

COMMON MYTHS AND FACTS REGARDING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN SPRINT CANOEING

SHOULD WOMEN BE PERMITTED TO COMPETE IN THE 2016 OLYMPICS?

Myth: There are not enough women canoeing for it to be included in the Olympic Summer Games.

Fact: Approximately 500 women from at least 16 countries currently paddle canoe at the local club and/or national levels. Canada, USA, Brazil, Ecuador, Spain, France, England, Poland, and Hungary – all 9 countries include women's canoe as official or exhibition events at their National Championships. An additional 7 countries have women paddling in canoes at various skill levels: Serbia, Guam, Mexico, Lithuania, China, Togo, and Uganda. Russia included women at their National Championships in 2004 (and invited Canadian and US athletes). Russia also competed in the exhibition events at the 2003 World Championships. Ecuador, England, France, Poland, Spain, and Hungary included women's canoe as exhibition events for the first time in 2008. Spain had 20 women who were under 14 years of age competing in exhibition events at their National Championships. France has included women's events as exhibition since 2006.

Too many countries still force women to race against the men at the national level because National Federations and even Local Clubs refuse to offer women-only events across the board. Federations and Clubs demand interest (i.e., a large number of paddlers) before they offer events – knowing that more interest will not be revealed without events.

"If women's canoe were an Olympic event, you'd see a lot of other countries jump on board," says Jeff Houser, Atlantic Regional High Performance coach for Canoe Kayak Canada. " But with so many countries tied to their Olympic funding in terms of what they can do in development, they just can't afford to add [women's] canoe."

Myth: Women in canoe have not competed in high level/international competitions.

Fact: Women's Canoe was held as exhibition in the 2003 World Championships (Atlanta, GA, USA) and will be included again as exhibition at the 2009 World Championships (Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, Canada). We expect 9+ countries to send qualified athletes to the 2009 exhibition. Ten (10) countries, across 4 continents submitted applications on behalf of 35 female canoeists to participate in the Pre-Worlds Women's Canoe Development Camp, sponsored by the ICF, CanoeKayak Canada, and Canoe '09. The Pan American Championships have included women's canoe since 2001. In 2001, World Cup #1 (held in Gainesville, Georgia, USA) included women's canoe. The Lake Placid International Regatta (New York, USA) featured highly competitive, full heats and finals for the singles events, and included hotly contested C2 (2-person canoe) and C4 (4-person canoe) events.

Myth: There are not enough young girls competing in sprint canoe globally.

Fact: Please refer to statements above. In addition, we have found there are more teenagers paddling canoe or interested in canoe, world-wide, than “adult” paddlers (over 18). Most countries we are aware of have primarily younger paddlers and many of them must race against the boys/men because of lack of opportunities for racing, coaching and resources.

The International Canoe Federation’s decision in late 2007 to *not* include women’s canoe in the 2010 Youth Olympics (YO) is disappointing given current data, but understandable given the timing of the decision and the relative progress at that time.

While this decision cannot be reversed, we do see great hope with the opportunities provided with exhibition events at the 2009 Senior World Championships. In addition, CanoeKayak Canada, Canoe ’09 (the World Championships local organizing committee) and the ICF have partnered to financially support a Pre-Worlds development camp for women in canoe – the first of its kind. We expect canoeists as young as 15 years old to participate. The top camp participants will compete for their respective national federations at the 2009 Senior Worlds. We already see increased interest and participation in canoe as a direct result of these announcements.

Myth: Women only recently started paddling canoes – Olympic style – in flatwater.

Fact: Paddling in canoes has been a method of transportation, a means of gathering food, recreational outlet, and a part of survival for women and their families for centuries. We have documentation of women doing “high kneel” canoeing dating back to the early 1900s, and women have been paddling in slalom canoes in whitewater since the 1950’s.

Canada continues to lead the way as a National Federation, providing women only events since 1995 at the National Championships and encouraging the growth and development of women nation-wide. Brazil followed suit in 2000, USA in 2002. We expect other National Federations to change their by-laws to offer women-only events as “official” events, and eliminate the need for a girl to demonstrate her skills in the same races as the men.

Myth: Because of the unilateral development resulting from Olympic style canoeing, women’s bodies (e.g., reproductive organs) would be damaged and/or feminine development stunted.

Fact: There is no medical evidence to support this myth. In fact, this argument has been used for over a century in attempts to restrict and/or limit women’s participation in most Olympic disciplines. Dr. Don McKenzie, Chairman of the ICF Medical and Anti-Doping Committee, has publicly dispelled these types of comments from ever being used as justification for restricting women’s participation.

Unfortunately, these false statements continue to be made by coaches around the world, scaring parents and youth away from this sport. For more information about this issue,

please contact Brandi Derksen, Public Relations and Media Officer, ICF at brandi.derksen@canoeicf.com

Myth: The cost of including a women's canoe event on the 2016 program would be prohibitive.

Fact: Women's canoe is held at the same venue as men's canoe, men's and women's kayak, men's and women's rowing and men's and women's distance open water swimming. Additional costs would be minimal. The inclusion of one event, e.g., C1 (singles) 500 meters, would add no more than ten minutes to the regatta schedule in any given day, and an additional 15 minutes for the applicable medal ceremony. The addition of the C2 500, would add approximately ten additional minutes on top of this in any given day, and the additional time for medals. Only three (3) medals would be required to be made from existing molds for the singles events. Six medals would be required for the C2 events.

Women have competed in international Flatwater canoe competitions since 1999.
(continued below)

INTERNATIONAL RACE OPPORTUNITIES

1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Pan Am Champ			1 st Intl. Event To include Women's Exhibition 'Lanier Sprint Challenge'		World Cup #1 – April Pan American Champs	Pan Am Champ Curitiba, Brazil	World Champ.	Pan Am Champ
2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010			
Pan Am Champ	Pan Am Champ		Pan Am Champ	World Championships Exhibition	Youth Olympics ICF voted NO for WIC.			

Women continue to make great strides despite the obstacles of no or little access to equipment, training programs or coaching. Women around the globe are getting connected via grass-roots movements spearheaded by WomenCan, offering hope in the midst of isolation and obstacles.

For more information, please contact Pam Boteler, Executive Director, USA WomenCan, at pamcanoe@hotmail.com, or visit www.justcanoeit.com.