

The Basics:

What is the recent history of dragon boating?

It is an ancient Chinese sport that is about 2,500 years old. Most recently, it came to North America when China donated boats for the Expo '86 in Vancouver. The local Chinese community saw it as a way to showcase their culture. The cultural festival spread to other major markets including Toronto, San Francisco, Montreal and New York. Since then, it has become much more of a sport with over 100 events annually in North America, but has never lost its' Chinese heritage.

What is the ancient myth of dragon boating?

The main legend concerns a Chinese court official named Qu Yuan. It is said that he lived in the preimperial Warring States period (475-221 BC). During this time the area today known as central China was divided into seven main states or kingdoms battling among themselves for supremacy with unprecedented heights of military intrigue. Qu Yuan is regarded as a minister in one of the Warring State governments.

In 278 B.C., upon learning of the upcoming devastation of his state from invasion by a neighboring Warring State, Qu is said to have waded into the Miluo river, which drains into Dongting Hu (lake) holding a great rock in order to commit ritual suicide as a form of protest against the corruption of the era.

The common people, upon learning of his suicide, rushed out on the water in their fishing boats to the middle of the river and tried desperately to save Qu Yuan. They beat drums and splashed the water with their paddles in order to keep the fish and evil spirits from his body. Later on, they scattered rice into the water to prevent him from suffering hunger. Another belief is that the people scattered rice to feed the fish, in order to prevent them from devouring the poet's body. In commemoration of Qu Yuan, people hold dragon boat races annually on the day of his death, a national holiday in China.

Participant Demographics

Who participates?

Really anyone can. One of the contributing factors to the sport's growth is the ease of access. It doesn't matter if you have a bad back or bad knees. The beauty of the sport is that anyone can do it. There are teams of wounded war veterans, blind teams that use the beat of the drum to stay in sync. Really, anyone can participate. It's an inclusive sport/activity – new experience necessary, it's for all shapes, sizes ages and skill level.

The vast majority of participants come from corporate teams. Even the competitive teams are made up of paddlers that were once on a corporate team and became hooked.

Why do corporations participate?

There are three common reasons: team building, healthy lifestyle choices and community engagement.

Technical Facts

How many people in a boat?

There is a total of 22 people in a boat. There is a drummer, 20 paddlers and a steerperson / coach.

How many people are on a team roster?

We recommend teams to have a minimum of 16 paddlers and 1 drummer. Each team roster can have up to 25 people – 20 paddlers, 1 drummer, 4 alternate paddlers.

We make exceptions for kids over 12 with parental consent. Remember, this is a big boat and we want it to be fun, so a boat comprised of just kids will make things challenging. GWN will provide the steersperson/coach. Keep in mind that your drummer is going to work with your coach/steersperson to keep the boat in time (beat the drum to the count of the steers). It's a pretty narrow seat, so we would recommend putting someone who would be comfortable sitting there.

What is the minimum age for participants?

The minimum age is 12 years old and everyone under the age of 18 will need a parent/guardian's permission on the waiver.

Are there different classes?

Yes, there are generally three racing classes, Mixed, Women's and Open.

Mixed Teams: Consists of a maximum of 10 men in the boat and any number of female paddlers in the boat. A drummer may be male or female. The Mixed division is the most popular in North America.

Women's Teams: Consists of all female paddlers, including the drummer.

Open Teams: Any combination of male and female paddlers, but often teams are comprised solely of men.

Do I need any equipment?

You do not need any equipment. GWN to provide the use of paddles, lifejackets and of course, the boats to race in.

How far is the race?

The most common distance is 500m. It takes a top team about 2:00 to finish, but most new teams are in the 2:30 – 3:00 minute range. At some community events, the distance is shorter.

Do we race once and then we are done?

No. Everyone races the same number of times. At most festivals it is usually three races. The first is a qualifier. We rank all of the teams and then divide you into divisions. For the rest of the day you are racing against teams with a similar skill level. The second race is a semi-final and the last race of the day is a grand or consolation final.

What is an industry cup and how does my team qualify?

An industry cup is a race consisting of teams from a similar industry. For example, the Banking Cup. At least 70% of the crew must be part of the same company or even industry to qualify (i.e. Financial Services, Banks, Fitness Clubs, Public Services, etc.).

This is up to you to decide if you wish to have an industry races, it gives you an opportunity to create competition within each industry. At our own races, we usually make the first race of the day double up as industry cup races, so that it's not an extra race as 4 races in one day is a lot for beginner teams.

What should I wear for paddling?

Wear comfortable clothing that does not hold or absorb moisture and has a tighter fit rather than loose or baggy. Keep in mind you will warm up quickly after the paddling begins. A thermal layer such as Lifa / Dri-fit / Coolmax or Polypropylene shirt is a good idea. Shorts or similar tights are best for your lower body. You will get wet so be sure not to wear your brand new running shoes. Old shoes, water sandals or aqua socks make the best footwear. You may want to bring a change of clothes for afterwards.