

EMERGENCY PROCEDURES FOR DRAGON BOAT CREWS

BOAT CAPTAIN'S RESPONSIBILITY

The boat captain is primarily held responsible for the safety of the crews while in training or during races. When on the water, the boat captain, who will normally be the helm (steerer) must take responsibility for the crew's safety. The boat captain will ensure that all their competitors are:

1. Suitably dressed for the weather, water and race conditions and that they are not wearing anything (such as personal accessories or jewellery) which may impede their ability to escape from a capsized boat or swim unaided once in the water, for example, wrist weights.
2. Must be water competent and, ideally able to swim at least 100 metres in wet competition clothes, unaided.
3. Fit to race' both medically and physically at all times during the competition.
4. Fully briefed on all safety matters contained within the training water safety protocols, Competition Regulations and Rules of Racing for the competition.

WATER SAFETY GUIDELINES

Prior to boarding the dragon boat, the boat captain and Boat Helm (steerer) must ensure all crew members comply with the advice given concerning dragon boat crews in competition and in training situations

1. All Novice crew members and non-swimmers are *wearing* an appropriate and approved Personal Flotation Device (Aid) (PFD/A).
2. Non-swimmers, weak swimmers and individuals with medical conditions have been identified to the boat captain.
3. The buddy, buddy system has been implemented.
4. No crew members have been consuming alcohol.
5. No crew member is wearing anything that that may get caught and cause injury.
6. All crew members are "fit to race."
7. The total number in the boat has been communicated to the Chief Boat Marshal
8. All crew members are aware of the emergency signals in the event of a racer overboard or a medical emergency.

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RACER OVERBOARD

Racer overboard means a crew member has fallen out of the boat. The boat captain shouts 'Stop the Boat.' The helm uses the throw bag, if required, to pull the paddler out of danger and away from other boats, to the edge of their boat. If successfully returned to the boat, then he or she should be floated on the windward side of the dragon boat and reenter the boat, with the assistance of the crew. If the paddler cannot be retrieved back into the dragon boat, the boat captain may use a whistle to signal to emergency personnel and the crew should use the international distress signal. The helm points with an arm at the paddler in the water so emergency personnel are aware of the nature of the emergency and the whereabouts of the victim.

Emergency personnel will take the paddler on board their boat, and return to the dock. The rescued paddler remains at the dock until the rest of the crew arrives. The chief boat marshal is to be informed that the crew is now complete once the paddler rejoins his or her crew. If the paddler was injured in the incident and is not immediately returned to the dock, the chief boat marshal is to be informed that the crew is one member (or more) short and where the Racer is – e.g. on the rescue boat.

COLLISIONS – not resulting in a capsized boat.

A dragon boat collision can put many people in the water in danger. In the event of a collision which affects the fair outcome of the race, the race will be stopped. All dragon boats must avoid adding to the collision. When other crews see a collision, they must avoid the collision area or come to a stop if directed to by their helm. Dragon boats are not to go to assist with the rescue. A dragon boat is not easily maneuvered; it will get in the way of emergency personnel and may cause injury to paddlers in the water. If the umpires indicate that the race has been stopped all dragon boats not involved in the collision are to return immediately to the embarkation area.

If a helm finds the boat is in an unavoidable collision situation, he or she must command the paddlers to STOP THE BOAT. If the collision occurs despite this effort, paddlers should try to avoid injury - such as leaning away from the collision point to avoid being hit by another person or part of a boat. Once the boat has come to a stop the boat captain must ascertain if any of the crew sustained an injury that requires immediate medical attention. If so the boat captain and crew are to signal an emergency to the rescue boats. Crew members should keep calm and quiet so they can hear the directions from the boat captain, helm and emergency personnel. Crew members must stay in the boat. This will keep them out of harm's way when emergency personnel arrive. Any paddlers in the water should not attempt to get into either boat, until directed to do so by their boat captain or rescue personnel as doing so may cause a boat to roll towards the water or even capsize, thus putting more people in the water. If a crew member in the water is injured, the nearest uninjured crew member in the boat should steady themselves and uses one hand to grasp the collar of the PFD of the injured Racer or take hold of the other persons arm. It is important for the uninjured crew member to maintain verbal contact with the person in the water until emergency personnel arrive. The boat captains must inform the rescue boats of any injuries or missing paddlers.

The lead boat operator collates the reports and radios to race control the full information concerning the number of injuries and their nature and the total number of missing racers so the appropriate services can be initiated. If a racer is missing, the emergency personnel from the vessel assisting that dragon boat initiate a search and inform the lead rescue boat. Once a rescue boat is at capacity, it should push away carefully from the collision with rescue personnel directing the remaining Racers to stay with the dragon boat to be picked up by additional rescue boats. Once clear the rescue boat should return quickly to the dock where onshore emergency personnel can take over the treatment of any injured crew members. The additional

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vessels (if available) ferry injured people to the shore-based First Aid point for treatment to begin. If there are no additional rescue boats, the priority of one rescue boat will be to search. The second rescue boat will triage the victims and ferry them back to the embarkation area.

CAPSIZES

A capsized boat is one that has turned upside down with the hull of the boat uppermost. Capsizing can occur in strong side winds or in cross wave conditions. Crews must understand that they cannot stop a boat from capsizing once it has started to roll. Crew members must let themselves go with the roll of the boat and try to throw themselves clear of the boat or dive into the water. Once clear of the boat paddlers should try to locate and retain the nearest paddle.

A crew member who is underneath the overturned boat can breathe in the air pocket. They should then grasp the gunwale of the boat with one hand and push back down into the water until they are clear of the boat and can surface. As soon as each crew member is clear of the boat, they must look for their buddy. The boat captain will check that all crew members are present by calling for Racers to identify themselves by shouting out their crew number. Once all the crew is accounted for 'Buddies' check each other for injury and report any injuries to the boat captain. Crew members must stay with the boat, using it as a floating platform but should avoid climbing on top of the boat as it may start to roll and possibly injure other paddlers. If a 'buddy' is injured, the uninjured buddy should grasp the gunwale of the boat with one hand and the collar of the PFD (or clothing) of the injured buddy with the other. It is important for the uninjured buddy to maintain verbal contact with their buddy. If the water is cold or paddlers feel cold, they should pull their knees to their chest and wrap their arms around their legs. This is often referred to as the HELP position – Heat Escape Lessening Position. Upon their arrival, emergency personnel take control of the situation. The boat captain will provide them with information on missing buddies or injuries. Emergency personnel may take some paddlers on board the rescue boat. If there are no rescue boats immediately available and if the weather and wave conditions permit, then the crew may swim to shore in a self rescue, under the direction of the boat captain.

SWAMPING

A boat is swamped when it takes on large amounts of water which fills the boat to a level where it cannot be paddled and becomes unstable. A swamped boat will float upright just below the surface of the water. Swamping generally occurs in high winds or in choppy wave conditions. Once the boat has come to rest it will float just below the surface. While the crew may be tempted to 'abandon ship' as it fills up with water, it is best that the crew members stay in the boat and to remain still, calm and quiet so they can hear directions from the boat captain, who will conduct a crew check.

If water can be quickly and safely bailed out, the boat captain assigns crew members to do this with the bailer(s) in the boat. Other members can assist by using their paddles to bail out the boat. If the boat cannot be bailed out, the crew- stays in the boat to steady it - all paddlers reach with their paddles as far to the outside of the boat as possible and hold them flat on the water. Upon their arrival, rescue boat personnel will take control of the situation. If the dragon boat can be safely maneuvered, the boat captain instructs the crew to slowly move the dragon boat to the nearest suitable unloading point or to the embarkation area. If this is not possible or there are no rescue boats immediately available and if the weather conditions permit, then the crew may swim to shore in a self rescue, under the direction of the boat captain.

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SELF RESCUE - Swimming to shore

Crew members can swim to shore only if directed to do so by boat captain. All crew members swim to the same spot on shore as directed by the boat captain. Crew members are to swim with their 'buddy'. Cold water can make a short distance feel like a long one. If a buddy was taken into a rescue boat, the lone buddy is to make a threesome with a buddy pair.

Once on shore, the boat captain conducts a crew check accounting for those taken aboard a rescue boat or who may have remained with the dragon boat to help bring it to shore. The boat captain reports to the chief official on the number taken on the rescue boats, anyone missing, anyone injured on the swim in and if all are accounted for.

REQUIREMENTS TO BE MET BY BOAT CAPTAINS

1. To carry out a risk assessment of the weather and water conditions, equipment and personnel at the venue;
2. To be able to conduct a "safety brief;"
3. To understand the requirements of first aid treatment on the water and its associated risks;
4. To complete a swimming test of at least 100 meters;
5. To have completed a "swamping drill;"
6. To have completed a "capsize drill;"
7. To be able to demonstrate "basic helming" abilities.

These criteria must all be met before operating as a boat captain when coaching a novice crew or helming a dragon boat with a novice crew. Taking into account previous experience, some concessions may be given at the start of this programme and subsequently for new but experienced dragon boat paddlers. However, before being authorized to act as a boat captain, without 'on the water' supervision, all initiates MUST demonstrate and pass the tests outlined below to the satisfaction of a suitably qualified dragon boat coach or hold the PDBF Coach Level 1 award.

A. Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is to be done on the weather and water conditions, equipment and personnel at the venue being used. The purpose of this training is to ensure that personnel are not placed in any danger and the club's assets are not compromised.

Before a boat is taken onto the water, the boat captain will take into account the following:

1. If there are NO rescue boats available during the dragon boat training, teams are obligated to ensure their own safety and first aid.
2. The boat must remain within 50 meters of the shore where and when practical.

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3. Wind, water, wave and weather conditions at the venue are suitable for paddling. If the wind is OFFSHORE, pay particular attention to its speed and direction. (If there are safety boats on the water, advise the safety boat captain(s) of your intended session duration and location.)
4. Note the condition of the boat to ensure that all safety equipment are available and in good condition.
5. Assess the physical condition of the paddlers, note their experience and any possible health risks they may have.
6. All paddling is to be done during DAY LIGHT hours, therefore, training programs must take into allowance the time of sunset and finish practice BEFORE DARK and not be on the water after sunset.
7. No paddling is to take place if electrical storms are forecast or when there is fog heavy enough to obscure a landmark 80 meters away. If anyone suffers an injury, or if damage is done to equipment a "Safety Incident Notification" form must be filled out by the boat captain at the time.

B. Conduct a "Safety Brief"

The boat captain must be able to carry out a proper Safety Brief.

Definitions:

LIFE JACKET ~ This vest consisting of a sleeveless jacket of buoyant or inflatable design will turn the person over onto their back in the water unaided. It normally comes with a grab strap on the back and protection around the head.

BUOYANCY AID ~ Any device that supplements the wearer's buoyancy. Suitable types are used for kite surfing, canoeing, wind surfing, etc and tend not to have cells on the sides of the jacket. They may also include gas-operated jackets.

A Safety Brief does not address paddling technique nor is it a coaching session; those details should be demonstrated prior to talking about boat safety. Consideration needs to be given if the crew is regularly in attendance; however, if there is one new paddler on the crew a full safety brief must be given to all.

A Safety Brief should be carried out IMMEDIATELY before going onto the water. These rules are designed to ensure that all are safe in the boat on the water.

Important rules that MUST be adhered to:

1. NO person who has a smell of alcohol or drugs on their breath, or who seems to be impaired in any way, is allowed to paddle.
2. No children under the age of 12 are allowed on the boats, unless by prior approval accompanied by a parent or guardian and with a written waiver or consent form fully accomplished by the parent or guardian.
3. Children up to the age of 12 must be accompanied by a consenting adult, who will take care of them in the event of an emergency situation. (Allowance will be made for school teams as required).

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4. The maximum number of children under 15 is 6 per 12 adults, and less if fewer adults are on board so that the ratio is 1:2.
5. All paddlers must observe the safety rules and if at any time the boat captain is concerned about the conduct of any paddler, that person must be taken back to shore.
6. ALL novice paddlers MUST wear a "BUOYANCY AID" or a "LIFE JACKET." The jacket must be kept on and fastened correctly during the on-water training.

SAFETY BRIEF for all new paddlers

1. Identify all NON-SWIMMERS, these paddlers MUST wear life jackets – weak swimmers may wear Buoyancy Aids (PFD).
2. Identify all persons who have First Aid training.
3. Identify all paddlers with previous paddling experience.
4. Identify any paddler who has a medical condition (asthma, strained muscles, etc, those with heart conditions or epilepsy will not be allowed to paddle).
5. Pair paddlers according to height, weight and experience and place in a line side-by-side.
6. Place those experienced in other water-sports at the front and rear if possible.
7. Place non-swimmers/weak swimmers in front of swimmers if possible.
8. Number off paddlers starting from front left then front right then second row left to the back of the boat. 1,2,3,4,.....If there is a Drummer they are Number 1 and the first paddler is Number 2. The helm (cox) always has the last number.
9. Have the paddlers number off again.
10. Explain that they are responsible for their seat buddy firstly, to those in front of them secondly, and thirdly, to those behind them. The Drummer is assigned to the FRONT most pair of paddlers and the Helm to the REAR most pair of paddlers.
11. Give instruction that their number will remain theirs during the session.
12. If the boat capsizes the boat captain (normally the helm) will ask the crew to call their numbers (have the paddlers call their numbers again).
13. Instruct that the boat captain has the full authority on the boat.
14. Explain what may cause the boat to swamp or capsize and instruct how to prevent it.
15. Instruct the Crew that in the event of a capsize everyone should release their paddles and attempt to recover them once they are clear of the capsized boat.

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16. Demonstrate how to take up the fetal position, i.e. with their hands on the top of their heads. Should the boat hit them this position will help to ensure they stay on the top of the water.

CONFIRM THAT THEY HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE BRIEF

1. Explain that to board the boat the paddler steps into the middle of the boat – not on the seat, and then sits down.
2. If possible, board the boat from front to rear, paying attention to position.
3. Explain why it is necessary to keep hands OFF the gunwale beside the wharf.
4. Explain the two main strokes for safety “Brace the Boat” (or “flat paddle”) and “Emergency Stop.”
5. The paddlers must be able to understand the IDBF starting commands, even though the local commands may be different. When in the boat on the water they are:
 - a. **ARE YOU READY?** This is a negative command - any paddler who is not ready should state so now.
 - b. **ATTENTION.** Get into the paddle position.
 - c. **GO.** Start to paddle.

All Crew Members must know the IDBF paddling commands

- a. GO ~ Start to paddle.
- b. BRACE THE BOAT ~ Hold the paddle out over the water with the blade flat on the surface to brace the boat laterally, this can be enhanced by asking the paddlers on each side of the boat, to lean outwards when placing the paddle on the water.
- c. STOP PADDLING~ All paddling is stopped and the paddles are placed in the flat paddle position allowing the boat to continue to move slowly.
- d. STOP THE BOAT ~ The boat is stopped quickly by a reverse stroke

C. Understand the requirements of First Aid on the water and its associated risk

In the unfortunate event of injury or accident, assist the person(s) to shore as soon as possible. This is the reason it is recommended to stay within 80 meters of the shore at all times and the reason for ensuring shore-based patrols are notified in advance.

It is believed the greatest possibility of injury is from a boat capsizing and accordingly it is better to manage the risk before this type of incident occurs in order to prevent injury.

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Other possible medical problems may be associated with a heart attack, which requires that CPR be carried out - this is best done on the shore. Minor cuts or bumps from paddles may also occur, but once again, this can be prevented through training BEFORE the paddlers get onto the water and by correct positioning of novice paddlers in the boat. Dependent on the severity of an injury, the situation may require the team be taken back to shore. For cuts, pressure should be applied to the general area to stop the bleeding.

D. Achieve a swim of at least 100 meters

1. Captains of any water safety boats and the life guards working in the area should be informed before this drill is carried out.
2. All persons wanting to act as boat captains must be swim ably enough to save themselves.
3. Enter the water wearing either a life jacket OR a swim approx 50 meters. Tread water for 3 minutes and then –swim a further distance of approximately 100 meters.
4. If the life jacket OR buoyancy device is one that is operated by a gas bottle it must be inflated to simulate the restrictions that these devices cause.
5. It is beneficial to swim on one's back while wearing the life jacket OR buoyancy aid and to swim in pairs (using the buddy system) while paying attention to your position in the water relative to the shore.

E. Complete a “Swamping drill” (this can be done in conjunction with the Capsize drill)

Captains of any water safety boats and the life guards working in the area should be informed before this drill is carried out.

This is the most likely event to occur when on the water and the risk of this can be reduced by proper RISK ANALYSIS and consultation with other users of the water.

Dependent on the height and pitch (crest to crest distance) of the waves, the boat captain needs to determine the best angle to avoid swamping or capsizing the boat.

When waves are higher than normal, the boat captain should ensure that the boat is at approximately 45 degrees and under paddle power OR that the boat is braced by the BRACE THE BOAT command. He or she should be looking out for other boats in the area, especially those travelling at speed or heavy causing large wakes.

BEFORE the boat is taken to the water the boat captain should ensure that adequate equipment is on board to bail the boat, if necessary during the training or practice session.

As part of the Safety Brief, awareness of the boat swamping should be pointed out along with what is expected of the paddlers.

It is important that the crew remain calm and take direction from the boat captain.

During this exercise the boat captain needs to remain vigilant of the water conditions, other water-craft operating nearby and their position relative to the shore, and keep the boat under control by utilizing the paddlers as required.

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After the RISK ANALYSIS is made a Safety Brief is carried out with regard to this particular exercise

Swamping Drill Brief:

1. There will be a minimum requirement of 10 persons in the boat for this drill.
2. Take the boat into shallow water (approx 1.5 meters) and slowly fill the boat.
3. The boat should be kept into or down the wind/wave direction.
4. It is not necessary to fill the boat completely but there must be at least 200mm in the hull, this can be done by bucketing the water in and **NOT** by allowing the water to come in over the gunwale.
5. After the boat has sufficient water onboard, paddle and maneuver the boat carrying out a figure of eight near the shore.
6. Bring the boat close to the shore again and proceed to bail the boat until the water has been removed.

F. Complete a “Capsize drill”

Captains of the water rescue boats and the life guards working in the area should be informed before this drill is carried out.

This is unlikely to occur and the risk of this can be reduced through a proper RISK ANALYSIS and by a consultation with other users of the water.

Dependent on the height and pitch (crest to crest distance) of the waves, the boat captain needs to determine the best angle to avoid swamping or capsizing the boat. When waves are higher than normal the boat captain should ensure that the boat is at approximately 45 degrees and under paddle power OR that the boat is braced by the BRACE THE BOAT command. He or she should be looking out for other boats in the area, especially those travelling at speed or heavy with large wakes.

NOTE.1: It is possible an injury may occur during this drill so a full briefing of what to expect **MUST** be made along with the standard SAFETY BRIEF.

NOTE.2: During normal training or race practices, it is not recommended that any paddlers leave the boat unless they are easily able to reach the shore. The **COMMAND** to abandon the boat will be given by the boat captain. This forms part of the SAFETY BRIEF and RISK ANALYSIS (covered in this document) given immediately **BEFORE** any on-water activity. It is recommended that all paddlers stay with the boat, holding onto the side if possible.

During this drill the boat captain needs to remain vigilant of the water conditions, other water craft operating nearby and their position relative to the shore, and keep the boat under control by utilizing the paddlers as required.

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Capsize Drill Brief:

In accordance with the SAFETY BRIEF each member will first be responsible for finding their seat buddy. Within 15 seconds of turning over the boat captain will call for a number count to begin. This will ensure that all the Crew is accounted for.

If there is anyone unaccounted for, the buddy will look under the boat for their 'buddy' as directed by the boat captain. Other crew members may be required to assist as directed by the boat captain.

The boat captain will next ascertain if there are any injuries that need attention and care for these as required.

NOTE.3: All paddlers must stay with the boat at all times, holding onto the gunwale, unless directed by the boat captain to abandon the boat and swim to the shore or to a rescue vessel.

It has been demonstrated that it is possible in certain water conditions to bail a boat that has been capsized, therefore always ensure that all bailing containers are attached to the boat by a string that will easily break, so that the bailers can be used. (i.e. builders line string with 10 lb breaking strain)

If possible take the boat into shallow water (1.5 meters or less) and roll the boat over. At this time the participants should be able to stand beside the boat and commence bailing it out. If the boat is in water over 2 metres deep, then either swim the boat to shore, if a beach or bank is within 20 metres or commence righting the boat, if water/ weather conditions allow.

RIGHTING THE BOAT ~ the Boat Captain will control this action

1. Use the crew to position the boat at right angles to the waves.
2. Generally select three largest/tallest crew who will be pushed up onto the hull from the same side and reach across to the opposite side, holding the gunwale.
3. On command from the boat captain, roll the boat upright. Caution to be given to the crew in the water as they will be assisting.
4. Stabilize the boat ensuring all crew members are accounted for.
5. At this point the boat will be full of water.
6. Brace the boat by placing the crew members evenly on both sides of the boat and holding onto the gunwales (sides).
7. The boat captain will select the first crew member to enter the boat.
8. The preferred method is to lie at right angles to the boat, legs extended and kick and pull oneself over the submerged gunwale into the centre of the boat.
9. The selected crew members sit in the centre of the boat on the floor, NOT on the seat.
10. Ensure that the boat does not roll over at this time and that it is kept directed into the waves.

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11. If possible and as directed by the boat captain, continue to board the boat until 4 persons (2 at the front and 2 at the back) are on board, the others will be holding onto the sides.
12. As directed by the boat captain, paddle the boat to the shore with those in the water stabilising the boat and kicking to aid this process.

Bailing Out the Boat

If water and weather conditions are favorable, the boat captain may instruct the crew members already re-boarded in the boat to start bailing the boat out. As more and more water is bailed out of the boat, the boat captain will direct one or more paddlers to re-board the boat and assist with the bailing process. Paddles are also useful in helping to bail out a Dragon Boat.

This process of bailing out and paddlers re-boarding shall continue until the boat is no longer unstable and in danger of a further capsize, at which time any remaining paddlers should reboard, as instructed to by the boat captain and the boat paddled back to the nearest shore or return to its starting base, if it is safe and timely to do so.

G. Demonstrate “Basic Boat Helming”

Without basic Helming skills the paddlers and equipment may be placed in an unsafe position. If a Helm or Club boat captain does not hold the appropriate IDBF Coaches Award, they must as a minimum, be able to demonstrate their ability to maneuver a dragon boat competently.

The boat captain’s function is to command the dragon boat. He or she must be strong in character and compassionate of others.

The boat captain must be aware of his surroundings and see the ‘big picture’ and not focus only on what is happening in the boat, this is particularly important if the boat captain is also coaching.

If the boat captain is also coaching he or she should assign one paddler to take the lookout function while they are talking or working with the rest of the paddlers. The boat captain needs to recognize when a paddler is having difficulty and slow the pace as required in conjunction with coaching practices. If needed, he or she must be able to take the boat back to shore, quickly and efficiently if the weather conditions change or a crew member is injured or becomes ill.

The boat captain is responsible for discipline on the boat and while this should not normally be an issue, he must recognise it and have the paddlers understand their function before they board. The boat captain is responsible for the paddlers and the safety of the boat while seeking the correct course to navigate, and he must be aware of any other craft on the water or, when near the shore, any swimmers.

When helming, the standard method is to stand bracing oneself against the sides of the boat, this is done with the steering oar blade set deeper into the water, this can cause the Helm to over-balance, if the crew causes the boat to tip to one side unexpectedly or the wind has caused choppy wave conditions or there is a heavy swell. It is also possible to steer (helm) the boat whilst sitting, twisting the handle to make small corrections or to push or pull the steering oar for larger movements.

The boat captain will continuously be making decisions based on Risk Analysis assessments and in this way keep possible problems at bay.

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Boat Captains and Helms must be able to demonstrate the following:

1. Maneuver the boat in a figure of 8 at speed.
2. Maneuver the boat sideways.
3. Turn the boat in its own length.
4. Carry out an emergency stop (stopping the boat within one boat length)
5. Keep the boat straight for 500 meters beside the buoys in the bay at DIMC.
6. Back up the boat in a straight line for two boat lengths.
7. Bring the boat alongside a loading dock, floating pontoon or shore-side bank.
8. Embark and disembark a crew correctly, speedily and safely.

REFERENCE DOCUMENTS

IDBF Coaches Awards Scheme (CAS) - available from www.idbf.org

IDBF Competition Regulations (CR) - available from www.idbf.org

IDBF Rules of Racing (RR) - available from www.idbf.org

IDBF Water Safety Policy (WSP) - available from www.idbf.org

