

Dragon Boat Paddling technique

(Taken from the Hong Kong Island Paddle Club website)

The technique that will be discussed is based on flat water sprint canoe style used by the two time International Dragon Boat Champions - The Canadian Men's Dragon Boat Team. There are six key parts to the dragon boat stroke. When done properly, a boat flies; executed improperly, the boat will feel sluggish and heavy. The first three components set up the stroke, while the last three are considered to be the work-phase part of the stroke. The six components are called: rotation, reach/extension, catch, pull, exit, and recovery.

Rotation

The image some coaches use to help paddlers picture rotation is that a pole is inserted through the head, along the spine, and then anchored to the dragon boat seat. Another way of achieving full rotation is to present your back to the shore or have your chest facing your partner. Full rotation, or twist as it is sometimes called, allows for maximum reach/extension.

Reach/Extension

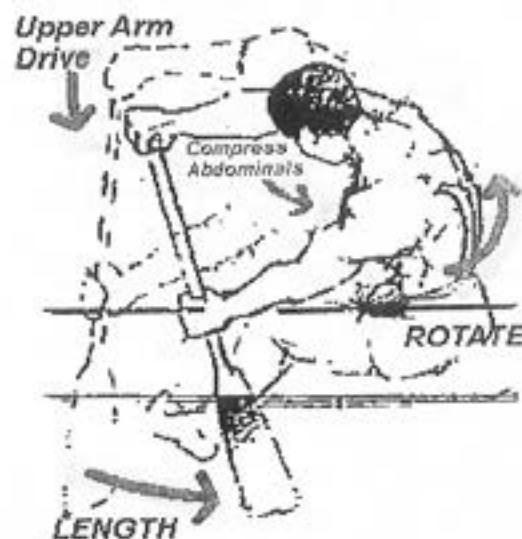
This position in the stroke is crucial in maximising the length of the stroke. The position of the outside paddling arm is equivalent to pulling a bow and arrow. The outside shoulder should be dropped slightly and also extended forward. The torso leans forward for additional extension.

A proper reach position is the foundation of a proper dragon boat stroke. The reach position is the extended position with the paddle a few inches above the water before the driving it into the water. This reach position determines the length of a stroke and a long stroke means more water is pulled. The reach position is the end point of the Recovery phase, but is the beginning of a new stroke cycle.

The reach position determines the rotation of the torso. If the torso is "rotated" forward upon the paddle entering the water, the torso will naturally want to "de-rotate" back to the normal seated upright seated position.

As mentioned previously, the lower arm position is similar to drawing a bow and arrow. The bottom arm is extended straight forward parallel to the water. The lower shoulder is dropped and is extended forward and therefore the shoulder on the top hand side comes back and up. In the Reach position, these four points on the body should be lined up in a vertical plane: (a) top hand, (b) head, (c) lower shoulder and (d) lower hand.

From the side view there should be a straight line from the top hand, head and hip. The torso rotation, extension of both arms and the forward lean are important aspects of the stroke. The upper arm coming over the head. The lower arm is fully extended and is almost locked at the elbow. The lower hand grip should be relaxed and not grip the paddle too hard. The paddle flips forward into the reach position where it is at its highest potential energy level. From this position, the potential energy will be used to submerge the paddles as the stroke progress.



Catch

The catch phase is the most critical to the speed of the boat. The catch is the moment the paddle blade first bites into the water. The top hand is held over the water, then drives down on the paddle with the outside arm relaxed and fully extended. Remember that the length of 'the forward stroke' is controlled by a fully extended bottom arm and a rotated torso. You only need to bend far enough forward to bury the blade to its full depth at the CATCH. Remember also, a powerful CATCH comes from a strong upper arm drive into the water at a forward position which is sharp, clean and instantly transmits power into the STROKE.

Pull

Once the paddle is fully submerged or "buried", the next component of the stroke is the pull phase. The paddles should pull back directly parallel with the boat. The top hand stabilises the paddle as the bottom arm and back muscles pull back. To use the back muscles effectively, the paddler sits up while pulling and continues to drive the paddle downward with the top hand. Maximum power and endurance will come from using the larger muscles of the back, shoulder and trunk rather than relying on the smaller arm muscles. Very often, paddlers get into the habit of pushing their upper arm over and downwards at the CATCH, thereby lowering the paddle fulcrum point to the location of their lower hand. The upper hand during this phase should not drop below your shoulders and your forearm should remain parallel to the water surface.

Exit

At the end of the stroke the paddle should exit the water at the hip. Allowing the stroke to go past the hip results in the paddling blade being at an angle that would slow down the boat. The phrase "out at the hip" is often used to correct a stroke that is too long. The outside arm blends slightly to allow the paddler to clear the water and then it is pushed or snapped forward.

Recovery

This part of the stroke is the rest phase when the muscles are not working as hard; recovery speed plays a large role in determining the stroke rate. During recovery, the torso starts rotating and leaning forward to setup for another cycle of the stroke.

These six components are basic in nature but go a long way in achieving great results. There are more advanced techniques that can be used, but as far as building a strong foundation for a team, these are what I recommend focusing on doing best for each individual.

