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

Presented by Gregory van Heerden ICF Level 1 accredited course Facilitator and Callam Davis ICF Level 2 coach

Acknowledgements

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

- Paddlesport South Africa and the International Canoe Federation.

Coach group photo

Course date

This level 1 Hybrid course was held over the following two days, 3rd and 4th March 2025

Hybrid course details

This course combined online theory sessions with in-person practicals over two intensive days. This structure allowed for a condensed yet comprehensive learning experience, covering all essential theory and reinforcing it through hands-on experiential learning modules. Canoeing South Africa also arranged to carry out their safeguarding training on the evening of the 3rd March followed by safeguarding checks on the morning of the 4th March. Participants were hosted at the Riverside Hotel in Durban.

Course Outcomes and measurement

The course was designed to equip coaches with the fundamental knowledge and skills required to instruct beginners in canoeing and kayaking. The program combined theoretical learning with four practical sessions to ensure a well-rounded coaching foundation.

Upon completing the course, coaches were able to:

- Create a safe paddling environment
- Plan and deliver beginner lessons
- Design and lead basic training sessions
- Teach balance, fundamental kayak paddling techniques, and steering
- Conduct basic physical conditioning exercises
- Prepare athletes for domestic-level competition

To evaluate their understanding and practical application of these skills, participants completed four practical assignments, followed by a written exam consisting of 20 questions. A minimum of 16 correct responses was required to pass

Schedule of events:

Day 1:

9am – 10am	Welcome, Introduction, and Providing a Safe Environment for paddling
10 am – 10.15 am	Tea Break
10.15am – 12.15 am	Technique and Conducting beginner lessons
12.15am – 13.30pm	Lunch
13.30pm – 15.00pm	Practical - Safety
15.00pm – 15.15pm	Tea Break
15.15pm – 17.15pm	Practical – Technique & Beginner Session
	Dinner
19.30pm	Safeguarding Online Course

Day 2:

7.30am – 8.30am	Safeguarding Clearance Checks
8.30am – 10.00 am	Plan and conduct a basic training session
10 am – 10.15 am	Tea Break

10.15am – 11.00 am	Preparing athletes for domestic level competition
11.00am – 12.00pm	Practical: Basic Periodisation and training sessions
12.00am – 12.45pm	Lunch
12.45pm – 14.30pm	Practical – Training Sessions
14.30pm – 14.45pm	Tea Break
14.45pm – 16.00pm	Test

Collaboration in action

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 covering:

- Developing a safety plan and activity risk assessments,
- The demonstration and teaching of the Szanto dryland technique method,
- Running a bodyweight training session, and
- The development and presentation of a periodised training program.

Additional resources supplied

The following additional resource links were provided to the coaches for their continued learning and development:

- International Canoe Federation online education:
  - https://www.canoeicf.com/icf-performance-education-free-online-series?utm_campaign=PerformanceEducation
    - Anti-doping Education - Keeping canoeing clean
    - Choosing a paddle for young kayak athletes
    - Difference between women's and men's training methods
    - How to train your athletes to paddle faster
- Drug Free Sport:
  - https://drugfreesport.org.za/
    - Parents' guide to clean sport
    - Coach True
    - Medication check
      - https://drugfreesport.org.za/online-medication-check/
- British Canoeing Awarding Body Digital library
  - https://britishcanoeingawarding.org.uk/digital-library/
  - Risk Assessment Centre and AI Advisor
    - https://paddleuk.org.uk/risk-assessment-ai-advisor/

Attendance

The course was attended by the following 16 Coaches:

1. Anela Ndonga
2. Nkosikhona Mabaso
3. Lindokuhle Maphumulo
4. Nhlakanipho Gumede
5. Camurin Abrahams
6. Hlelani Radebe
7. Nkosinathi Mngwengwe
8. Nosipho Mthembu
9. Menzi Mthembu
10. Berven Titus
11. Jabulani Gwamanda
12. Sandile Mtolo
13. Sikhanyisele Dekeda
14. Mpendulo Alex Mthethwa
15. Kamva Nkosinkulu
16. Thandeka Cynthia Ndlovu

Results

Thirteen coaches passed the final exam.

Presentations underway

Facilitator Comments

Theory feedback

Efforts were made to simplify the theoretical elements, considering that English was not the participants' first language. Condensing the required knowledge into two mornings was challenging but this was balanced by in-person practical sessions, where hands-on experience reinforced theoretical concepts and helped prevent information overload.

The online format of the theory sessions presented some difficulties, as all coaches were in a single room rather than participating individually. This made interactive discussions harder due to sound and visual limitations. However, having an in-room facilitator ensured these discussions could still take place, preserving the interactive learning experience.

Overall, a good balance was achieved, effectively delivering information at a level suited to the coaches' needs.


Dynamic warm up and core

Practical Feedback

The Role of the Coach

I was encouraged to see many candidates recognise two coaching styles that have no place in sport: the dictatorial coach who shouts and the absent coach who lacks care. This sparked valuable discussions on effective coaching, emphasising support, encouragement, and positive feedback—aligning well with the Level 1 course content.

Some candidates also highlighted sport's role in tackling issues such as drug abuse in underserved communities. Nearly all shared concerns about challenging training conditions, including poor water quality, pollution, crime, and long commutes. We discussed practical solutions such as providing sanitiser after training and affordable shoes for walking to the river, though cost remains a barrier.

Safety Practical

Candidates grasped basic safety concepts such as swimming ability and wearing life jackets. Initially, many overlooked broader risks, but through discussion, they identified hazards unique to their

clubs—flooding, snake bites, quicksand, extreme weather, and pollution-related injuries. Together, we developed mitigation strategies and emergency response plans.

Technique Practical

I was impressed by the candidates' strong understanding of paddling techniques, particularly the Szanto method. They progressed much faster than expected.


Technique demonstration and practice

Teaching Beginners Practical

This session was integrated with the technique practical. Candidates effectively engaged learners, demonstrated skills, and corrected mistakes constructively, reinforcing earlier discussions on positive coaching.

Basic Training Plan Practical

Candidates showed a solid grasp of periodisation principles, progressing from general to specific training, aerobic to anaerobic work, and allowing recovery. However, many found physiological concepts from theory challenging. If they advance to Level 2, physiology will require extra focus. Some also struggled with advanced periodisation, a Level 2 topic, but its relevance to modern racing suggests it could be introduced in Level 1 coursework.

Bodyweight Gym Practical

Candidates demonstrated strong knowledge of bodyweight exercises, designing well-rounded circuits for explosive power, strength, and endurance.

Complete Training Day Guide

This final exercise tied course concepts to practical coaching, helping candidates apply what they had learned.

Written Session Plan

Many candidates misunderstood the session details, outlining general training rather than specifics. Next time, I will provide an example (e.g., "Today's target: threshold. Session: 10-min warm-up, 6x5 min @ 80% effort with 2-min rest, 5-min cool-down") to clarify expectations.

General Thoughts

Language barriers posed challenges, but all but one candidate overcame them through practical engagement. Most struggled with theoretical, text-heavy concepts, especially those involving maths. Using visual aids (e.g., demonstrating paddle angles rather than stating "45 degrees") significantly improved comprehension.

The coaches thrived in group settings, exchanging knowledge and building confidence through presentations. Practical sessions were the most effective part of the course, reinforcing key skills through hands-on learning. I believe this collaborative approach should be encouraged in future coaching development. The impact of this hands-on learning and supportive environment was clear from the feedback received:

"The experience was fantastic, and I had a great time. The course provided valuable insights, and I learned a lot that I'm excited to apply in the future. It was a great opportunity to grow both personally and professionally, and I'm grateful for all the support and guidance provided throughout."

"I personally have learned a lot."

"I would like to take this opportunity to say thanks for hosting us—it was great and a wonderful experience."

Getting stronger

Conclusion

This Level 1 coaching course successfully equipped participants with essential coaching knowledge and practical skills, ensuring they are well-prepared for their roles. Despite language barriers and the challenge of condensing theoretical concepts, the combination of online learning and hands-on practical sessions proved highly effective. Candidates demonstrated strong engagement, quickly grasping key coaching principles, safety protocols, and technical skills. The discussions on coaching philosophy, training conditions, and real-world challenges highlighted the depth of understanding among participants. Their ability to collaborate, exchange knowledge, and build confidence through group work and presentations was particularly encouraging. The positive feedback received reflects the strong outcomes of the course, with candidates feeling well-supported and empowered in their coaching journeys. We are excited to see how these coaches apply their learning and progress in their careers. Their enthusiasm and commitment to development suggest a promising future, not only for them but for the athletes and communities they will support.