

Tim W Smith. BDA Senior A National Squad Coach. September 2019.

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Open letter to all paddlers eligible for the 2020/21 GB Senior A Squad.

Dear Senior A athletes;

The BDA has notified me that I have been selected as a Senior A coach for 2021-21. I am proud, honoured and very pleased to return to a BNTS coaching role. I am currently in discussions with some very talented, committed individuals. We plan to construct a great coaching team to take the Squad forwards.

The “Senior A game” has changed. At the IDBF World Championships in Pattaya, Thailand the Senior A Mixed Standard boat 500m was won in 1:57 mins. The slowest crew in that Major final did 2:01 mins. Pattaya was a deep, fair course, like Brandenburg in 2018 and Welland in 2015. Times which were achieved by Premier crews only a few years ago are now the preserve of Senior A. Looking forwards, GB Senior A needs a response which will keep us proactive & competitive at World level.

Whilst I have been away from BNTS coaching I have not exactly been idle. Aside from paddling GB Senior B, I have been coaching abroad and gaining some insights into what works well and less well in preparing International crews. The raw material is clearly the athletes. BNTS is the medium where club athletes prepare for International competition. It is not where people learn to paddle. As a BNTS coach, I need to strike a balance between blending a top level crew and developing paddlers both for 2020 and future years. In the past few weeks I have had discussions with present and potential Senior A paddlers about their expectations. Two trends emerge: 1) Those who want to press on as rapidly as possible and 2) Those who want to wait and see “if the squad is good enough” or “whether they can commit”. That is all fine since my decisions have always been and will be informed by crew perspectives and opinions.

In the early stages of the 2020 campaign we will try something new. We will run a twin track squad and during this process resolve any remaining dilemmas. Training from November will be over a weekend. Day 1 will be for the Main Squad and Day 2 will be for the Development Squad. “Main Squad” athletes can attend both days if they wish. There will also be club based activities providing coach support where required. This is a continuation of the “BNTS on Tour” events I ran with the Premier Squad from 2014-2017.

How do you know which group you are eligible for?

Easy - you submit performance data. This should be routine and familiar to all National Squad athletes. All successful Nations benchmark and measure their athletes and crews. The GB Senior A Squad aims to be successful so this is a logical first step. Every Senior A eligible BDA member qualifies for the development squad immediately. However, if you wish to progress straight to the Senior A Main group I will need to see some recent performance statistics for the following distances. The Main Squad will obviously be paddling at a higher level.

- 1) 500m in an O1 / OC1.
- 2) 1000m in an O1 / OC1.
- 3) 200m in an O1 / OC1.
- 4) 6 mins on an Ergo meter. Distance covered at 75%-80% effort. (Rowing / Paddling / Ski).

Do these in one session or 4 sessions - your choice. Tell me about the conditions and location of the paddling.

It is anticipated that athletes will complete these activities in October, 2019. I will also launch the Strength and Conditioning programme during October. We will review the data and decide who logically starts where.

The first BNTS Senior A training weekend is scheduled to be on 16th / 17th November.

Strategy and Plan for 2020.

The key aspects are as follows. These will be explained and expanded upon at the BNTS sessions.

- ❖ Acknowledge, respect and build upon the foundation laid down by the previous coaches.
- ❖ Senior A is for 39-50 year old paddlers. There are always exceptions but these will be based on merit, extenuating circumstance and unique skill sets.
- ❖ Athletes will be positively coached. They will be expected to respond to well founded criticism with a willingness to change. The ability to blend, adapt and respond to coaching will be an objective, goal orientated selection criteria.
- ❖ There will be a performance culture with benchmark trials and monthly returns. The main Time Trial will be just one of these performance measures.
- ❖ There will be performance standards in paddling, technique, strength, conditioning and fitness. I will expect a return rate of 90%+.
- ❖ There will be specific training for Helm / Steerers and Drummer / Cox. All crew members will also be paddlers or at the very least have dual skills (e.g helm & drummer - cox).
- ❖ There will be a Code of Conduct. GB Senior A athletes must be exemplary on and off the water.
- ❖ There will be a culture which is fair, open, honest and transparent. We will remain as flexible as possible regarding crews, composition and race categories entered.
- ❖ BNTS monthly training events will be staged over weekends. The training camp model is favoured by a number of successful nations.
- ❖ BNTS sessions are the medium where athletes train for International competition. There will be a Development squad to maximise opportunities for athletes to “make the BNTS Senior A grade”.
- ❖ There will be access to International Training Camps in Cyprus, SW France, the US and Spain.
- ❖ There will be a Strength and Conditioning / Flexibility programme. Submission of regular returns will be a selection criteria as well as a benchmarking / performance measure.
- ❖ “GB Senior A” is a global entity. If there are eligible & willing BDA members based outside the UK and we can blend them into a Senior A crew then they will be welcome.
- ❖ All squad members will agree to contribute to squad fund-raising activities. There will be no requests for handouts. I anticipate that we would have sufficient skills, aptitude and resources available within the squad.

NEXT STEPS: If you would like to join the 2020 BNTS Senior A programme please contact me ASAP.

Tim W Smith

GB Senior A Coach, 2020/21.