

February Volunteer Focus

Across the country, volunteers are making outstanding commitments to Paddlesport. Without the coaches, officials, committee members, administrators and helpers the sport could not exist as it does today. A special thanks goes to all volunteers and this section provides the opportunity for clubs, centres and committees to say a special thanks to their volunteers.

International paddler to International Official

Previously the focus has been on coaches and volunteers within clubs, which to some may appear to be the most obvious route into volunteering within the sport. But for Andy Dancer, who started canoeing at the age of ten, his passion for the sport has led him through all kinds of roles culminating in the role of Chief Referee for Polo.

Most officials, regardless of their role or discipline, would tend to agree their contribution to the sport often goes unnoticed with very little acknowledgement or appreciation, but it is the officials who are the backbone to the competitions which enable paddlers to excel and compete in their sport. "It's a thankful task in many ways" explains Andy about being a polo referee. "If you get the decisions right then you are just doing your job. If you make a mistake then it's all your fault! Having been through many years of training daily and devoting my life to the sport, I can appreciate the frustration for the players."

Since starting canoeing at the age of ten, Andy moved to slalom and competed for Great Britain as a junior and senior in C2. His move to volunteering started through organising slalom events as well as qualifying as a section judge, joining the Slalom Committee and qualifying as a coach: "I've enjoyed coaching within the club and I hope soon to see some of the juniors that I've coached start to beat me around the pitch!" Andy explained. And, as if that's not enough, Andy was a founding member of Cherwell Canoe Club, Banbury eleven years ago.

With his interests moving towards polo over the last ten years, Andy followed what seemed like a natural progression to being a polo referee and is now qualified to UK Grade 1 and holds the ICF Polo Referee's qualification. "Polo is a self-refereed sport," explained Andy. "As players on the team gradually started retiring, I eventually decided it was about time I took my turn and went out to get my refereeing qualification."

From being an international paddler to being an international referee, Andy has enjoyed refereeing at the World Championships in 2006 and the European Championships in 2007. Andy may well go unnoticed by some with very little praise or thanks, but his love for volunteering in polo is clear and is very quick to praise his team of referees: "I have a fantastic team of senior referees who help out with courses and assessments".

Many thanks to all the volunteers in Paddlesport. Let Canoe England know about volunteers in your area for the chance for them to be recognised in Canoe Focus and receive a special gift of thanks. Email volunteers@bcu.org.uk or write to the Volunteer Coordinator, British Canoe Union, 18 Market Place, Bingham, Nottingham NG13 8AP.

Are you interested in becoming an official?

Andy and his team are working hard to tackle the travel and time issues associated with qualifying as a referee. As Andy explains: "trying to get my qualification, particularly the higher levels, was hard – not just practising and getting to the right standard, but trying to find courses and assessments. I ended up travelling all over the country to find the right people with enough time to

help me.” In his role as chief referee, Andy and his team are introducing a way for people to start on the refereeing ladder with assessments being held at regional club sessions to minimise travel.

Another project which the team have targeted is to increase the respect for polo referees at all times by the players on the water. With previous experience as a paddler, Andy understands the frustration from players when referees make a decision which appears: “Having been through many years myself of training daily and devoting my life to the sport, I can appreciate the frustration for the players of having their hard work spoilt by a poor decision from the ref. That drives me to review the decisions I’ve made and try to learn from every game in exactly the way the players do.”

If you would like more information on refereeing in polo, please email Andy Dancer chief-referee@canoepolo.org.uk. For other disciplines, please contact the relevant committee or contact volunteers@bcu.org.uk.