

# Slalom E-Book

*By William T. Endicott*

## Section VI - Case Study : PAUL RATCLIFFE

“I’m very impatient, but you’ve got to learn to be ‘patiently impatient.’ ”

-- Paul Ratcliffe

Great Britain has certainly had its share of great K1s over the years. One thinks of World Silver Medalists David Mitchell (1967), Ray Calverly (1969), World Champions Paul Farrant (1959), Albert Kerr (1977), and Shaun Pearce (1991) and the astounding five-time World Champion Richard Fox (1981, '83, '85, '89, and '93 -- no one has ever won more times). And recently, there have been two Olympic Silver Medalists, Paul Ratcliffe (2000) and Campbell Walsh (2004). This is the story of one of those, Paul Ratcliffe. In addition to his Olympic medal, Paul was World Cup Champion 3 times, and World Bronze Medalist twice. He is now a coach of the British team.

Paul was born November 12, 1973 in Eccles, Salford, near Manchester. But he grew up in Tyldesley, about 10 miles west of Manchester, and he lived there with his parents until he was 18 years old, when he moved to Nottingham.

When he raced, he was 5' 11" tall and weighed 70 kilos. His paddle length “varied from 205 cms from 1993 to 2000. From 2001 to 2004 it was 203.” The angle of feather also varied over the years, “probably 85 degrees in the early years, and 65 degrees in later years.” His paddles were right-hand control and, from 2001, had a bent shaft instead of a straight one.

### Family Background

“I came from a typical working-class family. My father, Bob, in his youth was very active in sport. He did a lot of football and cycling, and he was pretty much top of his class in everything he did. And my mum, Kath, I never recall her talking about doing much sport when she was young. She was more on the academic side; she worked in industry as an industrial chemist.”

Bob is a slalom coach now and was, as we shall see, Paul’s coach during his entire career.

“I guess through my career he learnt coaching, learnt what I did, how I did it, right from a young age he’s been with me. He’s always worked closely with me, and then he started doing a bit more personal coaching for others. Basically, he responded to requests. So, he did some private work from '96 onwards and then he started working with the Welsh team probably around '97, '98. He wants to retire every year and they keep asking him to do a bit more. He coached Helen Reeves to her gold medal in the Junior World Championships in 1996, when she was 15. [She later won an Olympic Bronze Medal, in 2004 – ed.] Now he works just part-time with a Welsh programme, so he’s down in Nottingham once a week.”

Paul has a brother, Mark, two and a half years younger, and not only was Mark a paddler, he's now a slalom coach, too:

He had kind of a fragmented career. He probably got to the top end of Division 1 just missing the junior team when he was 18. And then he went to University and had a big break for 4-5 years, and came back and moved in with me in Nottingham, started padding again, reached top 10 levels in the Premier Division. And then he retired, 4 years ago and started coaching. He now runs the World Class Junior Program.

In their coaching careers Paul and Mark work together quite closely now.

### Early Sports Involvement

Paul was active in many sports when he was young:

“I was into everything. I played a lot of football [soccer], captained the school teams from junior school and into senior school. I was the best in the class at cross-country. I did gymnastics up until I was 11, just at school. I was a member of the swimming club. But I guess all those sports sort of filtered away as I became better and better at canoeing. One of the reasons I didn't do swimming later was because I hated being in these confined spaces, looking at the floor of the pool.”

Paul further describes his early sports involvement:

“I was more short, sprint-based, I think, probably better at those sports. The reason for the gymnastics was because I was good at trying new things. I was probably brave in the school competitions more than being the most naturally gifted at them. I would do all of the gymnastic events, like vaulting over boxes or a routine on the floor or on an old school climbing frame. “

It was similar with swimming, in that Paul did a lot of different events there, too. “But the event I favoured most was the breaststroke.” He also did a lot of outdoor sports:

“I've always been into outdoor sports, as well as typical school sports. And as a family we also did a lot of outdoor activities, walking and camping, that sort of thing, so our holidays were typically outdoors.

I think my interest in outdoor sports was maybe due to the freedom to express myself more. I didn't feel like I was restricted. In swimming, it just felt very confined. But out on a river I could go explore a lot more. I associated better feelings with it.”

On top of just being interested in sports generally, Paul was also interested in competitive sports:

“From an early age, my father set us up to climb mountains. He wanted us to find out what it took to reach a peak, and I think he instilled that in me. So, on holidays we would go and climb mountains in Snowdonia and the Lake District and there would always be a competition about who could get to the top the quickest. I think I just took that sort of attitude into sport.”

### Gets into Kayaking

At age 8, Paul got into kayaking, entering his first competition 2 years later, at age 10:

“We always camped by rivers. So I’d see kayaking groups on the rivers, and it was just something that gave me a flavour for wanting to paddle, and so I sent off for my first kayak.”

Paul’s brother, Mark, got into it, too. At that point, their father “was more of a facilitator, he would carry our boats down to the rivers and make sure we were all right--that sort of thing.”

“We got these big polo-type boats. We took them to the local lake and started to learn to paddle a bit, and then we joined the Manchester Canoe Club.”

### Sees Bala World Championships

Very shortly after Paul got into kayaking, he and his whole family went to see the 1981 Slalom Racing World Championships which were in Bala, Wales that year. It was the first slalom race he ever saw.

“It had a big impact on me as a little eight-year-old. We managed to find a spot on the bank. And we stood there watching Richard Fox [the eventual winner, from Britain – ed.] come past and then at the end of his run I just remember him being able to do a move that nobody else could do, and how fascinating it was seeing somebody perform at such a high level. That stuck in my mind as a vision I wanted to achieve at a young age. We got Richard’s autograph at the end of the race. It was quite inspirational at the time for me.”

It was then that Paul decided that he was really interested in racing.

“I’d always been doing other sports and was competitive about it. I always had to win whatever I was doing. And now we had boats at home. At the Worlds I saw what it was like winning at the highest level. I had not made a conscious decision that I was going to do kayaking long-term before watching the World Championships. But I guess watching them gave me the flavour for what was possible. It gave me a vision of me wanting to be a World Champion. If you imagine that I loved the outdoors and there’s a guy winning the World Championships in a beautiful outdoors environment -- it was paradise for me, being able to do something like that.”

### Training at Manchester Canoe Club

When Paul first became a member of the Manchester Canoe Club, it was one of the biggest clubs in the country, with a few hundred slalom paddlers. Today, however, like most clubs in Britain, it has fewer slalom competitors but more recreational paddlers. Paul and Mark started out at the club learning how to paddle in flatwater:

“We learnt some strokes. Then, in the winter we learnt to roll in the swimming pool and we met a coach named Harry Bowles. And Harry had two sons that used to paddle in the top end of the Premier Division. So, that linked us with a pretty good coach at a young age and he guided me for a few years. Once a week we would go up on Tuesday nights to Manchester Canoe Club. This was at age 9-10.

Harry had specific time blocks for kids but I would go and see him for blocks outside of that. Eventually we started to paddle with Heather Corrie and a couple of paddlers from around that area at a different a place called Cheadle Hulme, which is on the Mersey.”

But then all within a 12-month period Harry “kind of drifted away,” Paul had appendicitis and broke his nose and collarbone and had to take some time off. When he came back, around 1985, at age 12-13, he started paddling with Adrian Welsh who was a top-end premier division paddler. “That had a big impact because I started training at a young age with prem guys who were top 5 and top 6 in Britain.”

#### 1983 -- First Race

“My first race was when I was ten years old, at a place called Glasshouses in Yorkshire. I came 12th in the novice division and I won a bottle of milk -- and it was full-fat milk in those days, too. So it was fantastic!

Then, I worked my way up the divisions. In Britain it used to go from novice, four, three, two, one, to premier division and division four. That was '83, or '84, probably. I did 8-10 slalom races a year then, no wildwater races.

At local club sites, you'd arrive Friday night, camp, caravan or whatever. Then you'd train all Saturday morning on this course, and you'd have team events in the afternoon. Then, you'd do the individual race on Sunday. You'd go home knackered and go to school the next morning. It was great.”

#### Working on Technique

Paul describes the work he and his dad did on slalom technique in those days:

“We did lots of technical work. Lots of work under the flood lights under a bridge on the river Mersey. My dad was at every session, with rats running around him. And we'd spend a whole session just on one escape. There was a bridge pillar and we'd do an S-gate behind it. And we'd work on trying to get my edges right, working on when to shift from downstream lean to an upstream lean. We'd do a whole session just on one skill.”

Paul's brother, Mark, didn't do these sessions, though, “Just my dad and I.”

“There was often at least one prem guy on the river at the same time and sometimes more -- there were 3-4 prems in that group. Fortunately, they took me under their wing.”

The group worked a lot on upstream gate technique:

“We'd work on 3-stroke upstreams, 5-stroke upstreams, Meranos, and S-gates. There would be whole sessions just on these sorts of things.”

But just as importantly, there was a lot of forwards paddling:

“I would also paddle on the canal back home and we'd just work on the forward paddling. We started time trials of 20 and 30 minutes. We did this all in slalom boats. We never spent any time in wildwater boats then, and later on in my career only a little bit. Probably one of the biggest things I learnt at a young age was how to sprint.

At that stage we always used to train on quite short courses, always 20--30-second stuff. Some of it would be in loops, and some of it would be downstream stuff. And I just remember this Harry Bowles guy who used to say, "Come on Paul, give it some Welly!" And that was like a trigger for me to sprint. "Give it some Welly," as in Wellington boot. You throw a Wellington boot at something -- you "give it some Welly." My dad picked up on the importance of sprinting, to go quickly and not hold back. I was able to paddle fearlessly, and that was one of the big things I think I took into my career."

### 1986 -- Starts Training Log

When he was 13, Paul started keeping a training log – which is the earliest age this writer knows of an athlete doing that.

"The prem guys had these stickers on the decks of their boats, and every time they did a timed session, they'd write down the times on the sticker. Later, they'd write them in a logbook. So, I started writing down my own training, too, in an old exercise book. So that's how it started. These guys had simple columns: date, description, minutes worked something like that. And that's how I did it, too."

The training log progressed over the years, but there would often be big gaps in it.

"I'm one of these people who have all these good intentions about being diligent with a logbook. But then I'd get in season and it would all go to pot sometimes. But then I'd start it up again. So, there are not many years where I have completed a full training diary. But I probably completed more when I was a junior.

Eventually I tried doing it on a computer. But I don't know why I bothered because my computer was nicked. And also with the simple diary it's easier just to flip through it than it is with the computer. I just find the diary a bit more descriptive, just a better indicator, really. It's with you every session, say, if you want to just write down something in the gym, for example. Sometimes I'd go a month without writing anything. And then I'd re-visit everything in my head and write the whole month out. So, sometimes it wouldn't be as descriptive as it could have been. I'd just have a brief overview."

After keeping a handwritten log for 10 years, in 1998, when he was 23, Paul bought the computer and it is the records from that period onward that are now lost.

### Description of Training

By 1985, when Paul was 14 years old, he was doing 4-5 paddling sessions a week, plus some general things at school, such as football or cross-country:

"There was no gym work. But I did a lot of PE at school twice a week, and maybe go for a run on my own or something like that.

In the winter we'd do a loop session, so we'd start at the floodlights on the bridge and go downriver and come back, take a couple of minutes rest and then do it again, 5-6 times or something. And we'd try to chase this prem guy down the whole time.

And then we'd do a technique session. A lot of it was physical, because in the winter we would have very fast water coming under the bridge and without realizing it, we'd do a lot of upstream paddling just to get back to the top. So, these were quite physical sessions as well as short power technical stuff. So that was another session.

I would also have a session on the canal. And then on weekends we'd go to Llangollen for a day, or to the club at Marple and do some longer courses in the morning and then some shorter, technical stuff in the afternoon."

### 1987 – Wins Under 14 British Championships

One of the important early "markers" for Paul was winning the Under-14 British Championships. And in describing his racing at that time, he says:

"I was always faster rather than clean. I always worked on the old adage that it was easier to clean up rather than go quicker. Perhaps that had consequences later on in my career.

At this stage, I was not very developed physically -- It wasn't until my last year as a junior that I actually had a real growth spurt. So I had to achieve my speed through good technique that helped me to paddle fast and efficiently and precisely.

I'd always win my age class at the end of the year, like the national championships, although there were times in the spring when somebody made a year-team and I didn't. But that never happened again from the age of 16 onwards."

### 1989-90 – Makes First British Teams

The first British team Paul made was for the Junior Pre-World Championships in Switzerland. He finished 56<sup>th</sup> because he had 3 gate touches. He was only 16 then, paddling against 18-year-olds. But the next year, 1990, when he was only 17, he finished 6<sup>th</sup> at the Junior Worlds by virtue of a clean run.

"In the Junior Worlds, I was still physically weaker than the other guys. I'd get to the end of a run and didn't think I could do any better -- I was physically shot. It was a 180-second course and, compared to some of the other guys, I just didn't feel like I had it in my arms. So, I was at my potential, and that was one of the things I was pretty much able to do all through my career. I learned to race well early on and I had a good ability to race to my potential on any given day."

Why does he think he learnt at an early age how to race up to his potential, to conquer the mental side of the sport so early, when most athletes usually don't feel they get a handle on this until later on?

"I was always good at exams in school, never had a problem, and I think that helped. I always got nervous, yes, but I always had a good ability to deal with exams. I was never the quickest learner though. I never had this photographic memory, like my brother. I'd have to read something over and over again to learn it, and I think I probably took some of that into my paddling career.

Also I developed a sort of mental toughness through a lot of the sports I did as a young kid. And finally, I'd had lots of experience of overcoming things, like a collarbone injury, falling off a bike, breaking my nose or getting appendicitis.

So I knew I could race; I knew I could deal with nerves and I knew I could deliver my potential on the day. That was always a strength for me, I felt. "

While we're on the subject of school, how good a student was Paul? What were his best subjects?

"I was top of my class pretty much all the way through junior school through to the end of high school, although by then canoeing took over a bit more. My best subjects were sciences. I think I was probably as good at the others, but since my mum was strong at science, I think I favoured them more because of that. But probably I was more naturally gifted at geography or economics. My mum was the one who helped us study, the one to help if you were stuck on something. Dad was the one that took you to training and things like that, while mum made the sandwiches."

#### Discovers Visualization

Not only did Paul learn how to deal with nerves at a surprisingly young age, he also learned about mental training:

"When I was 13 or 14, I saw people at the beginning of races with their heads down and doing this sort of stuff with their hands. The guy I used to paddle with, the prem guy, said it's "visualization." He said it's where you picture in your mind what you're going to do on the course. And I think I learnt that pretty quickly. I learnt to memorize courses, and see the courses and how I was going to operate on them. At first, I just pretended that I could do it. But, then eventually I thought, well, maybe there is something in this, and I developed it naturally."

#### 1990 -- Training at Time of Junior Worlds

"At that stage, the prem guy I was paddling with started going over to Llangollen. It was an hour's drive from home but we went over 3 times a week. There was a place that had permanent gates up and it's got a good feature in the middle when the river's up -- so whitewater training pretty much all year round. I got into a group of varied abilities over there. Some were older guys, but a lot were my age. They came from all around: Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, and Wales. It was a fantastic environment to grow up in and train in."

#### Jimmy Jayes

In preparing for the Junior Worlds, Paul began an association with a coach named Jimmy Jayes that lasted a number of years. Jayes had been a K1 on the British World Champion team in 1985 and on the Europa Cup team in 1986. After he got done competing, he hired himself out as a coach. Here's how Paul describes the relationship:

“We did some work with Jimmy once or twice a week. From age 15 through to the '96 Olympics I spent a lot of time with him. Not on a daily basis, though, only a couple of times a week, and sometimes on weekends, and then the odd training camp. Other times we just touched base on the phone. Once he flew out to watch me at the Junior Worlds on his own. But he wasn't with me every day. I was pretty autonomous; I generally built my own programs but I listened to other people. “

What did Paul get out of working with Jayes?

“Jimmy had international experience and had worked with groups. He was also good on lines, smart lines, quick lines, short lines. So, we worked on that quite a bit and then, later, we spent more time in training camps -- Saint Pe in France, Nottingham for a week-long camp, or Scotland. We'd work on things like cutting close to the poles and making our lines as tidy as possible.

The majority of it was really technical but he also encouraged the physical side in the gym. My father wasn't big on the gym in the early days because he was afraid I might get hurt training weights too early. He wanted to make sure my body developed fully before I did weights. I guess research has now shown that doesn't have to be a problem, though.”

#### Father's Role

Even though Paul saw Jayes on occasion, he still maintained a more frequent coaching relationship with his father:

“It was my dad who was the constant factor the whole time. He was my mentor, if you like, but not actually delivering the hands-on coaching sessions. He would always watch from the bank and we'd talk after the session. He was the guy you would talk to in the car on the way to training and when you went back home again.”

Paul's father came to all of his races and every training session until he left school and learnt to drive.

“Unfortunately – or maybe for me, fortunately – he was made redundant in I think '87, and it co-incided with my mum's mum, and my dad's mum becoming ill at the time. So dad ended up looking after the family. And then he'd pick me up from school and take me training. So, without that, I wouldn't have had any success whatsoever.”

And what exactly did his father do?

“He wasn't the coach; he was my dad, if you know what I mean. He didn't set my training up or anything and he didn't put a lot of pressure on me. I never remember him asking me did I want to go to training, or telling me to go training. I would always have to ask him.

He had to go out of his way to facilitate me, particularly when petrol money was hard to come by, that sort of thing. But I was driving it, saying things like: “Dad we've got to go the canal tonight.” And when we got there he'd walk up and down the bank making the odd observation here and there. But I'd be in my own little world.”

Paul speaks fondly of the group he had to train with at that time:

“I loved it. We had a blast. We’d do a session and then we’d play on the river for an hour after until it was dark. The number of people in the workout would vary. Some nights it would be 3, some nights 10. In the winter it would be less because it was cold. But my mate Bleddyn Lloyd from Wales was a constant. Another friend, Paul Ebrey, was a constant, too. My brother would go occasionally.”

### Living in the Caravan

Eventually, Paul just camped out at the training site:

“By the time I was 16, my parents had a caravan just up the river from the site, so I’d go and stay there. My dad and my mates would come, too. I would go home and take my GCSE exams, since this was my last year at school, and then go back and do my training again. I’d be studying in between sessions.

When I was 17, training for the Junior Worlds, I did the same. I trained there all summer. Bala was only half a mile up the road, as well. So basically, I spent the majority of my time there learning skills on a natural river and developing it on gates, gates, gates -- as much whitewater as we could possibly get.”

### Transition Year

1990 was a really important year for Paul and looking back on it now he describes it this way:

“As the season went on, I could feel myself developing. I finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in a national senior race, so that was pretty good and I was becoming good on the natural rivers. But I couldn’t quite handle the power of the artificial course at Nottingham then. It took me quite a while before I bridged the gap to the seniors in Nottingham, but I breached it a lot quicker on natural rivers, in places like Bala.

So, at the end of that season I finished 10<sup>th</sup> in my first year in the Premier Division which was very competitive in those days with Richard Fox, Melvin Jones, Ian Raspin, Shaun Pearce, and so on!

I’d done my GCSEs at school so that was out of the way.

But then over the winter I realised I was about 3-4 seconds short of winning. So I went about trying to find 4 seconds in one year.”

### Finding 4 Seconds

So, what did Paul do to find these 4 seconds?

“I spent more time on white water. I also did longer stuff on the canal during the winter. Plus, I started some strength training for the first time. I bought some dumbbells for home and my school had a multi gym. On top of that, in Llangollen, like on Thursday evenings after a training session with Jimmy Jayes, I went to a little gym and I’d bench row and do the isokinetic machine

there. My body was maturing at that stage, my growth spurt was happening over that winter, and I guess I capitalized on it with the types of training I was doing.”

### 1991-2

Paul succeeded in finding the 4 seconds, too, because he won the Junior Pre-World Championships the next year, in 1991. He lived at home that academic year and the next one, too, to do his 'A' levels.

“In '92 I was still at home so I had to do a lot of travelling to Llangollen. My studying suffered a little bit because of that. Until then I'd always been top of the class but at that stage, it started to drift. I was doing so much travelling in the car, like Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursdays to Llangollen, Monday nights on the canal, Friday nights in the gym and a run or something and then Saturdays we'd be back at Llangollen or Bala or somewhere like that. So, it took a toll on studying.

I also tried to paddle at Nottingham as much as I could and I also did a camp at La Seu d'Urgell with Martyn Hedges and another C1, named Joel Scott. We trained for 5 days there. I went home completely exhausted -- missed school for a week and everything, but it was a fantastic experience. Later I did junior camps in the winter with Joel.”

1992 was an Olympic year but Paul wasn't ready for it:

“No, it came a little bit too early for me. By July that year I was actually finishing 4th in my first senior race, the Senior Pre-Worlds at Mezzana. But at selection in the spring I wasn't quite ready for the prequalifying race at Nottingham. I was better on natural rivers, like the one at Mezzana. I still had to learn to transition to artificial courses.

So, I never even made the final Olympic trials. There was a cut-off at the top 9 and I finished like 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup>, so I didn't make the cut-off for the final trials, which were held in Seu on the Olympic course.”

But even though Paul was not on the British Olympic team, he and a friend did go to see the Olympics. They also did some races and training on the continent at Bamberg, Germany, Augsburg – “where I absolutely slaughtered myself in like 14 sessions in 7 days” -- and Bourg St Maurice.

In October that year, he moved to Nottingham, both to study mathematics and chemistry at Nottingham Trent University, as well as to train on the slalom course there.

### Nottingham

The artificial course at the National Water Sports Centre at Holme Perriepond near Nottingham has radically changed British slalom, now being *the* national training site. Before that, finding really good whitewater to train on in Britain was not an easy task. Furthermore, Britain's best paddlers came from a variety of local clubs then.

But once the Nottingham course came on line in 1986, most of the good paddlers left their local clubs and moved there, thus permanently undermining the clubs. Paul

moved there at the end of the summer in 1992 and it made Paul's schedule a lot easier.

"I had a lot less travel time in Nottingham. So I could again up the intensity of what I was doing. I went from probably 8 sessions a week when I first moved to Nottingham to 10 sessions a week."

But he was in an awkward position so far as training was concerned:

"In the early days I didn't have a coach in Nottingham. I was sort of on the fringes. I only made the senior squad for the winter, which meant I got access to coaching probably only 4-5 weekends through the winter and maybe one trip to Saint Pe, something like that. And the rest of the time, day in, day out, I was pretty much on my own or I'd have somebody like Alan Edge timing me on full run sessions. But Alan was the only fulltime coach and his main responsibility was the elite squad. So there'd be Richard, Melvin, Shaun, Ian Raspin, Gareth, Lynn, and maybe Rachel Crosbee who he was predominantly with. He started to offer me special invites into the squad. But I kept saying no because I thought they should either want me in all the sessions or none of them. "

#### Influence of Richard Fox

Richard Fox was by far the most successful K1 of the 1980s, winning the individual World Championships 5 times. Now, here was Paul training at the same place as Fox – what was that like?

"I only ever did 2-3 sessions with him because after '92, when I moved to Nottingham, he moved to France. So, he came over only a few times to paddle in Nottingham. So, I did maybe 2 or 3 sessions with him in my whole career.

But when I was young, when we went to Nottingham in the summer holidays, I'd spend hours just watching him from the bank. Or watching him on the flat water. I was so hungry for it. Any little tidbits of information he gave me I cherished.

For example, I remember him doing a session on S-gates. They had some flatwater gates on the regatta course in Nottingham and I just sat there watching him. I think my dad might have been with me. Richard must have thought "what's this kid doing?" And then he'd say "I've had enough here. I'm going on the course. Are you coming to watch me on the course?" And yeah, I'd go watch him on the course.

One day – I think it was in '87-'88 -- he was with the rest of the squad and we watched him. There was Richard, Melvin, Gareth and maybe Shaun or Russ Smith. They were doing a session at the bottom of the course. And Richard wasn't getting this move, and some of them were smiling or laughing at him. Anyway, he just brushed it off, you know, went away and came back later and did the move when they'd gone. And we stayed and watched. And I just thought then what it took, that little bit extra. He could walk away from it but then come back. He knew he was good enough but he was just having a bad day. Lots of little things like that I learnt.

One poignant moment was in '93 which is the first time I beat him at the Grandtully. It was high water, and a pre-selection race. So, that was a good moment for me. Unfortunately, though, a month later, at selection at the same place, I didn't make the team. The water had dropped and I think my lack of power and my strength at that stage hurt me. Since the water was low, strength and power came into play more. On the bigger water I could use my skill more and the fast water took me down the course anyway."

Britain had a number of other really good K1s then, too, but they were less important:

"I appreciated them all. But the only person for me to watch was Richard Fox, and I modelled myself as much as I could on everything he did. And it wasn't only seeing him on the water; it was off the water. He was really professional, dedicated and the whole mix. He was the only person I watched on videos, hours of videos from the World Championships, his runs from the Savage and things like that."

### Compensating for Lack of Strength

Paul recounts how he felt that lack of strength was his biggest problem in races:

"In races there were not many times that I was hacked off that I didn't perform close to my potential. I was hacked off more because I didn't have it in my arms to do it. The bigger guys would beat me and I was just so hacked off because they were bigger, you know, and I was like, well, how can I do it?"

So, I had to learn to be pretty smart with my weight. Power to weight ratio was probably my forte all through my career and I had to work really hard and try and develop my strength every year from when I first moved to Nottingham."

### 1993 Season

After one year of training in Nottingham, Paul made the British intermediate team:

"I did another road trip round Europe, did more international races. I did the Nordic Cup which I won, and I did a race in Prague which I think I won. So I was on a stepping stone to the senior team."

### 1994 – First Makes the Senior Team

The 1994 season was a key one for Paul because it is when he first got into the top ranks of international paddlers. Getting on the British team would be no easy task, though, for although Paul was now on the senior squad for the winter, to actually make the team, he would have to beat Melvin Jones who'd finished 3<sup>rd</sup> at the '93 Worlds, the year before. That's how high the level of competition was in Britain; the British had 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> at the World Championships that year.

Paul kept a very detailed training log for this year – one of the few he kept for a whole year – and this is how he assessed the things he needed to work on:

GOALS which will improve performance

- A. Increase strength.
- B. Develop and refine technique to improve consistency at a high level of accuracy and to be able to perform one-off "specials."
- C. Develop mental training.

Here, in minutes per week per activity, is a table of what he did from January until team selection that year:

Week No	Date	Total Training	White-water Gates	Flatwater Gates	Strength Training	Forward Paddling	Concentration Training	Other
17	1/3- 1/9	560	390		60	40	70	70
16	1/10-1/16	545	255		250		40	40
15	1/17-1/23	560	310		210	40		
14	1/24-1/30	420	150		140	40	60	30
13	1/31-2/6	865	775				90	
12	2/7-2/13	450	250		125	40	30	
11	2/14-2/20	550	235		180	40	30	60
10	2/21-2/27	545	285	40	180	40		
9	2/28-3/6	550	240	90	220			
8	3/7-3/13	500	330		170			
7	3/14-3/20	360	155	90	115			
6	3/21-3/27	790	410	85	115	20		160
5	3/28-4/3	385	300	45	45			
4	4/4-4/10	490	450					40
3	4/11-4/17	335	240		70	25		
2	4/18-4/24	475	335	40	70			40
1	4/25-5/1	350	240	40	40			30
0	5/2-5/8	SELECTION RACES						

Some examples of the whitewater gates sessions:

\* Llangollen. Water high

1<sup>st</sup> Session Full Run JJ coaching 60 mins

Sorted course from bank

5 x 127 second course. Very hard course

Times	Pens
-------	------

150	10
-----	----

127	10
-----	----

127	---
-----	-----

No time. Had to go back for bottom move.

130	---
-----	-----

Good session. Achieved a good level of consistency on the high water. Hard move on the bottom. Fine balance to stay on the back of the wave, then drive into the upstream at the end of the course.

\* Whitewater gates 60 mins. 5 runs.

Aim: strength power and focus on acceleration with first few strokes exiting certain gates, mainly breakouts (upstream gates – ed).

Times	Pens
-------	------

128	10
-----	----

123	5
-----	---

123	---
-----	-----

129	10
-----	----

128	5
-----	---

Course was very windy. Paddled OK. Felt tired from weights. Arms were stiff. Times were OK. Worked hard on accelerations out of breakouts. The rest of the course was at 80%. Last 2 runs were very steady. Trying to achieve a level of consistency in the

poor conditions. Coped quite well. Had to aim for the middle of each gate and had to be able to react quickly to any sudden gust of wind.

\* Matlock. Elite Squad whitewater gates 70 minutes  
Speed session. Course 14-19 seconds long. Varied technical difficulty.  
5 courses, 4 runs on each course  
I was quickest on 4 out of 5 courses. 30 pens total.  
Paddled powerfully and dynamically. Felt in control and well concentrated throughout session. I always believed in myself.

Some examples of the flatwater gate sessions:

\* Aerobic 150-160 pulse  
Windfield pool – round island – flat gates  
Aim: clean – though no hesitation in gates  
Keeping boat moving  
Easy steady flowing lines  
8 x 5 mins w/ 30 seconds rest  
Felt good.

\* Flatwater gates. 45 mins.  
Aerobic 150-160 pulse  
15 mins of 4:30 w/ 30 secs rest  
Cutting gates too fine on exit from breakouts with wind.  
Felt strong in paddling.

Some examples of the strength sessions:

\* Warmup on isos. Stretching before and after. (The “isos” are an isokinetic kayaking machine – ed)

Single arm	8x 75 x 3
Sweeps isos	8 x 2
Double bow rudder	8 x 20 x 2
Bow rudders isos	8 x 2
Flys	8 x 5 x 3
Situps lying flat	20 x 8

\* Strength 70 mins. Warmup 4 mins ergo. Plus stretching.

Bench row	8 x 55 x 3
Inclined bow	
Rudder	8 x 10 x 3
Flys	8 x 5 x 3
Situps inclined	20 x 3
Lat pull down	8 x 79.5 x3
Tricep press	8 x 29.5 x 3
Stretching to finish	

Some examples of Forward Paddling:

\* Long paddle canal. Aerobic development  
37:20

\* Lady Bay 3:35 pm  
Aim: to lower top arm

To keep pulse 150-160  
Time: 39:18

Some examples of Concentration Training:

\* Concentration session. Using as many different situations and practices as possible, should gradually increase the length of time for which concentration on a simple object or task can be maintained. The greater the variety of situations attempted, the better the transfer of concentration skills to canoeing.

\* Dissensitization exercises: structure training to practice big stress situations ie in competition. eg could practice needing a certain time to win the race, or might practice using last run to win the race.

To make practice effective spend time imagining how you would feel in that particular situation and then work really hard to imagine you are there eg selection. Practice getting out of difficult situations as well as winning the big race.

“Other” included running, games and tests, such as:

\* Badminton 70 mins

\* Running aerobic 30 mins continuous

### Frustrating Season

Even though Paul made his first Senior team in 1994, he didn't feel that the race season went particularly well:

“It was a frustrating because I put in top 3 times in almost every single race for qualification but I kept getting a penalty. And the penalty would knock me down to 21<sup>st</sup> but only 20 qualified for the final in those days.

So it was a frustrating. It was only towards the end of the season where I qualified in La Seu and finished 14<sup>th</sup> and then I won a Champion race in Carlton (USA) and won a bit of money there. I also won some prem races at home and then finished the season by finishing 4<sup>th</sup> in the World Cup Final in Japan. “

Looking back on the season, Paul sums it up this way:

“The gym work definitely stepped me up. Plus, I'd had continuity of white water in Nottingham, and a transition onto artificial courses. And I had a summer with another training camp in Prague and I went to Augsburg again. So, I was starting to gather that experience, that knowledge of these different environments. And I started becoming stronger, not rushing the strokes in Nottingham, but placing the blade a lot better. Those sorts of things helped me immensely.”

### Working with 3 Different Coaches

Once he got in the senior team, Paul had the choice of working a lot more with Alan Edge, the British national coach. Alan had been World Champion in team with Richard Fox (and Albert Kerr) back in 1979. But Paul also retained his relationships with his father and Jimmy Jayes.

“When I got in the senior team, I didn’t really know what positions I could finish in. So I started asking Alan Edge who I was working with a bit more now because he was national coach. But I still retained links with Jimmy. Jimmy wouldn’t come on any trips but I touched base with him before and after.

With Alan, you could choose what you were doing. So, at first I was still running my own program. Some days I would work with him, some not, depending where I was with college. Because I had to fit the training in around college. The other guys, like Shaun and Ian, were fulltime, So, they would train at 8:00 every morning and finish at 10 -10:30. But I generally had college at 9:00, so I had done my training at lunchtime and then at the end of the day I’d do the gym sessions.

So, in the beginning I saw Alan only for half length runs on Monday, full runs on Wednesday and then another workout on Thursday and then full’s again on Friday.”

### Influence of Alan Edge

“I first met Alan at a course he ran in Bolton in 1986, so he was a thread through my whole career. And when we went to Nottingham, we would sometimes do a session with Alan on a Wednesday afternoon. My contact increased from there. The better I got, the more I did with him -- whilst still having a personal coach relationship with Jimmy.

But that broke apart after the ’96 Olympics because I learned pretty quickly that only the British coaches got accredited to the Olympic Games, and the personal coaches didn’t get accredited. So, I’d been used to working with a personal coach but then suddenly I couldn’t work with him any more. So, I had to learn to work with the squad coaches, like Alan.

I became a lot better at that. We’d have coaches at 4 sections of the river so I became better at going to each coach, asking specific questions, taking what I needed, either ditching it or using it, and going on. And then I would use Alan. He would generally position himself at the top of the course, and I’d go and sit with him before my race to make sure I was settled and finalise my plans and have a bit of light-hearted chat before I’d get on. And I’d never get on more than 15 minutes before a run. I had a really good routine for what I was going to do.

Looking back on it, Alan was a more positive influence than I realized at the time. When I was a paddler, I sometimes didn’t believe in his philosophies but now I see the truth in them more and more. He was very good at asking questions and not telling me the answers, so I almost felt like I was leading him, rather than the other way round. He was very smart, I think, in making sure I was leading my program and just checking back occasionally with him on what I was doing.

But because he was the team coach, he couldn’t have allegiances to individual paddlers and this was a problem for me because I got more and more demanding of his time. I needed more, I wanted this and that. But he kept a very flat playing field with everything he did, so I only sort of knew he believed in me. I knew the direction I was going in, was good, but it wasn’t like with a personal coach.”

### But Role of Father Continues

All the while he was dealing with Alan Edge and until 1996 with Jimmy Jayes; Paul was still keeping in touch with his father about training:

“The main mentor I always had was my father. He was a constant throughout my whole career and these other coaches only came in at different stages. I knew my father was there for me and only me. He had total belief in what I was doing, and he was probably the ultimate psychologist, encouraging, never pushing. It was always me who took ownership of everything I was doing. I learned pretty early on that was my responsibility. But he was key in maintaining a positive attitude. He just kept working on my head, but in a natural way.

He was always at races, so we could talk there. There was nothing formal about it. It was just “How’re you doing?” If I was a bit worried about something I would give him a bell. Every athlete has doubts and questions, no matter how good you are. So, who are you going to trust with your questions? I knew these other coaches had other people; even Jimmy Jayes had Scott Shipley (an American and one of Paul’s chief competitors -- ed) at the same time. Alan Edge had other kayakers and was always on the go. But I had my own person who was my constant, someone I could completely trust.”

### 1995 Season

“In '95 I did a few more camps abroad. I went to Saint Pe a couple of times and again just increased the intensity of the training, and started doing organized competitive training with the squads a lot more. I also did more of the full run sessions that we had on a daily basis. So all winter I could better track where I was.”

But then he finished 3<sup>rd</sup> in the selection races:

“That year I had the final exams for my degree, so it was a tough year. The day after selection my thesis was due and I had all sorts of trauma getting it done. I’d paid some secretary at the university to type it up but it was the Friday before the Monday it was due and she hadn’t done it. And that weekend was team selection.

Fortunately, my mother and some friends bailed me out and put it together for me. Then, Sunday evening after the selection race we had to go and photocopy it all. So that’s probably one of the reasons I finished 3<sup>rd</sup>. We still had Shaun and Melvin Jones around at that time so it was probably quite a good feat that I made it into the team.”

### Nottingham Worlds

The World Championships that year was at Nottingham, Paul’s home course. And not only was it the Worlds, it was a qualifying race for the 1996 Olympics.

“I’d finished my degree and did a couple of World Cup races straightaway, which were pretty average, maybe top 10, top 15, whatever. Then I had a long time to prepare for the Worlds -- 6 weeks or something. I was in really good form. I’d won almost every single full run session or half run session in training going into the Worlds. “

### Finishes 5<sup>th</sup>

Despite his preparation, however, Paul finished a disappointing 5th in the World Championships, although he emerged as the best Briton. "There was an S on the bottom stopper and I dropped low on the stopper which cost me."

To what does he attribute that mistake?

"A few things. Number one, physically it was a longer course than we trained for, with more upstreams. So, physically I was a little bit weaker at the bottom end, so endurance was still an issue. Number 2, my boat design was poor for the move I made the mistake on. It was very long at the waterline. So, it was fast but it didn't turn so well. But you needed a quick turn at the bottom. Also, the nose would pop up quick and that wasn't good. And number 3, maybe I had a slight break in concentration at that point. I knew I was on a good run but maybe I let up a little bit."

### Trains on Ocoee Olympic Course

After the World Championships, Paul travelled to America for a World Cup race on the Ocoee Olympic course. He says this was really the first time that he thought about the Olympics. And following that, he did a training camp in America with the German K1, Oliver Fix and his coach, Helmut Handschuh. Oliver had just won the Nottingham Worlds. (See Fix case study for information about his career.)

"It was a fascinating insight into a paddler from another country. He was very precise in training. He had a very focused approach on technical moves and he'd repeat them, look at them, repeat them, look at them. He'd spend 2-3 sessions on each move and then see if he could perform it as part of a full run. He worked one-to-one with his coach, very, very analytically. Again he'd do the same thing on upstreams; he would look at the time around a pole, the exit time. They broke it down in a very analytical fashion. They were quite modern in their approach to training."

Paul trained with Fix and Handschuh for a week:

"I felt at the time he didn't know a lot about boat design. He was talking about making this square boat for the Ocoee because it would be really good on boils, but there aren't really many boils there.

Since 1991, I was linked in with a boat manufacturer called Nomad Designs and we developed new boats year after year. From '95 to '96 we changed the boat so it had a little less rocker. We'd always gone for this long waterline and a little bit more volume because of the big waves. But we probably never quite got it right.

Anyway, come the start of the year, Fix changed his boat a bit and I think he put in some bits that were similar to my boat. So he got a mixture in the end. I just appreciated his professionalism, his approach.

But the approach was different than ours. He did a lot of block training -- specific periods where he would just train one energy system, like 5 days just endurance, endurance, endurance -- whereas I did a lot more explosive training throughout the year than he did. I didn't have as good an endurance base as he did. He had 12 months to prepare for the Olympics because he

was pre-selected, so he talked a lot about how he was going to do that. It was challenging, mentally and physically. I thought he was quite impressive, quite meticulous in the way he prepared.”

### Stipend Permits Training in New Zealand

For preparing for the 1996 Olympics Paul won an award, the Winston Churchill Travelling Fellowship, which enabled him to go and train in New Zealand.

“It’s a trust set up in memory of Winston Churchill for people to venture out into different areas. There are awards for the arts, history, geography, various different areas, and there was one for sport, which is in memory of Dr. Mike Jones who was killed on a river.

So, I won an award for canoeing and basically you go and do this research and bring it back to Britain. I wanted to tell people what we were doing, training for the Olympics, my preparation, so that paddlers coming through later could benefit from it.”

This was a £5,000 grant and on top of that Paul was also awarded a grant from the British Sports Aid Foundation which the best 8 athletes in Britain got at the time. So all together, he was awarded £17,000 in grants.

“So, I suddenly went from being a poverty-stricken student who’d had to scrape a bit of sponsorship together, to where I was now able to be a fulltime athlete. So in December and January I went to train in New Zealand for 8-9 weeks. I paid for my brother to come, too, to hold a camera and to be a training partner.”

This was Paul’s first warm weather training during the winter. Before leaving, though, he checked in with Jimmy Jayes. Jayes had gone to America at this point to work at the Nantahala Outdoor Centre in North Carolina. But before he left, Paul sat down with him and planned a 2-3 month block of training “and I pretty much did every session we planned.”

But when he first got to New Zealand he was in for a bit of a shock:

“I was disappointed with the initial river in Rotarua. It was a short section and not ideal, because I wanted to train for what I thought would be a 200 second course for the Olympics.

So, we ventured into the bush and we found a site where they held the World Cup in ’92 in Rangitaki [?] but it was all overgrown. There were no gates, no lines up or anything, so we had to make 30 gates.

The guy at the campsite we were staying at – we stayed in these log cabins – gave us some materials and a drill to help make gates. They were very successful gates. We met a New Zealand guy who wanted to train with us so he helped us out. We took all day to put all these lines up. We had 30 gates and it was probably the best training site in New Zealand. Everyone was using it until the rafters got a bit hacked off with all the lines on the banks.

It was an hour’s drive from where we were staying so, we’d travel over for the 2 days in the middle of the week. I wanted to do gym and stuff on other days.

We'd take some food with us and actually camp in the forest, under the stars. So it was another way of thinking, of overcoming problems.

I got my 200-second course out of it. But I found out at the beginning of the year they'd shortened the Olympic course to 160-seconds. But that just made the New Zealand course even better because I had gates up on the flats, so now I had both flatwater gates and whitewater gates."

### Wins Olympic Selection Back Home

Despite the good training in New Zealand, things did not go so well when Paul first got home:

"I struggled getting back into it in Nottingham. I was disappointed with the first race – I was all over the place. But then the Olympic selection was in Grandtully (Scotland) and I won both races. So, I was going to the Olympics."

### Training at the Ocoee

"In training for the Olympics, I don't think I really got it right. I spent 6 weeks training on the Ocoee with Gareth Mariott (Britain's 1992 Olympic Silver Medalist in C1). We probably spent a little bit too much time together and I got a bit stale.

Then we came back to Europe, and did a race in Seu and another one at Bourg, and probably spent a bit too much time on the road. By the time of the Olympics, I was probably a bit jaded and didn't quite get it right. You know, I'd gone from not imagining the Olympics in '95 to finishing 5th in the world, to finishing my degree. And now this was the first time I was in fulltime training. But I don't think the benefits of that came until the end of '96."

### Olympic Village

"I never got comfortable with the Olympic Village. I'd been used to staying in this cabin. And now suddenly I was thrown in with all these other international athletes in the Village and I was probably looking at what they were doing too much and not really focusing on me. It's the kind of thing that might knock just one percent off your concentration and that probably made a difference for me."

So, should he have stayed somewhere else?

"Yeah. Sometimes during my career I had to do that. If it wasn't quite right for me in the team environment, I had the flexibility to go off and do my own thing. Sometimes when we were doing a World Cup race, I'd travel to the venue later than the rest of the team, maybe come in on a Thursday, say. So I tried to be flexible in what I was doing."

### Jimmy Can't Get Credentials

As we have seen, Paul was used to having Jimmy Jayes around him at big races. But this didn't happen at the Olympics.

Security for an Olympics is much tighter than it is for World Championship or World Cup races. Furthermore, since the host country for the Olympics has to pay to house

and feed official members of all teams, there is a lot of pressure to keep these teams small.

As a result it is very hard to get “credentials” – a pass – to get into the Olympics if you are not part of the official team delegation. And Jimmy was not part of the official delegation. As a result, he was prevented from having access to Paul:

“Jimmy would end up being on the right-hand bank where I couldn’t really reach him. I couldn’t get him accredited. Maybe I just didn’t deal with the situation well enough.”

But Paul is not offering that as an excuse for performing below par at the Olympics (although it had to hurt). He’s just saying that it’s something you have to prepare for, as he did 4 years later:

“If an athlete’s been working with a personal coach during the year and that’s what makes him successful, and it increases the chances of winning, then for sure, that coach should be allowed in.

For me, though, for the future, I just chose to become more adaptable. In the build-up to Sydney, I went to races with different coaches just to make sure I could work with different people. So in case Alan was ill, say, I could go and do it by myself. I’d even practice races where I had no coach support at all.”

At the Olympics, Paul finished 14<sup>th</sup>: “I had a penalty that kept me from 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> place, which on the day would have been pretty close to my potential.”

“My practice run was average, I just learnt the course. (In those days, you got one unscored practice run, then 2 timed and scored runs, with only the best run counting -- ed.) The 1<sup>st</sup> run again was average. But then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> run I got going. And I was pretty happy with the top two-thirds of the course.

But then I nicked a gate and backed off a little on gates 17-18. Because of that I didn’t get the bow around early enough. I had to do a little shuffle just to get in the gate, and that stopped my speed just before the sprint section so I had to get going again. So that cost me as well as the penalty. The rest of the race I was content with, to be honest. Without the mistakes I wouldn’t have won but it would have been a medal.”

As a result, Paul was not very happy with himself, and felt that he had not prepared properly for the Olympics:

“I was really disappointed. It wasn’t what I went there for. It was a backward step after finishing 5<sup>th</sup> in the Worlds the year before. I wanted to win the Olympics, but I wasn’t really ready for it, didn’t really understand what it is to prepare for an Olympic Games.

I didn’t understand how to deal with people -- family, tough situations with a competitive environment around you, the media, all these other people. I’d probably not done enough thinking about that. I’d done all this training, but I probably hadn’t stepped back enough to consider the other things and get a grip on them. For example, the media attention ... what to say to them, and so on. When it came to Sydney I was ready for those things; I was a lot more meticulous in my preparation.”

Paul felt the media attention for the Olympics was a lot more than for the 1995 Worlds, even though they were back at home in England:

“At the Worlds I wasn’t the favourite even though I finished as the top British guy. But coming into the race, Shaun Pearce had been the world number one the year before and World Cup champion, and Ian Raspin had finished second. They also had big sponsorships from Teesside. So, they were projected out there and I just went about my own business nice and quietly. But at the Olympics the media was ready for me.

I mean, I think I handled the media all right, but I was just inexperienced. I learned a lot from it and learned to practice what I was going to say. For instance, if I wasn’t sure about something in an interview, I could say, “Let’s just stop a minute, I want to think about that,” and then continue. So, I’ve just become a bit wiser to it. I wasn’t wise initially and in hindsight the experience was a bit disconcerting.”

### Post-Olympic Races

The next few races after the Olympics were disappointing as well, “because I never felt like I got going.”

“I did a World Cup race in Prague and it didn’t go very well. I can remember winning the practice run but then the Europeans were better after that. And I just got too wrapped up in still thinking about the Olympics. Then I went home.

We’d been on the road a long time so I went home, went back to Llangollen, went back to my roots, had 3-4 weeks there, got back on top of things and went to Brazil to do the World Cup final at the end of 1996 and won my first-ever World Cup race.

So, that was a turning point for me and I played to my strengths of my original attacking style and never looked back from that, really. So I ended up finishing the year ranked world number one in '96, because the ranking was based on the qualification races in those days and I’d won a couple of qualification races. I think I was ranked World Number One pretty much from then on, all the way through the Sydney Olympics. So, consistency was my biggest thing.”

### 1997 Season

In preparation for the 1997 season, Paul was still based in Nottingham, again as a fulltime athlete. “I had a really good winter. I didn’t go abroad for an extended period but for warm weather training I did more short trips to Saint Pe in France.”

1997 was the year that the rules were changed and now two runs were added together for the first time. How did Paul cope with that?

“I adapted pretty quickly. I made sure it was reflected in my training. One example is full run sessions when we were going for volume. I’d do 6 runs on the same course, but two runs added together and then another two runs added together then a final two runs added together.

And when I was doing short courses, it was the same thing, two runs, two runs, two runs. You couldn't go back and take runs one and 5 and add them together. And you had to finish every run. No matter if you missed a gate you had to go back and finish the run.

I made sure the first run counted; I went into it with the premise of putting a first run on the board that would put pressure on my opponents.

A lot of the sessions had a performance focus and many mornings there would be competition, and I would want to win every morning. “

Paul kept a fragmentary log that year and it is interesting to look at a few weeks to compare with the table we saw from 1994:

Date	Total Training	Whitewater Gates	Flatwater Gates	Strength Training	Forward Paddling	Other
1/20-1/26	530	210		150	110	60
1/27-2/2	60	300		115	144	50
2/3-2/9	458	238		40		80
2/10-2/16	557	460	45		32	20
3/3-3/9	450	390			30	30
3/10-3/15	560	480	20		30	30

### Race Season

Although Paul felt quite confident going into team selection, Shaun Pearce won it, with Paul second. Then he did World Cup races and the World Championships in Brazil.

“I came into this season ranked number one from the previous year. So, I remember being overly nervous at the first World Cup at Bourg St Maurice. I qualified for the final. In the final, my first run was a bit average, I was laying 6<sup>th</sup>. And then did a run that was more reflective of me. I remember dropping low in one gate and then absolutely taking off. And the next two thirds of the run was probably one of my best ever. I came from 6th to 1st, which, after being 3-4 seconds down on the winner, and then winning by a second or 2, was a phenomenal run for me. I took that into the next race and the same thing happened, I won by 4 seconds, even with 2 touches, so I was really fast.”

At that point, however, Paul decided to concentrate on the World Championships, so he skipped the next World Cup race, and went back to Llangollen and Bala. This was because those were natural rivers and the Brazil Worlds was going to be on a natural river. After that training he resumed the World Cup, doing 2 more races:

“On the first one, I had a great qualification race. But in the final I had a mistake on the first run, and then things slipped a bit, and I finished something like 18<sup>th</sup>. In those days it was either winning or somewhere way down.

I went to Minden the week after that for a World Cup race, still number one because I'd won 2 World Cup races. I only needed a top 5 placing to win the overall World Cup, or something like that.

But again, whether it was a bit of anxiety, a bit of not being used to being in that situation, I don't know. But I didn't deal with it very well and I didn't win the World Cup; I came 3rd or 4th or something like that."

What does he think was the reason for this failure?

"Well, I was taking this attacking paddling style into everything I did. Possibly I went a little bit over the top; I needed pulling back a bit. Sometimes this attacking paddling was coming out more after I made a little mistake. But I had to learn not to go into it too soon, learn to get further down the course before pulling it out.

Now, when it came to Minden I just started attacking too early, I think. Instead of doing the first 3-4 gates in a controlled way, I think I went into it too early. Whoosh -- you know what Minden's like, a fast flowing course. I dropped low on a gate and bang! I wasn't on top of things any more. So, I had to just go back and revisit that sort of thing before the World Championships in Brazil."

### Brazil Worlds

The most amazing thing about the Brazil World Championships for Paul was that he learned from a disastrous logistical experience and was ready for it when it happened a second time!

"We had these minibuses and on qualification day mine broke down half an hour from the course and yet I had to get there. Fortunately, some Germans turned up and gave us a lift back to the hotel – we were all staying at the same place. And then we got somebody from the hotel to drive us to the course.

The good thing that came out of it was I was so relaxed I won the qualification race by quite a bit. Only when I came to the race, did I focus on the race, rather than thinking about it too much in advance. So, psychologically, the bus breaking down was good for me in a way."

But then for the final on the next day, Paul was ready:

"I said. "Right, this time I'm going in the bus but I want someone to follow me." Fortunately they did because the bus broke down again on the way to the course! So you just have to plan for all eventualities."

And in the final itself:

"I hit gate 1 with my top hand. I wasn't even off line. But, that put my whole race under pressure because Brazil was such a flatwater course, a physical course you really had to go hard. It also was a bit longer than what I was used to and that probably didn't help. I really had to pick up the pace to make up for the penalty. I had a quick time, but a 2-second penalty put me in 4th place. Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> run, I had a good run and pulled into 3<sup>rd</sup>. Thomas Becker won, Scott Shipley was 2<sup>nd</sup>, me 3<sup>rd</sup>. So, at the end of the day the touch cost me the gold medal."

### Wins Team Race

Immediately after the individual runs there was the team race – no time to dwell on the individuals, which was good. And Paul's team won the team event. "So it was a good World Championships but, again, not the win I was looking for, so I came away disappointed."

### Mental Training

Reflecting on the season, Paul felt it "gave me an understanding of trying to find that relaxed, balanced focus on the day, which was crucial for what I was doing, making sure I had my own space."

When I asked him, however, if he had ever worked with a sports psychologist to help with this, he said only a little:

"Intermittently, but not really a lot. I touched base with Hugh Mantle and John Males a little bit. At the end of that season I went to them and said, "this is what happened, this is what I need to be better at, what can you help me with here?"

One reason he didn't do more with professionals was because he felt he was already doing quite a lot on his own:

"When I was young, in 1994, Jimmy Jayes gave me these tapes and said, "Go away and play with these." One was on anxiety control, one on concentration training, one on visualisation and mental rehearsal, and I think the other one was on relaxation. So, early on I learnt about these things and I learnt my own methods for using them. So, for example, before I'd do mental rehearsal, I learnt this little mantra that helped me get into the state that I wanted to be in. And after that I found I could do better runs, so I placed that in my routine. I also started doing some relaxation exercises at various times of the year, sometimes on a rest day."

### 1998 Season

After the '97 season, Paul took a month break from training and got back into shape a little slowly.

"And then in January I busted my shoulder. I was doing some whitewater paddling in a plastic boat on a river in North Wales. I was meant to be going on a snowboarding holiday and my dad said, "You don't want to be doing that 2 years out from the Olympic Games. You'll go and break a leg or something."

So, he decided he'd go and run a river instead.

"I was paddling on this river and I capsized half way down this waterfall, spun around upside down and somehow my shoulder came out of joint and went back in again really quickly. I managed to get up but I'd busted my face.

Turns out that after a lengthy consultation and MRI scan and seeing a specialist, within 2 weeks it was determined that I had dislocated my right shoulder posterior, which is very rare, and it had damaged the capsule, so I had to have a capsule repair.

The guy undertook it with keyhole surgery, which was a pioneer surgery for posterior; I don't think anyone had performed that before. He said you've got an 80% chance of recovery.

Fortunately, he gave me a development plan for getting back on scratch. So that really focused me. I was like, "Bloody hell, I've got to reassess my goals!" because that year I wanted to win the European championships and the World Cup. After being so close the year before, this year was the year to do it. But suddenly all this had happened, in January."

So how long did it take him to work his way back?

"It was 8 weeks before I could hold my arm vertical, then another 8 weeks to when I started paddling on flatwater, and I got on rough water in April."

Fortunately, however, he was pre-selected that year. Otherwise, he wouldn't have made the team.

"Then a series of good things happened. I had a good focus about everything I was doing. So, everything from recovery techniques, to mental training, to every training session -- everything was just so precise.

Then, Richard Fox invited me to a training camp with the Australian team, who he'd just started coaching that winter. So I did camps in St. Pe and La Seu with them. The Australian kayaks were probably at the level I was at then. So, I had good competition.

And then I got back to Britain and the British had had the team selection so I went with the team to a training camp in Augsburg. And then I did my first international race in Bovec. Now, that was again a time to re-establish myself. I finished 4<sup>th</sup> there. It was my first race since the Brazil Worlds. And I finished the top British boat. That was four and a half months after my shoulder injury."

And things continued to go well from there:

"At month 6 from the injury, I won the first World Cup race, finished 5<sup>th</sup> in the 2<sup>nd</sup> one, and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the 4<sup>th</sup> one. That put me in the same situation I was the year before: I was leading the World Cup with one race to go. And then came the European Championships and I won it. So that was one tick. And then I won the last World Cup race, which was the other tick. So, what I learnt from the year before in the World Cup final paid dividends in the following year."

And once again, Paul also finished number one in the world rankings. Looking back on it, he realized he had gained a lot from that year:

"First of all, I never ran any rivers again until after the Olympics. But secondly, I had new experience, learnt about my body, about rehab, doing 4 lots of rehab a day, each taking 30-60 minutes each time. I couldn't drive; I had to walk to the physio, had to walk to the gym while everybody else was in training camps. It was a really lonely time. But gradually everything got better. And I got this drive, this momentum. So, it was really a key learning experience."

He also felt that he was now beginning to get better at the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of each run:

“Physically I was starting to do better at the bottom end of my run. I was generally very quick on the top half split, and I wanted to try and keep that speed up more on the bottom half. That was the main focus to take into '99, because in '98 I hadn't quite had the base training because of the 3 months off. So, I was always at my limit in '98, even though I was very quick. But in '99 I did better bottom halves.”

### 1999

Once again, Paul was pre-selected to the British team. But now, unlike 4 years earlier, he started thinking about preparations for the Olympic Games earlier: “That had always been in the back of my mind since '98. '99 was the year I was going to embark for Sydney.”

That winter, Paul went away twice. The first time was in January, 1999, when he went to Australia to train with Richard Fox and the Australians again, but this time in Australia, the first time he had ever been there:

“I did 2 weeks with them in Tasmania. I did their nationals and stuff. Then, I did a week in Melbourne, in Eildon. And then I went for my first look of the Olympic course, from the bank, with a hard hat on.”

Then, in April, he went to Australia again, this time to actually train on the course and be in the first series of races they had there. Being pre-selected, Paul didn't have to do the British selection races, but he returned to Britain to do them anyway.

“Then, I did race pre season international races, which I found to be good from the year before, in Bratislava and I re-established myself as the number one kayak in Britain. I thought that was important since the others had just done selection and were in good shape. And then we went into the World Cup season. Tacen was the first race and I got a 50 in the qualification, so, I didn't make the final. I had a really good second run, though.

But then the following weekend there was another race in Tacen, which I won and I won the next race, in Bratislava, too.”

Paul then chose not to do the 3<sup>rd</sup> World Cup race so he could focus on the World Championships in La Seu.

“We'd had lots and lots of training camps in La Seu through the summer, 3 short, 6-day camps. So I was in really good form. The qualification race was also the qualification for places at the Olympics, so it was an important day. And it went very well for me. Two of the best runs I ever had in my career were in '99. One of them was in Tacen, 2<sup>nd</sup> run, where I was probably 2-3 seconds quicker than everybody else. And the other was at the qualification race at the Seu Worlds. It also was probably 2-3 seconds quicker than anybody else. But then in the final I finished 3<sup>rd</sup> again, so again I was absolutely hacked off.”

What happened?

“The 1<sup>st</sup> run was solid but I dropped low in one upstream which cost me the lead. It was a more physical course. The 2<sup>nd</sup> run was going to plan but my last upstream was weak. Going across the finish line I had a general feeling of contentment in that I thought I'd done enough to win it. But then I looked up

and saw I was given a 2 second penalty. I'd hit gate 1 with my back and didn't know anything about it."

So, once again, one touch had cost him the Worlds and he got 3<sup>rd</sup> again:

"It was uncanny. But it was for a different reason. In '97 I'd learnt to be in the middle of the gate, so I could get those first few gates under my belt. But in trying to dot all the i's, and cross the t's, I didn't pay attention to my back end. So, again, I didn't produce the World Championship result, after being so consistent in dominating events up until then."

Despite not winning, Paul felt that he had done a lot of things right that year and just resolved to carry on what he was doing. So, coming into the Olympic year, "We just did little bits of boat tweaking. It was all real fine tweaks."

### Getting Ready for the Olympics

After the Seu Worlds, there was a World Cup final in Penrith on the Olympic course, and Paul won it – "So that was a marker. I came back and showed the form that I'd been showing all season and dominated the race."

"So, again I finished the year as World Cup winner, 3<sup>rd</sup> in the World Championships, and ranked world number one. Consistency was the biggest thing, and being able to stick to a plan, no matter what."

### Works on Aerobic Endurance

In order to increase his speed on the bottom of the course, Paul felt he needed to increase his aerobic endurance for 2000. So, for the first time in his career, he started doing some training in the wildwater boat:

"During the base training period in the fall and winter I did a few more 60-minute paddles in a slalom boat. And I did some 90-minute paddles in a wildwater boat. We had this loop in Nottingham where you could paddle up the canal, meet the river and then paddle all the way back down again on the river. I probably did it a dozen times that winter. So, it was a bit of a different stimulus. The wildwater boat was good for my stability, good for my posture. And I hammered it out with some of the guys; we used to do it together, maybe a group of 4. They ended up being competitive sessions."

Does he think it helped?

"Those periods of 1999-2000 were my fittest years for being able to push myself aerobically and maintain this fastness, this fast twitchness that I had. The base period in the winter caused that. In the summer I hardly touched aerobic training; I kept that sharpness, kept that focus, kept that 1<sup>st</sup> run mentality in everything I did. So, yes, I think the extra aerobic training did increase my base and it stayed with me quite a way through the season."

### Trains in Penrith

Besides working on his aerobic endurance, Paul also went to Australia for 8 weeks.

"I still maintained some long paddles, but not a lot. I didn't increase the white water content when I was in the warm weather. But I did increase the volume

of the gym training and as a result was becoming quite good at performing better over 2 days; I used to struggle with the recovery after the qualification into the final. So, to try and make myself fresher for the final I believed that I had to have this bigger endurance base.”

### Selection Surprise

Paul initially went to Australia with the British team for 4 weeks but then he stayed on for another 4 weeks, being the only one to do this.

“I was initially pre-selected, so I could afford to stay on while the others went back to prepare for selection. But then there were complications and suddenly then when I came back to Britain I was told pre-selection was a big issue. And one week before the race, the officials decided I needed to race selection.

So, it was a tough situation. I had to do selection after just coming back from Australia and recovering. You can understand how it wasn't the ideal preparation for selection -- and not the ideal preparation for the Olympic Games, to be honest.

I was on a plan; I had a 10-month plan for the Olympics that reflected similar things I had done the year before, in '99, with a few small adjustments. But now having to suddenly compete in the selection race through me off track. I hadn't done the quality training I would have if I was serious about selection.”

Nevertheless, Paul won the selection – which was a good thing because there was only one place on the British Olympic team. He won the 1<sup>st</sup> race and was 3<sup>rd</sup> in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and this, plus points he had picked up from his Worlds performance, put him over the top.

“I took a one-week break after that because it was a mentally challenging period. I needed to refresh and refocus on where I was going, because it was an interesting team dynamic after that. You can imagine: here I had originally been pre-selected over other people who wanted to make the team, then I had to do selection against them and now I was the only one person who's going to the Olympics, but I've still got to do World Cup races with these people. So, anyway I carried with that and I think I won 3 out of 4 World Cup races and I was ranked world number one going into the Olympics.”

### Sydney Olympics

For the Sydney Olympics, the British team did not stay in the Olympic Village: “It was a team decision not to stay there because it was a long distance from there to the course. So, we rented a house and stayed outside the Village.”

“We went to Sydney 3 weeks before the Games. When I got there I was fresh so that all the training I was going to do would be really high quality. But preparation was very tough because conditions were absolutely awful in that we had these big winds all the way through the training period. The wind was a complete nightmare. The gates were horizontal. It's not an excuse, it was just reality. I was trying to do this quality work and it wasn't happening. So, not the ideal preparation. But I knew it was the same for everyone and that my form had been very good going into it. Also, I was a favourite, and had

covered my bases dealing with the media attention and everything. So, I knew where I was going and I was confident.”

### The Race

“In Sydney one thing I did was to be as comfortable as possible in the qualification. I didn’t want to overdo it there and be tired for the final because it was the most physical course we had done all year, like 8 upstreams. So, I just cruised to the finish line, did just enough to qualify -- I was 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> .

The final was a pretty reasonable course. I was confident about it and knew the lines well. But on the first run, I touched gate 4, so once again I was on the back foot and had to speed it up – maybe too much. The rest of the run was pretty good, until the bottom drop. I caught an edge going down the bottom drop, capsized and rolled up a fraction of a second before the finish line. So I had a touch, and probably a 2-second time loss with the roll.”

What was his feeling about this performance?

“Completely hacked off. I took a bit of time just to assess where I was. I was 4<sup>th</sup>, I think. It was a pretty good run in most places. But Thomas Schmidt was leading by a long way. I was intent on winning, but what do you do? I regrouped and focused on what I could do, and then tried to put pressure on the others by putting down a great 2<sup>nd</sup> run. So, that was a very challenging position to be in.”

But then Paul had a touch on his 2<sup>nd</sup> run as well, while Schmidt was clean again.

“He had identical runs. He had an absolutely superb performance. So, to win, I would have had to be A), clean, B), not roll and C) been totally on it.”

Schmidt won by about 6 seconds, an unheard of amount in a race of this calibre. But Paul got 2<sup>nd</sup>:

“I was very disappointed at not winning. But I also realized that you have to take what you’re given on race day. And here I’d come out of it with the Silver Medal after falling in and coming within a tenth of a second of being disqualified.”

So, for a 3<sup>rd</sup> time, penalties had robbed Paul of a major title. Was there a pattern here?

“At the Olympics I think it was a lack of balance between wanting to go fast enough to win and staying in control. It’s probably one of the reasons I hit the penalties early on; I was a bit too eager. I wanted to win so much on the day that I was a bit too anxious.

Brazil and La Seu, though, weren’t the same reason as Sydney, because I didn’t feel the penalties in La Seu were because of my head. It was nothing to do with that. It was just that I didn’t realise that the line I was on was going to cause me to hit my back end on a gate.

But in Sydney I was a little bit rushed and not quite in my performance state until after I’d hit the gate; it was just a little bit late.

After that, I went to talk to the psychologist, John Males, about it. I talked about Schmidt winning and the way that he went about it. John was very good. I was in a mixed period after the Olympics because the only thing I thought about was Sydney, and I wasn't sure what I was going to do about anything else afterwards. I wasn't sure if I was even going to go for Athens. So, I took some time off."

### Reaction in Britain

Back in Britain Paul got a certain amount of recognition from winning an Olympic Silver:

"There was plenty of publicity in the build up, and some publicity after the medal. Canoeing was quite early in the Olympic program, so a Silver Medal early on was a big thing. However, as the Olympic Games went on, the Silver Medal became less important because Britain won 12 Gold Medals that year, so it was a fantastic Olympic Games for Britain as a whole.

The implication was that the world class programs set up by UK Sport and the Sports Lottery Fund were starting to kick in and were making a big difference from having one Gold Medal in Atlanta. So, Olympic sport in Britain was big; it was on the map. It was better than football teams. The Olympic team won Sports Personality Team of the Year in the BBC. It was big; there was a lot of interest and a lot of momentum."

### Deciding to go for Athens

Not surprisingly, with this attention and support for him, Paul eventually decided to go for another 4 years:

"I was financially more stable now – even though I lost my Adidas sponsorship. Starting in '97, when I approached them, I had a good sponsorship from Adidas up to the Sydney Olympics. But they finished with me after 2000, which was a bit strange.

However, I also had some key manufacturing sponsorships from Peak UK, Double Dutch, and Nomad Paddles. And then there was the National Lottery fund. So financially I was getting more stable, which was always an issue in the early days, having to rely on parental support. I was also doing a little bit more public speaking and those sorts of things.

So, I took a bit of a break and re-established where I wanted to go, and then kick started a bit later, in mid November--December.

But I never really got going. I did trips to New Zealand and Australia in the winter, and was chasing ground a bit. Fortunately I was pre-selected again, so I knew I had time, especially since the 2001 the Worlds were relatively late in the year.

Then I got ill in March and I didn't shake it off till April. I got this cold, but kept training. I was trying to do too many things. And the cold became a virus. So it was a month before I was fully operational again.

I went into the first World Cup race a bit jaded; not fully on form. I just never got going that year; I lost a bit of momentum but I tried to pull it back around

the end of the year and finished 4<sup>th</sup> in the last World Cup race going into the World Championships.

Bear in mind I had never won a World Championship, so the Worlds were my main focus. I took a little bit of focus off the World Cups in order to put the focus on the World Championships.

But then we had 9/11. So I'm, "Blimey!" you know. Then, I went into 2002, and changed coaches to Oliver Fix, who became the head coach of the British team. My father was still here at the side, though."

### Influence of Oliver Fix

Paul describes Oliver Fix, the World and Olympic Champion from Germany, he had trained with back in 1995:

"His main quality is that he did things in a real gentlemanly way. He was a fantastic character. He had a tough job. He was head coach for the entire team but he was working under a performance director; they started to build a bigger support staff for the team. More services came into play -- strength conditioning, more formalised psychology, we had a sports scientist, we had a full-time physiotherapist.

This was happening all the way through the end of the '90s. My medal in Sydney secured funding for another four years for British canoeing. So, we had good funding and we could prepare our teams well for the Olympic Games."

### 2001

And as a result of all of this support, Paul finally had a chance to prepare properly again:

"I took care of things diligently, started off early, with proper preparation, gym work, everything. Oliver advocated more endurance training, so I did that. He also introduced resistance training in the slalom boat and more aerobic training, some in the wildwater boat, some in the slalom boat, both up until Christmas.

There was also a lot of strength and endurance work. It was a lot different to what I had done historically, and I don't think it moved me on as much as what I'd been doing previously. I don't think it played to my strengths. Over time I lost a bit of my fast twitch quickness. Later on I got it back, though, coming into 2003, 2004."

In 2002, the World Cup was not important to Paul, since he had already won it 3 times and wanted to focus now on the European Championships and the World Championships.

"I won the European Championships in Bratislava in 2002. I didn't race any World Cups, and I went straight into the World Championships in Bourg in good form, confident, and happy with what I was doing. I changed some techniques, though. I worked a lot more on single arm upstreams, more like a C1 would do an upstream, basically. In other words, riding in and out on a

draw, or doing a turn off a reverse stroke. Basically I was trying to get a faster exit out of the gate.

This was something I'd started to develop in '99 a little bit. By 2000 it was apparent that Schmidt was using this technique a lot. And I started to develop some consistency with it more and more in '01-'02."

### Bad Worlds

But these things did not lead to a good World Championships:

"After the 1<sup>st</sup> run in the qualification I was winning. Then on the 2<sup>nd</sup> run, I had two 50s and didn't make the final.

I think I never got my head right for the start of the 2<sup>nd</sup> run. Normally, I looked at the video briefly after the 1st run and was done with it. I never focused too long on the video. I would just look at myself and if there was anyone quicker than me, I would look at him, too. So in this race, once I finished the video, I went off to relax. Then, I had another look at the course, and got changed.

But then the coaches came back with more video, and started showing me a bit more of some guy, I think it was Peschier. He'd done this great upstream gate at the bottom of the course. And it was all a bit too much. I think it kind of switched my focus off. Here, I was winning, and only had to think about a few improvements, but then this was added on. I don't know; it distracted me.

At this time the British had introduced this big video system where we had this company that came in, and had cameras on all of the course, all linked into a bus, where they coded it all in. You had it all run off a laptop. It was just this big machine that was generating data. It was too much for me at that time.

I had a really good routine and knew what I was doing. But then my routine got affected and I think I didn't quite get on it for the 2<sup>nd</sup> run.

I learned from that to keep all that video side of it out of my way. If I needed the video I would come and ask to use it; otherwise I didn't want it in my face. Because there were times in the team where all this stuff was going on. There were all these people coming into the team environment. Here we're trying to have a professional environment but there were all these distractions going on."

### 2003

It was now starting to be a long time since Paul had done well at a World Championships: after the Olympics, the '01 World was cancelled and now he had done badly in '02. Suddenly, he was into Olympic qualification again, at the World Championships in '03, in Augsburg. Paul talks about that year:

"Fabien Lefevre was coming through now -- he won the '02 World Championships -- so we had a look at what he was doing, some of his techniques. (See Lefevre case study for information about his career -- ed.) So, again I was trying to learn from people.

Before, I had learnt from Schmidt and the C1s, so I was developing that. Now, Lefevre and the other French were doing some good upstreams. They

were coming in and holding the inside pole quite closely with the bow on the outside and then reaching around vertically, which was a new concept for me. I'd always brought the bow round the inside of the gate and then had a quick change. So that was something new."

Another thing Paul did was "make sure my body was a bit more connected."

"I wanted to make sure I was using my whole body more, and not, say, just pulling with my bicep. So, I was a bit more diligent in the gym. I worked with a strength and conditioning coach from the Australian Institute of Sport who was working in England, for the English Institute of Sport. Instead of just focusing on adding plates to the bars, he started focusing more on the technique of the lifts. It was like 60% technique, 40% strength -- that sort of thing. I started feeling it in my paddling."

Also for '03, Paul changed his boat design:

"I squared up the edges for Augsburg because I wanted more grip in the eddies so I could project out better, more C1 style.

Augsburg has sharp, turbulent eddy lines and I thought the square edges might work well in that environment. But in the end, they didn't. I think the boat was one of my main downfalls at the Worlds (he got 4<sup>th</sup> – ed). Again, a touch cost me the Gold Medal. So 3 touches cost 3 Gold Medals at 3 World Championships.

The touch was at gate 18 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> run; it brushed my helmet on the way out. I was quick in the majority of the course, but not as quick as Lefevre. He had 2 touches but still won the Worlds. I had one touch and finished 4<sup>th</sup>. But excepting the touch, I was content with my race. It was one of those times where I was all right with it."

### Australia in the Winter

Once again, Paul went to Australia in the winter. He also changed boats again. At first, he started working on his own design but then ended up paddling Lefevre's boat, the Optima.

"I didn't feel there would be enough time for the manufacturer and me to make changes. I didn't want the hassle. I felt "There's a good boat out there, I'll just use that; I'm not going to make it a key focus for the year. There are other areas that would be better to focus on."

Anyway, that winter in Australia was absolutely brilliant. The quality of the training was superb. I was getting better and better. By the end of the Australia trip, I was starting to produce some good quality runs.

I came into the first series of selection races in the best shape I'd ever been in, I reckon, absolutely the best shape. I won the 1st race by 6 seconds or something, and the 2nd race by 3 seconds. That was the selection to get you into the World Cup team. But the first 2 World Cup races were the selection to the actual Olympic team.

And then I just didn't perform in the 2 World Cup races. In the 1<sup>st</sup> one, I got a 50. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> one I didn't perform, I'd been ill in the week -- I'd had a food

bug or something. I finished 18<sup>th</sup> and that was it; that was my Olympic selection ruined.

So, because of being in the best shape of my life at the end of March, I'd overcooked the first selection races. And I think I was becoming better at the one-off race format, rather than at persistent races over the World Cup period."

Any lessons to be learnt from this?

"In retrospect, I think I put too much into the domestic selection because I wanted to make sure I was selected, because then it would be an easy transition to the Olympic team. I was in a strong position because my 4<sup>th</sup> place at the World Championships the year before gave me some selection points. So I just needed one win at this World Cup series."

Did pressure from the media have anything to do with it? After all, here he was, the defending Olympic Silver Medallist.

"No, that wasn't a problem for me. I was used to all that, and I learnt to thrive on it, I think. That was just part and parcel of being a top paddler.

It was really competitive in the men's kayak class, and I have to give full credit to Campbell Walsh, who finished 2<sup>nd</sup> in both World Cup races (and ultimately got 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Olympics – ed). He had done bloody well to get on the team. It was absolutely phenomenal, what he had done, so full credit to him. I would have needed, I think, a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> place in the first World Cup to have got in. It was a very high standard, and me not being on the form I was on at the first selection races wasn't good enough."

And with this failure to make the Athens Olympic team, Paul's competitive career as an athlete came to an end.

### British System

Looking back on it, how much would Paul say that his success had been due to being part of a British system as opposed to just his own initiative?

"I would say predominantly it was my own drive, my own ambition, wanting to win. That was first and foremost. But as I said, the things that really helped me on my way to that were a good competition structure in Great Britain, so you knew what level you were working towards. And then having some coaches to help me along the way, and initially some good training gates, some moving water and other paddlers to train with. So those were important.

Role models would be a key, as well. I think having people in the club that were good, better than you, to chase and look up to and learn from was important. And having a key role model in Richard Fox, who was head of the sport, was really helpful.

So, on a 1-10 scale, with 1 being the British system didn't help very much to 10 being it was everything, I would probably rate it as a seven."

### Starts Coaching Career

Since stopping as an athlete, Paul has moved both as a family man and with a career in coaching. In the fall of 2005 he got married and his wife's name is Lucy. They have a little girl, Hope, who was born in October, 2006.

And somewhat before that, he got into coaching. As we saw at the start of this essay, both Paul's brother and father are slalom coaches, so in a sense, Paul has now joined the family business. Here is how it happened:

“During the time the '04 Olympic selection was going on, I was approached by John Anderson, our Performance Director. He knew all along that I would probably just do Athens and then move on. So he said, there's an opportunity coming up in October in the Elite Coach Program, which is a new program being run by UK Sport, to develop talented people into elite coaches for the future. He asked if I was interested and I said I was.”

Paul had actually done some coaching before this came up:

“I'd done some weekends with the Welsh squad in the late '90s and I'd done some junior training weekends in early 2000. Plus, I'd done my Level Three Coaching Certificate through Alan Edge in 2003. So, I'd been preparing a bit for the possibility of a career in coaching later on.”

### Selection to UK Sport Elite Coach Program

Selection to the UK Sport Elite Sport Program is a really rigorous process. First of all, most successful applicants are Olympic medallists. On top of that, there is a tough interview and screening process:

“Every sport nominates up to 3 people and then the list is narrowed down to 14 who will be interviewed. And then 8 were selected in my class.

Then there was a 2-day interview process. It was tough for me because I'd never had a job in my life before! They put us in an extended role for a day, where you were a president of a company, or president of a country, and you had to do all the decision making, develop strategy, manage conflicts, sponsorship negotiation, and media interviews. You were basically in an office all day, and you had all these different things thrown at you, and you had to deal with them.

Anyway it's a 3-year professional development program, and you have a development program through your governing body, as well, which is a technical coaching program. So, it's a partnership between your governing body and UK Sport.

This is a full-time position, with a view to your becoming a full-time coach within your governing body at the end of your training and maybe eventually the head coach.

The way UK Sport structures it, you have to undertake 4 “Residentials” a year, where you get high-level presentations from different people. They could be from the world of sport, or from business. We've had various things, from comedy training to presentation training, to being put in business situations to develop our leadership skills. So, all sorts of things. Probably

many things you wouldn't experience as a normal coach, but all things that are designed to develop you.

The Residentials are 5 days long. It's been a great opportunity to cross-sport network, because there are 8 people in a class from various sports in the room together.

And outside of that you can lead your own program -- do what other things you want to do, to work on your weaknesses identified from the interview process.

So, I spent a week in France actually coaching with a French team. I took some of my athletes over with me. I did the same with Australia. I was invited as a guest coach for one of their training camps in Australia, and I went to see the Australian Institute of Sport, and spent a bit of time with one of the performance directors, and looked at the basketball program.

I also have a mentor in Reg Hatch, who plays a role similar to what my dad did, helping me develop. He's a coach who's been there and done it with the best of them, and I think he's played a role that's a bit more impartial. (Hatch has coached both Australian and American Olympians in flatwater kayaking -- ed.) “

Reg was contacted for this essay and said this about Paul:

“Paul demonstrates the impatient impatience of most coaches -- nothing ever appears to happen as fast as it should or with the outcomes he expects - yet. He often leaves sessions more exhausted than the athletes and pours himself into each and every session and each and every person.

He has the genuine interest to be at every session and at as many appointments made by specialists and athletes as he can. Paul believes he learns more this way and his athletes want him to be there. This has huge benefits for the future since the knowledge of the coach about his/her charges is paramount.

Paul is keen on technology and has the intelligence to make things develop and work. The same skills give him a great eye for movement and the ability to see ahead in both river courses and what may be around the next bend.

He has instigated a live-in system for education and training for young athletes and that is starting to spread through other sports. Paul has a real vision for the future and employs succession planning where he is allowed to.

He is a parent, husband and in the future will be one of the great coaches of athletes and more importantly -- of people.”

From Paul's point of view, what's it like being in a class with other elite people training to be coaches?

“The biggest thing for me is being in an elite environment. Elite is the norm. So, we've been put in very challenging situations to see how we would deal with them. And a lot of skills they give us help us to deal with these situations. So, I'm with these other people, and I have to perform in environments that aren't the normal environment for me. I'm used to sitting on a start line and

performing, and I learned to deal with that environment. But I've had to learn to be good in these other environments as well. These people are helping me improve as they're improving, but we're probably also a bit competitive with each other, you know. We once had to do this comedy act. They trained us to be comedians for 2 days. And you can imagine the competition to see who was the funniest."

What are the main things Paul has learned from this program that are really important for a coaching career?

"First of all, I'm developing knowledge in a lot of areas, whether it's more sport-specific knowledge, or more sport science knowledge, or communication skills. I knew a lot as an athlete, but that didn't necessarily mean I was going to get the message across to other athletes. So, I'm learning how to deliver messages in a variety of ways, whether it is comedy, asking questions, or being able to get to the bottom of things with your athletes. So, communication has been a big thing.

Learning to lead people is another – whether my leadership style should be more entrepreneurial, more inspirational, but all the while being able to develop strategies and long-term planning, that sort of thing. I came into it probably a bit more autocratic. You know, "you've got to do it this way, you've got to do it that way," But now I'm learning to empower my athletes more. And some of the biggest things I've learned are from my athletes.

But I think it's really just a lot of little things that have been built up to make a big impact. For example, I went on a trip to Australia last week, and this guy was talking about growth hormones, and how long the growth hormones are around in the body, and how you can construct your training week to take advantage of it. And then how to add your recovery in -- how long a period you should give to it, and some specific recovery techniques. So, lots of little things. But they're not telling us what to do. It's up to us to take these messages out and figure out how to use them.

What they're doing for us is what we try to do for our athletes: try to project what a winning athlete's going to look like in the future. They're trying to give us information to enable us to know what an elite coach is going to look like in the future, one who can deal with budgets and the press, who can manage people, manage relationships, lead a team. So, we've had things like having to lead high-performance teams. We've learnt from how animals work, hunting packs in the wild, how they take care of each other to look after the team, how they hunt – things that might apply to our sports."

Given his background as a highly successful athlete, as well as the preparation he is getting through the Elite Coach program, what advice would Paul give to someone wanting to be a slalom coach?

"One of the things is what you yourself always speak about, the transition from being selfish as an athlete to being selfless as a coach. That, and I think, being prepared to always be challenged. And for me– and Reg is always saying it – I'm very impatient. So, you've got to learn to be "patiently impatient," I think. As an athlete, I was always one of these people who wanted to run before he could walk. You know, I'd always extended, I wanted to be out there, and I wanted to be doing things better than everybody else.

And as a coach, for me it's no different. I'm in coaching because I want to win. But you've got to make sure the building blocks are in place. You've got to patiently build, and success doesn't happen over night. As an athlete, I wanted to get there quick, and I wanted to do it quickly. But now as I look back at the preparation period, it took a long time. Now as a coach, although I want to get there, I've got to be careful that it's done in the right way, to do things at the right time, in the right place.

For me, just stepping back a little bit is important and seeing how things unfold, rather than going at it like a bull in a china shop, which I probably do a bit too often.

As an athlete I ended up having an experienced head, but now as a coach, I've got a young head on young shoulders. I'm still evolving, and I don't know whether you feel like you've ever made it – there's always something more to learn.

When I started, I thought, "Well, I was pretty successful, we'll do things my way." But now I'm starting to understand my athletes a lot better and am tailor-making things a lot more for them, understanding what makes them tick, and helping them understand what makes them tick. I'm starting to get some young athletes that are very autonomous in what they're doing, and trying to get them to learn and develop what's best for them. I've got 5 different athletes, and each one of them is on a slightly different track. So, there's not one track for one person. I've tried to individualize it quite a bit."

Lastly, what are some of the satisfactions of being a Coach, compared to being an athlete? How do the two compare?

"I'm not sure yet, until one of my athletes has won a big race! I've only had little successes so far. So I can't say, because for me the feeling of standing on the top of a podium as an athlete hasn't been beaten yet as a coach!"