpire will raise the RED flag and travel across all lanes yelling 'STOP STOP STOP'.
- If the crew has an equipment failure (boat, oar, seats, drummer's seat) attached to the boat (excluding paddles), within the **first 50m** it is the responsibility of the drummer to raise their arm immediately to signify there is an issue. If there is equipment failure between the 50m and the finish line, it is unfortunate.
- Once the starter has called '**paddlers, are you ready**' the drummer is able to raise their hand to the starter to indicate if they are 'not ready'. **Don't** raise your hand prior to the starter's call.
- During a 2 km race, crews have 'right of way' at the 50m buoy if the dragon head of the inside crew is level with the steering arm of the outside crew. If there is an overlap, then the Umpire will call 'right of way'. If there is no over-lap then crew must remain in their racing lanes going around the apex/turn. Crews must maintain clear water at all times (2m around boats)



7. Drumming Technique

- The drum must be clearly seen to be struck with the drumstick on the top of the drum skin.
- As a guide, raise your drumming hand up to your shoulder.
- Drummers may use one drum-stick or two drumsticks
- Drumming must be active and audible so it can be seen and heard of the race officials



8. Important rules a Drummer needs to be aware of (as taken from AusDBF Competition Regulations and Rules of Racing – edition 8)

CR 7.11 - Distress Signal

In the event that a crew member is lost overboard during a race, or other circumstances arise that necessitates a 'Distress Signal', the drummer must wave their hands over their head to attract attention as per R7.8 Distress Signal. If the drummer has fallen overboard or is unable to wave their hands, then at least one of the competitors in seat 1 should wave their hands to attract the attention of the rescue boat.

R7.8 Distress Signal

If a crew is in distress, for example, a crew member lost overboard, then the drummer or steerer shall alert the Rescue Boats and Umpires by using the International Distress Signal. The International Distress Signal is actioned by placing one's arms in the outstretched position (horizontal to the sides of the body), then raising the arms to the vertical position and crossing arms above the head, then returning arms to the horizontal position; this action is repeated until the Rescue Boats respond.

A Distress Signal given by a crew without just cause will result in action being taken against the crew under the Disciplinary Code.

R4.4 - The Drummer

The drummer must sit on the drummer's seat provided. The drummer must start **actively** and **audibly** drumming by the 50m mark (from the start line). The drum must be clearly seen by the race Officials to be struck with a drum-stick on the top of the skin at short regular intervals.

Failure to actively beat the drum will result in disciplinary action being taken against the crew concerned.



R5.2 - Paddle Breakage/Equipment Failure

Crews are advised to carry two (2) spare paddles, of the approved specification for the event, in each dragon boat they use during the competition. These may only be used if a paddle breakage occurs during a race. If any other equipment failure happens within fifty (50) metres of the start line, the Starter or Umpires will call a re-start.

R5.6 Movement up the Course

After a crew has embarked it must leave the boarding pontoon immediately and proceed directly to the Start Area. Crews travelling to the Start must keep clear of the Racing Lanes and must not interfere with a race that is in progress.

Boats travelling to the Start are to cease moving down the course during a race until the crews racing have passed by. Crews must not wait on the finish line to block the view of the race officials. Crews need to observe what is happening and either move forward or wait behind the finish line.

R6.1 Start Area

It is the Steerers responsibility to make sure that each crew member is familiar with the starting procedures. All crews shall assemble in the Start Area, at least three (3) minutes before their Start Time. No later than two (2) minutes before the actual Start Time the crews will be called forward and placed into the Racing Lanes by the Starter or Aligner in accordance with the published Lane Draw.

R6.2 Late Arrivals

For Crews who arrive late to the Start line (without an approved reason), the Starter will:

First offence - issue a warning

Second offence - issue a time penalty up to 5 seconds

Third offence – will be disqualification from the competition class

R6.4 Starting Position

The position of the Dragon Boats on the Start Line will be that the foremost part of the competing boats (which may include the dragon heads) will be aligned. When races start from a pontoon or dock, Boat Aligners shall hold the sterns of the boats. Alternatively, each steerer shall hold a rope or bar attached to the starting position. In an AusDBF sanctioned event, when a 'held' start is not possible, then a 'free' start may be permitted.

R6.5 Aligning

The Aligners Assistants will alter the position of the Dragon Boats in accordance with the Starters instructions, by physically moving the boats or by adjusting the length of rope available to the steerers. A Crew may assist in this aligning by moving the boat using their paddles to position the boat on the Start Line. However, once the Starter has alerted the crews then all movement of competitors in the water must stop. If movement of a crews paddle in or on the water is then observed, by the Starter or a Course Umpire, the Chief Official shall give a Time Penalty as for Jumping the Start.



R6.6 Starters Commands

When the Aligner is satisfied that all the boats are correctly aligned, the Starter shall alert the crews by saying: **'Are you ready?'** – if the crew is not ready then the drummer must immediately raise a hand above head height to indicate the situation to the Starter.

The drummer **should not** take such action prior to this question, especially when crews are under Starters orders when moving to the Start Line.

R6.7 Starting Signals

When the Starter is satisfied that all the crews are ready, the starting signal of the word **'ATTENTION'** is followed by the word **'GO' (or the sound signal)**, and the Aligners Assistants will release the stems of the boats, and/or the steerers shall let go of the pontoon ropes or bars, as appropriate.

R6.8 Alternatives

The word 'GO' may be replaced by a gunshot, electronic starting signal or other distinct sound, as specified in the Race Programme. The interval between the words 'ATTENTION' and 'GO' (or sound signal) shall not exceed five (5) seconds.

R6.9 False Starts

If a crew starts after the word '**Attention**' and before the word '**Go**' it has made a **False Start**. The Aligner shall indicate a False Start by raising a red flag. The Starter shall immediately recall the crews by shouting '**STOP STOP STOP**', or by a second gunshot, or by repeating the alternative starting signal as published in the Programme. The Course Umpire will assist with this task.

R6.11 The Drummers Task

It is also incumbent upon the drummer to watch the Aligner and Umpire and to instruct the crew to 'STOP' when a False Start has been called.

R6.16 Recall by the Course Umpire or Starter

The Course Umpire may interrupt a correctly started race if unforeseen circumstances occur, for example, adverse conditions in one or more Racing Lanes resulting in boats being inadvertently swamped, or a collision between two boats caused by the water conditions, or the breakage of a steering arm/sweep oar that materially affects the whole race. This shall be done in the same manner as for False Start, even if the competing boats are more than fifty (50) metres from the Start Line. In such circumstances the Chief Official may order a re-run of the race, even to the extent of timed runs down one lane, if time permits, or if it does not, a count-back of the previous times recorded during the competition by the crew or crews concerned.

The Course Umpire shall move in front of all boats as quickly as possible yelling '**STOP STOP STOP**' or sounding a horn to alert crews to stop racing immediately



Below are links to u-tube clips of live drumming

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z9b-9UHW0pY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzOt9mEpf0E>

AusDBF would like to acknowledge Maggie Boyce, Philippa Mclean and several other resources for their contribution to the content in this document.

