



The Dragon Boat - History and Culture



國際龍舟聯合會
INTERNATIONAL DRAGON BOAT FEDERATION



The Dragon Boat Race - A Very Special Chinese Tradition

The Dragon has a very symbolic meaning for the Chinese. A classic dragon has the head of an ox; a deer's antlers; the mane of a horse; the body and scales of a snake; the claws of an eagle and the tail of a fish. With its strength and power the Dragon rides the clouds in the sky and commands the wind, mist and rain.

The Dragon Boat is deeply embedded in China's 'Dragon' culture, with each Boat having an ornately carved dragon's head at the Bow and a tail in the Stern. The Hull is painted with the Dragon's scales. The paddles symbolically represent the claws. In IDBF Sport Racing there are generally 18-20 paddlers per Standard size Dragon Boat and 8-10 paddlers in the Small Boat, plus a drummer and a helm (Steerer). In Traditional Festivals the boat designs and crew numbers can vary from 10 up to 50 or more paddlers, plus of course the Drummer and Helm.

The races are a colourful spectacle, with at least two boats competing against each other over distances from 200 to 2000 metres and above. Not only are strength, endurance and skill important but teamwork and harmony of purpose.

In ancient China the Dragon Boat was used for religious purposes as a way of appeasing the rain gods. Later Qu Yuan, the great warrior poet, committed suicide in the river Mi Lo, as a protest against the political corruption of the day. To commemorate this sacrifice the people began to organize Dragon Boat Races in his memory. Since that time over 2000 years ago, Dragon Boat Racing has become a major part of Chinese culture, representing patriotism and group integrity. (Picture: Barbara KEENAN Amathus DBC, British Dragon Boat Racing Association).

DRAGON BOATING TODAY - A MODERN SPORT - THE IDBF WAY

In the 1970s the Hong Kong Tourist Association (now Tourist Board) decided to stage an International Dragon Boat Festival to promote Hong Kong. In 1976 the first Hong Kong International Races took place, an event recognized today, by dragon boaters world-wide, as the start of the 'Modern Era' of Dragon Boat Racing. The HKIR developed into an annual festival of enormous success and impressive press pictures of the Hong Kong Races went around the world.

Until the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) was formed in 1991 and Sport Racing was developed alongside the traditional Festival Races, the HKIR were the 'unofficial club crew world championships' of the sport. Crews who competed in the HKIR then went home and started their own Dragon Boat Associations, followed by the International Federations of the EDBF (European - 1990), the IDBF, 1991 and the ADBF (Asian -1992). Since then the IDBF has established Continental Federations for Africa, Oceania and Pan America. These six Federations' now govern Dragon Boat Sport as practiced in over 90 countries, word-wide.

Since the formation of the IDBF, the sport has spread rapidly throughout the world. Today, over 40 years after the first HKIR the numbers show the truly impressive development of modern Dragon Boat Sport. With nearly 40 million participants in China; over 100,000 in the UK and Europe, including Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Russia; 90,000 each in Canada and the USA and many thousands in Australia and New Zealand. With the sport now established in the Caribbean, Africa and the Pacific Basin; Dragon Boat Sport, under its governing bodies is a vibrant, effective and independent paddle sport. There were over 6000 participants at the 2018 IDBF Club Crew World Champs and nearly 4000 at the 2019 IDBF World Nations Championships. (Pictures: IDBF Spec Dragon Boats - on the move !)





Dragon Boat Sport - People Packed, Exciting!

Dragon Boat Competitions, under the IDBF and its Continental Federations have developed into a serious, high-performance, competitive sport, with many Dragon Boat Associations producing National Teams of elite dragon boat paddlers.

The IDBF World Championships, EDBF European Championships and ADBF Asian Championships are well established, as are the Pan Am Championships in North America. Championship Medals are hard to come by and well deserved. A whole new ethos and different set of racing values has developed from the Hong Kong International Festival Races.

There is no other paddle sport in which 22 people work together to create a Team result rewarded through the efforts of the whole crew, rather than a few individual performances. This harmony of purpose can only be achieved through many hours of training in the boat, learning to be a complete crew and developing the team spirit and understanding necessary to work together, as one unit, for the common good.

40 years after the first HKIRs, the numbers show the impressive development of Dragon Boat Sport. 40 million Dragon boaters in China and the sport, has now spread to all continents'.

Dragon Boating - the mass participation paddle sport for all ages & abilities.

As well as Sport Racing, Dragon Boat Associations have helped to develop the Festival Racing side of Dragon Boating too. Many Festival Races are successful due to the number of crews that enter just for the fun and excitement of the event. One of the advantages of Dragon Boating is that you can form a Festival Crew (or fun team, as they are sometimes known) and with little experience and knowledge, quickly become competitive in a Dragon Boat. A lot of Festival Crews come from the 'corporate market' and compete in Festival Dragon Boat Racing because it is also a social event and a team building activity in which the strengths and abilities of employees are soon apparent.



The growth in the Festival Racing scene is enormous. For example there are now event organising companies, world-wide whose sole purpose is to organize dragon boat festival races each year. This is particularly true in Canada and the USA, where Sport Racing Crews also race in the Festival Races. In Europe, Festival Races attract many hundreds of crews from companies and the community. In the UK Festival Races for Charity have raised millions of £ sterling and other such races in Europe and many more throughout the world, generate funds for the Sport too.

Dragon Boat Racing - the Modern Sport with Ancient Traditions. Serious Sport but Serious Fun Too !

Dragon Boating is the mass participation paddle sport of today, with an ancient past and a very bright future. Not yet an Olympic sport but heading that way fast, Dragon Boat Racing is a 'team sport'; a very social sport and great fun too!

Attractive to the corporate market and as a 'community activity' it is also a high performance sport for elite standard athletes. This ability range in a team sport full of tradition, culture and social interaction is highly desirable in today's world. Dragon Boating is a sport and recreational activity that can be pursued by everyone and anyone of all abilities and at every level of competition. That is the greatness of Dragon Boating- be part of it !



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'The Recognized World Governing Body for Dragon Boat Sport'