



CALIFORNIA DRAGON BOAT ASSOCIATION

YOUTH COACHING GUIDE

Disclaimer:

The information in this guide is meant to supplement, not replace, proper dragon boat training. Like any sport involving speed, equipment, balance and environmental factors, dragon boating poses some inherent risk. The CDBA advises readers to take full responsibility for their safety and know their limits. Before practicing the skills described in this guide, be sure that your team participants are prepared and equipment is well maintained, and do not take risks beyond your level of experience, attitude, training, and comfort level, and the paddler and crew's safety on land and water.

Introduction:

The Youth Coaching Guide was contributed by Bob Leung in 2010. Bob is one of the founding parents of the dragon boat community and CDBA in 1996. He has volunteered in numerous roles to grow the sport of dragon boat especially for youth in the Bay Area. Professionally he is a teacher and has also been the Youth Head Coach for Abraham Lincoln High School and Mission High School in San Francisco.

The Youth Coaching Guide is written as lesson plans that he uses. It is focused on developing youth teams for the season and practices held at Lake Merced in San Francisco. The guide provides a sound framework to fit any adult crew and/or interested persons in becoming a Captain and/or Coach for a dragon boat team. Modifications to the original guide have been edited to reflect current CDBA policies and procedures now in place.

Further information and resources are available on the CDBA website, www.cdba.org, including CDBA Policies & Procedures, Safety Program, Youth Protection Plan, and FAQ: Liability Insurance Coverage and Volunteers for references.

Handbooks for Youth Head Coach, Youth Paddler and Youth Parents/Guardians will be available on the website in the future. The content of the Handbooks are to provide an overview guide of what to expect and Codes of Conduct to ensure the safety of youth paddlers and volunteers.

“It’s indescribable to witness the sense of achievement and pride of these kids as they cross the finish line or do well in a time trial. They really support each other. It’s more than just a sport to the kids - they have to learn how to maintain discipline in the boat during races and in practices. Most importantly, they learn the value of working together and of being part of a team and community. All it takes is one person paddling faster or slower than the others to slow down the boat and lose a race, so they have to learn how to value their differences and find common ground.”

Bob Leung

YOUTH COACHING GUIDE

by BOB LEUNG, dated April 2010,
updated July 2015

1.Preparing for Start of the Season

NOTE: The following may seem like a long list of responsibilities! However, you don't have to do it all yourself. Create a leadership team.

At the very least, this leadership team should include an adult from the school (usually a teacher-sponsor), an assistant coach (if you have one) and a student captain. You may pick more than one (either co-captains, or a captain and an assistant). If you are coming onto an established team, they may already have one; if not, get to know the team a bit, and after a few practices, pick a captain.

This leadership team can then discuss the list of tasks ahead for the season and divide up some of those tasks so that the coach is not overwhelmed. Most established teams have an active and capable teacher-sponsor at the school who will assist you with tasks such as distributing and collecting waiver forms and creating a budget and finding the money needed. Some teacher-sponsors take care of those tasks entirely.

This leadership team should also meet before the season to talk about team goals and expectations before having a larger discussion of the same things with the rest of the team.

1. Find yourself a reliable steersperson. Once you find that person, have him/her begin to train a couple of your more reliable/mature paddlers to steer. This is important for the long haul. Once your team has students who can steer, it can become much more self-reliant. (Students can steer in the boat as long as a CDBA-certified steersperson is also in the boat. Often times, this is the coach.)
2. Find an assistant coach. This person can assist you during practice, or at the very least, fill in for you on those days when you are not able to make practice.
3. Reserve practice time for the season through the CDBA website. Contact the CDBA Practice Scheduler at practiceschedule@cdba.org to schedule a practice time. Please include the following in your request:
 - a. Your name, name of team, and number of boats.
 - b. Requested Time Slot(s) (Must be in 90 minute time slots listed in schedule. To see available times, go to the CDBA website and click onto "Practice info" and your preferred practice site.)
 - c. Name(s) of certified coach/steersperson per boat.

Once you pick a time, you should reserve that for the remainder of the season. This will change for July through September as CDBA prepares for the San Francisco International Dragon Boat Festival and Championship.

4. Type up a schedule of all the practices leading up to the race day and communicate this to your paddlers by making copies or posting it online. It's important to take into account dates like holidays and spring break and decide ahead of time whether you will be practicing or not. ... Related to this: give your contact information to all paddlers and parents/guardians in case they need to call you about practice, etc.
5. Distribute CDBA youth waiver forms and have them signed by parents/guardians and returned to you before the first practice. **No** student is allowed onto a boat without one. No exceptions. All paddlers **must also** fill out an electronic waiver on the CDBA website. The electronic waiver is for membership tracking and manifest purposes.
6. Create a budget. Decide what things will cost money this season and then plan for a way to pay for them. Uniforms are nice but not mandatory. Race fees may range from \$400 (April Youth Race) to \$700 (September's SFIDBF Race). Some teams charge the students for each item as they come up during the season; other teams charge a general fee (range from \$25 to \$50) to cover all the items. Some teams do fundraising and do it very successfully.

2. Safety and Procedures (See CDBA Safety Program)

1. CPR Training. Although CPR is not a requirement of CDBA coaches at this time, it is required of all Youth Coach to possess current CPR and First Aid certification prior to coaching.

Most CPR training takes no more than two to three hours over the course of a single day. There are many places that offer classes. One convenient place that I've used in the past is Safety Training Seminars in San Francisco. For more info., visit: www.safetytrainingseminars.com.

2. Always have your own first-aid kit at practice.
3. Remember that all paddlers are required to wear personal flotation device (PFD) when on the dock and on the boat. Absolutely no exceptions. If by chance all the PFD in the storage unit are in use, your paddlers will simply have to wait their turn. The PFD must be buckled up.
4. Make sure paddlers stay hydrated, whether you ask them to bring their own water or whether you provide it for them. I do both. I ask them to bring water, but I also bring a large cooler of water for them as well for later in practice. Proper hydration is especially important in warm/hot weather, as lack of it could lead to heat

stroke or worse. On warm days, I always have a water break in the middle of practice.

5. Know the medical history of every one of your students. By this, I mean you need to know who has asthma, a special heart condition, special allergies, etc. so you are familiar with health issues that might affect student participation. You can gather this information by checking the CDBA Liability Release and Waiver Agreement form or by asking each student and parent to fill out a separate form that includes their medical history. From that, I create a reference list of student with special needs due to their medical condition and I bring it to each practice. Also know where to find the emergency contact list for students (again, available from their CDBA Liability Release and Waiver Agreement form.
6. Make sure you teach and review all safety commands (“Brace the boat,” “Hold the boat” etc.) in the boat before the first practice.
7. Teach students the proper way to enter and exit a dragon boat, one row at a time and step onto the floor of the boat not on a bench seat.
8. Do not go out on the lake when rain and or wind is so strong that it begins to affect the stability of the boat. This also applies to the process of putting dragon boat away as well as returning in the paddle boat at the end of practice. Since there is no wind gauge at Lake Merced, you will have to be the final judge of what constitutes safe or unsafe weather conditions. You can always call a CDBA board member or a more experienced coach for a second opinion. When in doubt, however, cancel practice. Practice can resume the following week.
9. Know which paddlers cannot swim (in the event they fall into the water). Make sure you teach and review what to do if the boat capsizes.

3. CDBA Policies and Procedures:

(See CDBA Policies & Procedures, Safety Program, Youth Protection Plan, and FAQ: Liability Insurance Coverage and Volunteers for full procedures and protocols on its website, www.cdba.org)

4. Preparing for Race Day

1. The logistics: Make sure to communicate to paddlers when/where the race is (starting time of first race, last race), and when you expect them to arrive and help set up. Make sure everyone has a way of getting to the race site.
2. Logistics part 2: Food and drinks. Most races take up a full day. Kids will need to eat. Plan ahead how you plan to feed them. The same goes for water and liquids, especially on a warm day. Always have a few extra gallons of water for back up.

If you don't use it, you can always save it for the next race. Get your teacher-sponsor, captains, and parents/guardians involved in organizing this. You shouldn't have to do it all yourself... At the youth race in the spring, you may also want to get or borrow tents for your team. It comes in handy to either keep paddlers out of the sun, or out of the rain.

3. Be sure to have a first-aid kit on hand.
4. At the final practice *before* the race, the coach should lead the team in a discussion of expectations (sportsmanship, etc) as well as team goals. In setting team goals, I strongly encourage you to focus on setting multiple team goals which are attainable. Where you place in the race can be one goal, but it certainly shouldn't be the *only* one.
5. A week (at least) before the race, be sure to have your rosters set and copies of that roster printed or electronically completed as instructed by the CDBA Membership Director. You should also have a copy of the race schedule. Also make multiple copies of this.

Be sure to have your drummers ready as well as steers person and have a backup for both. Your steersperson has to be CDBA-certified. (Schedule for steersperson' safety training and certification are listed on its website, www.cdba.org)

6. Make sure you assign someone to be "second in command." This can be an assistant coach, captain, or parent/guardian. There may be times when you are occupied with something and a decision has to be made.
7. Be sure that race registration has been completed, payment for race is made, and all CDBA Liability Release and Waiver Agreement form signed by parents/guardians of your paddlers and electronically completed or turned in at registration.

5. Eight-Week Practice Schedule

Notes: This eight-week schedule is made with novice to intermediate teams in mind. It can easily be modified to a longer ten- or 12-week schedule. The first four weeks of practice should focus primarily on technique. Increasing power and practicing race components can come later. I also believe strongly that, for novice teams, the first two to four weeks of practice should be low on intensity and high on the "fun" factor. It's not wise to push inexperienced paddlers through 30 minutes of continuous paddling of high intensity. It can also lead to injury.

I tend to break the basic stroke into seven components: rotate, reach, entry, catch, pull, exit, and recovery. I take the first four weeks to teach the stroke, introducing one to two stroke components per week.

Depending on the level of experience on your team and how competitive you want them to be, two coaching tools you may consider: shooting still photographs and videotape of

your team. Both can be shot from the shore. You may use one or both. This is a powerful learning tool for paddlers because they can actually *see* for themselves what they are doing right, as well as what they need improvement in.

Week 1

Focus: Introduction to basics: Teach them how to sit in the boat (foot placement; hip against the gunnel). Teach them how/where to hold paddle. Watch up front at strokes for timing. Teach and review the basic five (5) commands: “Brace the boat,” “Hold the boat,” “Back-paddle,” “Right-draw, left draw.”

Endurance: Mainly low-intensity ladder pieces and some light seat pulls. An example of a ladder piece can be four minutes of continuous paddling one minute of 60% power, two and a half minutes of 80%, and 30 seconds of 100%. Of course, if your team is made primarily of brand new paddlers, four minutes of continuous paddling may be too much. Adjust as you see fit.

Technique: Teach stroke components -- rotation, reach – using hit drill. Use one-on-one coaching where you see fit

Week 2

Focus: Endurance: Slightly longer ladder pieces and seat pulls. When doing seat pulls, do not use less than six paddlers. Using less than six paddlers creates too much weight to pull and can easily lead to injury.

Technique: Teach stroke components -- the “set-up”; correct paddle angle at positive entry. Practice with hit-drill. One-on-one coaching.

Races: Introduce shorter race pieces (200m)

Week 3

Focus: Endurance/strength: Continue with longer ladder pieces (up to 6 or 8 minutes)

Technique: Teach stroke components -- The catch. Bury blade up front. The pull. Practice with hit-drill. Be sure to pull blade at 90 degrees

Race components: teach the “5-20” start.

Races: Introduce a longer race piece (500m)

Week 4

Focus: Strength: If paddlers are ready and eager, practice in the Hong Kong boats which weight 1,200 lbs to the Buks which weight 500 lbs.

Technique: Teach stroke components -- Exit and recovery. Have paddlers practice this at ½ and ¾ speed. Practice with hit-drill. Top hand over gunnel

Race components: teach the Power-10

Races: 500m pieces; practice the powers

Week 5

Focus: Strength: Continue practice in the Hong Kong boats which weight 1,200 lbs to the Buks which weight 500 lbs.

Endurance: sprint interval training (6-8 one-minute pieces of all-out paddling with one-minute of rest in between each piece. The key is to *not* allow paddlers

to have a full recovery. This will help with paddlers' muscular as well as cardio endurance.)

Technique: Introduce pause drill to help with rotation, reach, set-up. Also introduce a two-part hit drill with paddles in starting position held above head in "Power-D" position. ("Rotate... hit"). This drill also helps teach top arm set-up, locking bottom arm, and reach.

Race components: teach the "finish"; begin training drummer.

Racing: Introduce a lap race. This is a timed race around the lake. The purpose here is to build up their endurance.

Week 6

Focus: Continue sprint interval training

Technique: Use drills to get paddlers to add *more* rotation/reach. Introduce the "Push-pull" drill.

Racing: Continue practice for powers; continue training drummer(s).

Week 7

Focus: Fine-tune timing. This can be done by watching your paddlers from different places in the boat (front, middle, and back of the boat) as well as from "outside" the boat such as on the dock or the vantage point of another dragon boat. This is really important. If you only watch your paddlers from the front of the boat, you will miss catching a lot of timing errors that can greatly affect your boat. Continue sprint intervals; race pieces.

Technique: Cleaning up individual as well as collective flaws

Racing: practice race components and race pieces with high intensity; continue training drummer(s).

(Note: At this point, you should begin to form your race roster, as well as making a final decision on the two paddlers who will be your strokes for the race day, if you haven't done so already.)

Week 8

Focus: fine-tune timing. Work on race pieces. This is the week before the race. Begin to "taper down" your practice. Do not introduce anything new.

This is also the time to prepare your paddlers for race day. This means communicating to them your expectations as well as setting team goals for the race day. There are also race day logistics to go over with your team: when you expect paddlers to arrive; what to do in terms of food, drinks; what to bring; team assignment by CDBA for race day set up/break down

6. Teaching The Stroke ...

The stroke is a complex thing. As you will notice, there are actually several sub-components within each component of the stroke. If you form a good, effective stroke, it will repeat itself for the approximately 160 strokes of a race. If you have a flawed stroke, you will repeat that flaw 160 times throughout a race. The key is to focus on these components during practice so that you won't have to during a race; it'll just become natural. Let's break the stroke down into **seven major components**:

1. **Rotate.** Turn your chest to your partner, your back to the shore. Your outside hip should rotate forward at the same time.
2. **Reach.** Slide yourself forward in a fluid motion. Keep your head up, back straight. Your chin should be positioned above your mid-thigh, almost at your knee. Make sure your bottom arm is stretched all the way forward.
3. **Entry.** Your top arm should be somewhat high, slightly bent at the elbow: your bottom arm should be straight. Together, they should form a "U" shape as you initiate your entry into the water with your paddle at an angle of 70 degrees. (See below). As you begin your top arm drive, focus on "dropping" the blade into the water instead of pounding it in.



The components of rotation, reach, and top arm position are all set up for a proper catch.

4. **Catch.** This is the split second after you enter the water and before you pull. Be sure your blade is fully submerged ("bury the blade") to get a full resistance.
5. **Pull.** Initiate the pull ONLY after the blade is fully buried to avoiding "ripping" through the water. As you pull, your paddle should remain at a 90-degree angle as much as possible; fight the temptation to "punch out" your top arm and scoop the paddle back. At the same time, initiate your leg drive.



Once you bury the blade, be sure to keep the paddle at 90 degrees as you proceed through the pull.

6. **Exit.** Exit (Pull paddle out of water) as your paddle reaches past your mid-thigh but before your hip. Do not scoop water up or backwards as you exit.
7. **Recovery.** Keep both the grip of your top and bottom hand relaxed as you do this. Keep your top arm close to the gunnel of the boat; don't get lazy and bring it into the boat (or worse, letting it rest on your lap). Keep the paddle within 16-24 inches of the boat as you recover; do not "wing out."



A uniform recovery makes it easier for everyone to follow in time.

7. Teaching The Race

The start

Once the boat approaches the start line, there should be absolute silence among the paddlers so the crew can anticipate the start of the race. The race starter will call: "Paddlers are you ready? Attention please!" And then the horn will sound and *all* paddlers in our boat will count: 1-2-3-4-5-up-up-up-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-up-up-up-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-ready-and-reach!

The first three strokes are ½ stroke, ½ stroke, and then ¾ stroke. The "up-up-up" is added to rapidly bump up the stroke rate. The "ready-and-reach" is to transition into a slightly slower and steady rate for the majority of the race.

The power-10

In the middle of the race, the drummer will call "Power-10-in-three-two-one!" At that time, all paddlers will count from 1 to 10 and give maximum rotation and reach and give their 100% into the stroke. However, do NOT speed up the tempo of the strokes.



The Finish

About 60 meters from the finish line, the drummer will call "Finish-it-now!" This will be followed by the count of "Up-up-up-4-5-6-7-8-9-10-up-up-up-4-5-6-7-8-9-10." The stroke rate is increased and the stroke length reduced to about 80%.

It's important to keep your head up and focus on your timing while “dumping it” (giving it your all) for the final strokes of the race.

History, revisions:

Date	Reviewers	Comments
April 2010	Bob Leung	First Edition
July 2015	Bob Leung	Review
January 2016	Kara Tsao Wong, Thaddeus Hunt & Mabel Jung	Revisions as indicated to reflect adoption of Youth Protection Plan, CDBA Policies & Procedures and Safety Program.