



United Kingdom Surf Rowers League

Annual General Meeting

2009



Presidents Report

My first duty is again to thank all those who have organised and officiated at the events we have held this year at national, international and series level. I know every sporting body says the same and the League is no exception - without such attention there would be no sport.

The one thing that 2009 season produced, apart from a third successive rotten summer, was consistent, if erratic, surf conditions in all competitions in North Devon and Cornwall. In surf, the element of luck is greatly amplified but, despite this, a dominant Porthtowan prevailed and proved unassailable and worthy champions in both mens and womens disciplines in both the UK Series competition and Open Championship. The conditions this summer (sic) demanded sweeping proficiency which, though greatly increased, proves we must adhere to the measures being advanced, to increase their number by training and experience. This has been a concern highlighted by the expansion of the sport from the surf beaches into the realm of the traditional ARA/British Rowing membership. Coming from a surf rowing background I initially welcomed these crews with a degree of caution. Did they really know what they were letting themselves in for? I have long since wiped the egg off my face. The speed with which they have adapted was proved by the fact that five of the six finalists in the 2009 Men's Open Championships were our flat-water cousins. And what a performance they put up – in conditions as far removed from their established roots as it is possible to imagine. The culmination of this would have to be the victory of Bristol Barracudas lifting the European 2009 title in Newquay with their sweep, Mark Bannister of Bude. The rowing clubs are once again raising the bar - to the advantage of all – and their contribution to surf rowing and this League is to be welcomed. Lets hope they stay the course and together with Andy Cox's UKSRL coverage in British Rowing's inhouse magazine, Rowing & Regatta, encourage even more participation.

In June, four UKSRL sweeps were recruited to steer four 35' plywood stage props for a 'Robin Hood Adventure' being filmed on the beautiful Freshwater West beach in West Pembrokeshire. A handful of British and Australian surfboat rowers helped coach the ten oarsmen each boat required and allay the fears of the 12-15 soldier/extras each boat carried. Together with the rowers needed to simulate rowing in four 40-ton 'landing craft' there were a total of about 100 experienced coastal rowers involved. When I say experienced, several had even rowed the Atlantic. Most were recruits from the Welsh Celtic Longboat fraternity and together our camaraderie helped us survive a month of irrational behaviour by the film-makers. There were another 500-600 soldier/horsemen extras so it was of little surprise to hear that the month was costing the company, Paramount Pictures £30m. I have to add there is no truth in the rumour that Russell Crowe and Cate Blanchett both sought JR's autograph. Just a persistent Russell Crowe.

The end of the season was 'celebrated' by Mr. Gaisford taking a mixed-club team to the Dutch Championships in October. The warm hospitality was in serious competition with a fierce northerly wind and certain parts of the sweep's anatomy are only now returning to their normal position.

One of the critical issues arising now with the steady success of the UKSRL is the sourcing of good boats. If the sport is to continue to grow in the UK, experienced surf rowers are going to need good boats in order to be adequately competitive. To this end we need a manufacturer in Europe capable of building new boats to the same standard and specification as those built by the main suppliers in Australia. For the past forty years we have imported, with few exceptions, second-hand boats that usually possess a 'history'. Hopefully a solution is now under investigation but for it to develop further there has to be a committed market. We have an exciting sport that is fortunate in that it can advertise sponsorship in the most effective way and, as in the past, this has to be an important contributory factor in funding expensive equipment. If the determination is there - it will happen.

Finally, and hopefully without sounding too patronising, I have been greatly impressed by the courage and commitment displayed this year and am honoured and proud to be in a position to say so. Hats off to you all. Surfboat racing is not for the faint-hearted and 2009 has proved that it doesn't attract them.

Nick Beringer

United Kingdom
Surf Rowers
League



Chairmans Report 2009

Firstly, I would like to thank all UKSRL committee members for their help and support throughout the past 12 months. Due to personal circumstances, I have not been able to attend many of our events this year but I am pleased to report that all went well in 2009's somewhat "testing" conditions. Special praise must go once again to Peter Gaisford and also to Spike for their joint commitment to the League, driven by their passion for Surfboat rowing.

Congratulations to Porthtowan's Blue Belles who's return to form this year saw them emerge as Women's UK Open Surfboat Champions, UKSRL Summer Series winners and also 2009 European Surf Rowing Federation champions; the first time a women's crew has won all three major titles in the same year. Praise too for the ever consistent, Blue Bali crew from Porthtowan. They retain their title as Men's UK Open Surfboat Champions for 2009 and once again are the UKSRL Summer Series winners. City of Bristol's crew "The Barracudas" were their closest rival throughout the season and were deserved winners of the European title.

Well done to Gethin Edwards who won UKSRL Novice Sweep and to all other podium finishers and crews for making 2009 another successful and closely fought season of racing. Thanks must go to all our Sponsors, to the RNLI and to British Rowing (ARA) for their continued support.

I am also grateful to all clubs/venues who hosted events again this year. Our 5x Summer Series events and Open Championship format is now well established and seems to run smoothly thanks to the skill, character and competence of all competitors, officials, and helpers.

As I am stepping down from UKSRL committee, I would like to wish the new Chairman and the UKSRL every success for the future. We must continue this professional approach and "open door" policy to welcome new members who are keen to experience one of the most exciting and visually spectacular sporting disciplines in the world.

Andrew Smith
Chairman – United Kingdom Surf Rowers League



Secretaries Report

The 2009 surf rowing season began with the annual Truro River Race in April. Little did we realise that the lashing rain and cold winds for the Truro event would foretell the conditions for the summer season. The 2009 surf rowing season has to be one of the hardest conducted to date. It is indicative of the spirit of the crews and their supporters that they continued to turn up to each event with a smile on their faces.

Congratulations to the Porthtowan Blue Belles crew upon their remarkable achievement of winning the UKSRL VB Womens Summer Series, The Womens UK Open Surfboat Championship and the Womens European Surf Rowing Championship. Congratulations also to the Porthtowan Blue Bali crew upon winning the UKSRL VB Mens Summer Series and The Mens UK Open Surfboat Championship. For the first time the UKSRL also had an Italian surfboat crew enter the UK Open Championships. We would like to thank the rowers from Cannottieri Milano for attending the event

We should also thank the officials namely Spike and her band of finish judges for attending the events and for keeping us all in order. A presentation was made at the final Summer Series event in Bournemouth to those who helped conduct the UKSRL events.

This year the UKSRL conducted the events in more testing surf conditions than previous years. The Ocean Thunder Europe event in Biarritz in 2008 proved that the UK crews could take on larger surf conditions and crews were keen to keep the momentum moving forward. This in turn required the UKSRL to reconsider the safety cover needed at the events. During the summer I met with representatives of the RNLI and we reviewed the minimum safety requirement at a surf rowing event. The rowers safety is paramount, this in turn places additional responsibility upon the organisation to finance and ensure the safety requirement is in attendance.

I should like to thank the Fosters Brewing Group for their sponsorship of the VB Summer Series 2009. Unfortunately the contact we had at the company has now moved on and therefore we need to find another sponsor for 2010.

Surf rowing achieved some media success with several articles in the Rowing & Regatta magazine and the 2009 Rowing Almanack published on behalf of British Rowing. Local coverage in The Western Morning News, The Newquay Guardian and The West Briton. There is also a short film on the MyCornwall website. Thanks goes to Andy Cox and UKSRL members for providing content for these publications.

The UKSRL website needs to reflect the organisations growth and development, up until now the site has been administered on a voluntary basis by Andrew Smith, Chairman UKSRL. Perhaps it is now time to have a review of the website and to bring the design forward with professional input.

The UKSRL agreed to host the 2009 European Surf Rowing Championships at Tolcarne Beach, Newquay. Mens and womens crews from Holland, France and the UK attended the event. I am pleased to congratulate The Barracudas from Bude and the Blue Belles from Porthtowan upon securing the Mens and Womens european titles and for keeping the UK at the forefront of surf rowing in europe.

Peter Gaisford
Secretary UKSRL



2008/2009 UKSRL

Treasurers Report.

See attached documents



Publicity Officers Report

Television

Through good fortune a TV crew came to watch Round 3 of the UKSRL Summer Series at Watergate Bay. A short report was subsequently placed on line which captured well the drama of the day.

Given the low profile of the medium on which it was aired, however, it is unlikely that large numbers saw the footage. Despite assurances that the TV crew would be at Tolcarne for the ESRF, no sign was seen of them.

It may be worth someone making contact with the programme-makers to see if there is any interest in them filming more events in 2010.

Newspapers

A number of the events were covered in local and regional publications. As mentioned last year this is not organised and would benefit from someone applying a systematic approach to the various papers before and after each event.

Surf life saving is becoming better recognised (or its supporters better organised) and this summer there were regularly multiple pieces on different events/clubs in the West Briton. The Summer Series had to compete with all the others for space.

Magazines

UKSRL received coverage in British Rowing's (formerly ARA's) magazine Rowing & Regatta. Unfortunately, like everyone else, R&R was badly hit by the effects of the credit crunch. Advertising revenue fell and as a result the size of the magazine was reduced. Typically, post event reports were reduced from two pages last year to just one this year. A report on one of the events (Perranporth) was not published despite being commissioned and filed.

Given our size, compared to say gig rowing or coastal rowing, we still receive more coverage than could be expected – we have a marketable commodity.

Website

The website is tired and in need of updating. This is in hand. We need to generate our own community if we are to attract sponsors/interest. That means everyone contributing to a blog, filing news items, images and generally helping to grow the sport.

The Way Forward

As mentioned last year, there is a need to have a comprehensive media strategy. This is beyond what I am able to do in my spare time. If someone could be found to take the role on, it would be sensible to devise a plan of what we want to achieve. If, for example, it is to bring the sport to a wider audience in the hope of encouraging more rowers, it needs to be complemented by resources being made available to take on and encourage novices.

Arguably, time could be better spent trying to make a more efficient use of what we already have. By way of illustration, we have surfboats at St Agnes and Hayle that lie idle.



Development Officers Report

Where do you start? The results? The surf conditions? The less established sweeps taking on the tough surf conditions and equipping themselves admirably? The capsizes and rower injuries? Porthtowan ladies making a clean sweep of the titles?

Well this season had it all! From the first event and rain all day, to the surf conditions at every event, it was always going to be tough one way and another. A few rowers took some pretty hefty knocks along the way, and I hope they have recovered from them now and are coming back next season to do it all again.

Porthtowan. WOW! What can you say? A clean sweep by the ladies and very nearly the same by the men. An awesome season for all the guys and ladies in those crews. John Richards and Gary Walters. Well done. Without your efforts it could not have happened.

Development this year has really been one off consolidation. Of who we are, what we do, and why and how we do it.

The first of what we hope to be many signed up for the new sweeps courses, and we wish them well in there endeavours with the big oar. They are in essence pioneering the way for our continued and future development of the sport. It would yet again seem that the sweeps are the driving force behind the crews as well as the sport. For the first time to my knowledge, we had a surplus of sweeps due to one reason or another. Dan Berriman and Andy Bray, boats and crews next season if possible please.

As some crews and rowers dropped out, new ones took there places. So participant numbers largely stayed the same as previous years. This never allowed the two division system to come into operation and be tested out. If the sweeps who were out for this season are able and willing to come back in 2010. I think that we will be in for a huge membership boost, and in turn a very large increase in participation in the league.

The league and its membership I feel this year has gained very valuable credibility as well as recognition for the sport in general. This in turn will have good long term benefits for the sport in general and will hopefully safeguard its future for years to come.

To end I must just say a huge thank you to all of you guys and ladies that make this all happen, in particular those who work behind the scenes, The sweeps, committee members, starters, judges to name but a few.

Sadly I am unable to attend this years AGM due to having to go and watch the Piha Pistols in training before the 2010 European championships. I am more than happy to continue in the post of Development officer, but should some one else be happy and willing to stand for the post, then I am more than happy to help that person in any way that I can.

Well done all.

Have a good Christmas and New Year.

Look forward to seeing you all next year.

Phil Martin