

International Canoe Federation Level 1- Online Assistant Canoe Sprint Coach Course

**Presented by Gregory van Heerden ICF Level 1 accredited course
Facilitator**

Acknowledgements

The implementation of this course would not have been possible without the generous help and support of the following:

- The International Canoe Federation.
- Guam Kayak and Canoe Federation.

Course date

This online level 1 course was held over a three-week period (1st to the 19th December 2025), in a condensed approach made up of virtual engagement over Zoom, theoretical coursework and three practical elements to ensure a transfer of theory to actual coaching application.

Course Outcomes and measurement

The purpose of the Level 1 course was to provide the coaches with the basic knowledge and skills needed to coach beginners in Va'a/canoe/kayak. The course covered theory and three practical tasks.

On the completion of the course the coaches were able to:

- Provide a safe environment for paddling to take place
- Plan and conduct beginner lessons
- Plan and conduct a basic training session
- Teach balance, the basic technique of Va'a/Canoe/kayak paddling and steering
- Conduct basic physical conditioning training
- Prepare athletes for domestic level competition

In order to assess the coaches' knowledge and their practical ability to apply this they had to complete three practical assignments followed by a written exam comprising of 20 questions (a minimum of 16 correct responses was required in order to pass)

Furthermore, it is expected that all the coaches be compliant with the regulations of their National Governing body with respect to first aid, safeguarding and related screenings.

All the successful candidates shall receive a "Level 1 Assistant Canoe Sprint Coach" certificate from the International Canoe Federation.



Technique drills

Course content

The following content was covered in the course:

- Introduction to Canoeing, a short history of Canoeing, the definition, discipline descriptions and Canoe Sprint description
- Equipment; Boats, parts of the boats, paddles and accessories, handling of equipment
- Safety and Rescue; equipment, personal safety, injuries, methods of rescue
- The technique of canoeing; launching, balance, strokes of canoeing, basic paddling technique, steering
- Physical conditioning; endurance development and strength development
- Training and basic training methods; Why training is necessary, training loads, frequency and duration, long distance, fartlek, interval and complex training.
- Role of the coach; teaching skills and communication, coaching tools, methods and teaching beginners.
- Introducing racing; race course, racing rules, the goals and principles of racing

With the Practical component including three practical assignments:

- The demonstration and teaching of dryland Va'a/kayak/canoe technique,
- Running a bodyweight training session, and
- The development and presentation of a periodised training program.



Bodyweight Practical demonstrations

Attendance

The course was attended by 9 Coaches, unfortunately 1 coach was unable to meet the attendance and assignment criteria and did not sit the final exam.

Results

The following 8 coaches successfully passed the exam:

- John Wesolowski
- Melonie Treltas
- Ryan Raguindin
- Justin Andrew
- Daniel Filmore
- Joseph Santos
- Ryder Cotelesse
- Cameron Grieger

Facilitator Comments

The cohort of 9 coaches who participated in this Level 1 Coaching course were all Va'a/Outrigger coaches and represented a wide and diverse range of coaching experience. This included an experienced national team coach, developing club coaches, athletes transitioning into coaching roles, and individuals at the very beginning of their coaching journey. This breadth of experience created a rich learning environment, bringing together perspectives from high-performance coaching through to foundational, participant-focused delivery.

Given the cohort's exclusive focus on Va'a/Outrigger paddling, the course was delivered with a strong emphasis on relevance while reinforcing that the qualification is grounded in universal coaching principles applicable across paddlesport and sport more broadly. Core concepts such as skill acquisition and progression, physiological principles (including work-to-rest ratios for targeted adaptations), and fundamental paddling mechanics, such as the importance of an effective catch, achieving a vertical blade position during the pull phase, and generating forward propulsion rather

than torque, were explored in ways that directly connected to Va'a practice. These generic principles were consistently contextualised using Va'a-specific examples to ensure learning was practical, meaningful, and immediately transferable to the coaches' own environments.



The importance of core

The course was also approached as a valuable opportunity for mutual learning. Coaches were actively encouraged to share their experiences, insights, and cultural knowledge related to Va'a paddling and coaching. This exchange strengthened peer learning within the group and enhanced my own understanding of Va'a-specific approaches, reinforcing the importance of culturally informed coaching practice. These shared discussions will continue to inform my ability to draw strong connections between paddlesport disciplines and deliver inclusive and adaptable learning experiences.

Engagement from the coaches throughout the course was good. Group discussions demonstrated a willingness to reflect, ask questions, and challenge ideas constructively. Coaches showed an ability to link theoretical concepts with practical application and to articulate how these principles fit within their own coaching philosophies, highlighting an appreciation for both the science and the "art" of coaching.

The development of periodised training plans proved to be one of the more challenging modules, particularly given the variation in prior experience. However, the practical assignments demonstrated clear learning and progression across the group. Coaches who initially had limited exposure to structured planning showed notable improvement, and by the end of the course all participants demonstrated a solid foundational understanding of planning principles, providing a strong platform for continued development.

6 Week Mesocycle											
			General Preparation: Basic endurance, strength development, pre-conditioning, dealing with any imbalances/weaknesses		Specific Preparation: More time in the boat, training becomes more event specific, long/medium/short endurance development		Race Base: Speed endurance development with maintenance of endurance, introduction of threshold work and speed		Race tolerance: Threshold and speed work, development of race pace, maintenance of endurance and speed endurance, okay to go hard!		Race Taper: Speed work, recovery, staying in touch with race pace elements of threshold and speed endurance
	Time			Time				Time		Time	
Sunday	AM	-	Evaluate body imbalances/weaknesses, nutrition, and hydration	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)
	PM	-	Mobility work	-		-		-		-	
Monday	AM	60 mins	Core (30 mins) and Stretching (30 mins)	60 mins	Endurance Nonreg 1:0.5>: 60 mins @ Zone 2 (Continuous) Technique focused	60 mins	Endurance Nonreg 1:0.5>: 3 x 30 mins @ Zone 2, rest 30 sec	60 mins	Speed 1:3-10: 15 mins Zone 2, 15 x 20 sec Max Effort, 2 min rest, 10 mins Zone 2	60 mins	Speed Endurance 1:1-3: 10 mins zone 2, 5 x 500 meters @ race pace, paddle back to start line 4+ mins, 10 mins zone 2 (race strategy)
	PM	60 mins	Cardio 60 mins @ Zone 2	60 mins	Gym: Strength and Conditioning	60 mins	Gym: Max Strength	-	-	-	-
Tuesday	AM	60 mins	Gym (Strength Development)	70 mins	Endurance Nonreg 1:0.5>: Fartlek (Zone 3 and Zone 2 Technique focused)	60 mins	Speed Endurance 1:1-3: 10 min warm up no resistance, Resistance Paddling (bungee or sand bag) 2 min on/ 2 min off x 6-8 (lower rate, maintain normal tech), 5 min Zone 2 no resistance	60 mins	Gym: Explosive Power	60 mins	Gym: Explosive Power
	PM	60 mins	Cardio 60 mins @ Zone 2	60 mins	Cardio 60 mins @ Zone 2 (Steady)	60 mins	Cardio 60 mins @ Zone 2 (Steady)	-	-	-	-
Wednesday	AM	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	-	Recovery (Active, Stretching, sleep, mobility, etc.)	80 mins	Threshold 1:0.5-1: 10 mins Zone 2, 8 rounds of 2 x 90 sec on @ Zone 5, 90 Sec off (Rest), 2 mins rest between rounds, 5 mins Zone 2	60 mins	Speed 1:3-10: 15 mins Zone 2, 10 x 60 sec max efforts, 4 mins rest, 5 mins Zone 2
									Recovery (Active, Stretching,		Recovery (Active, Stretching,

Example of submitted periodised training plan

The following videos were added to the homework of the coaches from the ICF online lecture series:

https://www.canoeicf.com/icf-performance-education-free-online-series?utm_campaign=PerformanceEducation

- Difference between women's and men's training methods,
- Choosing a paddle for young kayak athletes,
- How to train your athletes to paddle faster,
- Anti-doping Education - Keeping canoeing clean.

Also shared was the link to the British Canoeing Awarding Body Digital library as this includes a number of useful resources:

<https://britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/digital-library/>



The importance of warming up

Feedback received at the end of the course indicated that the coaches' expectations had been met. Overall, the cohort left with increased confidence in their understanding of core coaching principles and their ability to apply them effectively within Va'a contexts, supporting athletes and participants through improved guidance, structured training, and positive performance environments.

As one participant shared:

"Taking the ICF Coaching course was informative and the best decision ever. Presenter is compassionate and provided an outstanding presentation."



Getting strong