

Members of a Dragon Boat Team are Not Your Typical Athletes!

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Dragon boating is the fastest-growing team water sport in the world. Why does a sport which consists of 20 paddlers in a long heavy boat with a steersperson in the back and a drummer in the front racing against other boats appeal to so many? The sport can be extremely competitive but encourages team building and challenges people from different backgrounds, shapes, and sizes while having fun. The sport also has a tradition of easy access and inclusion.

For many who do dragon boating, it is a life-changing sport. It is rare to find a sport where everyone is seen and treated as equals, and where there is access for so many. In dragon boating nothing matters except how well you can move the boat with your paddle as a team. Dragon boaters are a special type of athlete and here is why:

1. Dragon boaters are diverse:

The greatest thing about dragon boating is that anyone can succeed in this sport, regardless of age, size, background, gender, or previous athletic experience. Many sports have specific physical requirements to succeed, but in dragon boating all you need is an unwavering work ethic, grit, and drive. Diversity is a huge advantage since anyone can join the team and become a great paddler in a reasonably short time, enabling them to contribute to better performance by the team. In a world which constantly scrutinizes and stereotypes people, it is a relief in dragon boating that all participants, regardless of physique, are celebrated and embraced.

2. Dragon boaters become strong and fit:

Dragon boating is a strenuous, whole-body workout every practice. Each stroke starts from the toes and progresses through the body ending with your hands. Power in every stroke is essential to move the boat and be competitive in races. Female dragon boaters are not scared to get muscular or look strong because that is their goal. We all work to become as strong a paddler as possible. Serious paddlers will develop strong bodies and minds.

3. Giving up is not an option:

Not only is physical strength important to being a successful paddler, but mental strength is also the other part of the equation. Dragon Boat races can last from 2 to 3.5 minutes and the goal for each race, regardless of time and distance, is complete exertion and exhaustion of all paddlers by the end of the race. Once the race has started, there are no time-outs, or substitutions, therefore, a paddler must develop a special kind of endurance which comes from mind, heart and body. A lot of mental endurance and strength is needed to continue to push yourself with every stroke, since giving up during practice or a race means letting down 19 other paddlers working hard in the boat. No matter how much our bodies are hurting, we find

the strength to push past it and never give up paddling hard for our team. Tenacity and mental toughness will often win the race.

4. Dragon boaters build each other up:

Dragon boating is the epitome of a team sport; no one person can be an all-star to carry a team. Everyone must contribute their best self for the boat to move as fast and efficiently as possible. Because teamwork is essential, we value highly building strong support among the team members to motivate each other to keep improving. We are each other's biggest fans and we are stronger as paddlers and as a team for that. There is nothing stronger than a group of women who build each other up and support each other unconditionally.

5. Consistency and dedication are our foundation:

Paddling consists of the same motion repeated over and over. Because of the repetitiveness, the key to becoming a good paddler is mastering a consistent technique. To build muscle memory, dedication to train consistently is crucial. The commitment, devotion and perseverance required to master this skill are vital characteristics of a paddler. The commitment to be present and support team improvement is also vital, and these characteristics carry through to other aspects of our lives.

6. Fear is not in our vocabulary:

Dragon boat team members are fearless individuals who are ready to take on any challenge. If we can push our bodies and minds to the max for a practice or race, there is very little we cannot do. The paddling motion is not natural, and the training and effort required to become a proficient paddler take time to develop. We all have taken a leap becoming dragon boaters and do not let our fear of failing in a new sport stop us from pushing past the initial awkwardness of learning to paddle.

7. A team is a community:

At the end of the day, a dragon boat team becomes a community. They empower each other through this sport and bond through our dedication, commitment, and common goal to become better paddlers. By training next to each other, both in and out of the boat, week after week, we have built an unbreakable bond through our passion for this sport. Being a part of this community can be life-changing and empowering for team members of all types and backgrounds.

8. Dragon boaters are always positive:

A race is not an art and not a frantic scramble. It must be paddled with head power as well as hand power. Our thoughts are not directed to the other teams, but to us and our own boat, always positive and never negative. We have confidence in each other, and we are therefore able to drive the boat forward with abandon; we are confident that no one paddler will get the full weight of each pull of the paddle.

9. Dragon boaters work to achieve harmony, balance, and rhythm:

Our dragon boat team works to achieve harmony, balance, and rhythm to achieve success. These three things can also serve each team member well in other aspects of their lives.

10. A dragon boat team develops “swing”:

Swing is the fourth dimension of paddling, the secret sauce. When a crew achieves “Swing”, paddling seems to be effortless and propelling the boat forward is a delight. There is a spiritual value to losing one’s self entirely in the cooperative effort of the entire crew.

11. One final thing:

It is hard to find a dragon boater coming off a boat after a hard practice or race who is not smiling. The joy found in this community is pervasive.

Note: This article is based on the article titled ‘The Women of Dragon Boat are Not Your Typical Athletes’ written by Viki Chou of the Pennsylvania Dragon Boat Club and published on the website monochromepink.com. Also included is material from ‘The Boys in The Boat’