COMMON FAULTS

- **Catch is too slow**. The blade should be vertical (and fully submerged) in front of the cockpit. A slow Catch means that this is not achieved until after the front of the cockpit has gone past the blade. Many start the Catch (ie blade tip touches the water) in front of the cockpit and by their feet but the blade is not fully submerged until after the front of the cockpit has gone past and just in front of their knees. This wastes up to 50% of the leverage that could potentially be exerted on each stroke. This can be prevented by "spearing the fish" (ie imagine trying to spear a fish in the water alongside your feet) whilst driving the blade downwards and forward into the water using the Recovery hand and arm. This will help get the blade fully covered and vertical as far forward as possible before you start to lever yourself past it. Maximum power/leverage can only be exerted when the blade is vertical and fully submerged. Failure to do this allows for a loss of potential power during each stroke.
- **Pulling backwards at or even before the Catch**. During the Catch phase of the stroke the blade should be driven slightly forward and down (controlled by the top arm) until it is fully submerged and vertical in the water. At this point the power can be applied to lever the boat past the paddle blade. However, a common fault is that the blade is already moving backwards through the air and as the blade is gradually being covered by the water. This is usually indicated by a small amount of water being splashed backwards during the Catch as the paddler is generating force on the blade before it has fully submerged and this can also result in a "plopping" sound at the Catch. It also means that the good reach forward shown by many at the start of the stroke just before the entry into the water is lost before the blade is fully submerged. This is usually indicated by the knees being level and the chest being square to the front at the start or end of the Catch. This is inefficient and can only be overcome by focusing on "spearing the fish" at the Catch and completing the Catch quickly before the front of the cockpit passes the blade. The aim is to create a virtual rectangle with the blade in the water resulting from a quick vertical catch, horizontal draw and quick vertical exit. Most paddlers create more of a saucer shape as the blade goes in slowly, comes out slowly and is only fully covered at the midpoint just in front of the knees. The nearer this is to a rectangle the more effective it is.
- **Top arm is pushing forward and down to finish at chest height whilst force is being applied to the blade in the water**. This is usually the result of allowing the blade to Exit behind the hip. It results in the top arm already being fully extended at the start of the exit and it is therefore unable to assist with lifting the blade out of the water through the "over extension" of the arm at the end of the stroke. Once the blade is in the water you should lock your arms and shoulders during the power transmission phase when leverage is being applied. This would result in all the force being applied to the blade coming from the rotation of the whole body. It would enable you to use your whole body to apply power to the blade, ie to lever yourself past it, from the end of the Catch to the Exit (ie from your feet to your hips – if you get the Catch and Exit right). The locked arms and shoulders would then only be responsible for providing the link from the body to the blade and would not be the main source of the power. Also, if the top arm is not locked during the time when the opposite blade is in the water, the fulcrum created by the top hand is less effective as it is moving forward instead of being fixed in relation to body and the blade in the water. The top arm should be pushing forward as it places the opposite blade into the water at the Catch, locked during the power phase and then straighten fully (the over extension) as the opposite blade exits the water. This has the effect of the top arm pulling the exiting blade forward as it is lifted out of the water and enables a clean exit with no water thrown backwards.

- **Little or No Glide Phase**. This occurs when the blade for the next stroke is being placed in the water as the blade on the opposite side is being lifted out at the Exit. In his 1000m gold medal winning race, Tim Brabants had over 200m of gliding with neither blade in the water. A long glide phase (ie when both blades are out of the water) between each side of the stroke is evident when the recovery hand is raised to the level of the forward hand (ie the shaft is parallel to the water with both blades out of the water at shoulder height) before the forward arm drops down into the next catch. A long glide phase allows the arms and shoulders to relax momentarily after each stroke thus improving endurance. If this glide position is achieved well below shoulder height (usually due to the top hand being lowered to chest height due to the blade exiting the water behind the hip) it is shorter than desired giving slightly less time for recovery. It also means that the angle of the shaft is too low when the blade is in the water resulting in more of a sweep stroke instead of a powerful forward drive.

- **Top arm fails to take control of the Catch**. This is usually the main cause of paddlers failing to complete the Catch in front of the cockpit. After the recovery hand reaches head height and the shaft is parallel to the water, it should then take over control of placing the opposite blade in the water for the next Catch. This means that it then pushes the shaft down towards the water over the outstretched forward hand. It should not go higher than the side of the head. Failure to do this means that the top hand is initially raised above the head instead of staying at head height to drive in the next Catch. This is usually caused by the forward hand being held in front of the face for too long instead of allowing it to be dropped towards the water by the recovering arm pushing forward.

- **Ineffective body rotation**. In order to keep the shaft parallel to an imaginary line between the shoulders, the torso, shoulders and arms must be locked during the Power Transmission phase from the end of the Catch to the start of the Exit. This will cause the top hand (the fulcrum) to finish in front of the opposite shoulder at shoulder height. This is only possible if the blade is exited at the hip and not behind it. For many, any forward rotation at the start of the stroke has usually been lost before the blade is fully in the water at the end of the Catch phase. Most of the subsequent rotation is achieved at the Exit to allow for the paddle being brought out behind the hip. Even this rotation is usually lost by unwinding the rotation before the next Catch is completed. Focus on keeping the paddle shaft parallel to an imaginary line between your shoulders when the blade is in the water. This will force you to rotate. If only the arms/shoulders swing and the body does not, the shaft cannot remain parallel to the line between the shoulders.

- **Blade exits slowly and behind the hip**. The Power Transmission phase of the stroke should take place in front of the body as there is no value in continuing to apply power to the blade after the hip has gone past it. At that point the focus should be on a quick vertical Exit and then Recovery into the next Catch. If the Exit is slow, it allows the blade to remain in the water too long after the power has stopped being applied. This just creates drag and slows the boat for a less effective glide. One reason for a slow Exit is because the Exit is being controlled by the bottom hand, with no assistance from the top hand reaching forward. Continuing to applying force to the blade during the Exit causes water to be lifted and thrown backwards at a time when there should be no force applied to the blade and the focus should be on a quick vertical Exit controlled by the top arm reaching forward (over extension) and minimal lift from the recovering arm bending at the elbow.

- **Retaining a tight grip on the shaft during the Recovery**. The Recovery phase is not only the recovery of the blade but also allows the body to recover slightly from the exertion of levering the boat forward. This is the phase when your arm muscles should be relaxed in preparation for the next stroke. This is enabled by lifting from the elbow and not from the shoulder so that the elbow

remains below the shaft during the Exit and Recovery. Relaxing the grip on the shaft also enables the arm and shoulder muscles to relax.

- **Relaxing the grip during the Recovery but failing to firm up the grip at the Catch**. This is a co-ordination issue which results in a "quill" grip on the shaft during the Power Transmission phase (particularly on the non-control hand side) and therefore an inability to generate power which would cause the hand to slip off the shaft.

- **Holding the paddle shaft too close to the body**. The paddle shaft should be held as far from the body as possible throughout the stroke. This will enable the fulcrum to be established at the top hand at eye level and above the front of the cockpit (depending on arm length and seat position). It will also make it easier to Exit the blade at the hip because it will not be possible for the blade to continue to swing past the hip if executed correctly.

- **Leaning backwards or sitting in a hunched posture**. Neither of these are conducive to good technique and stability. You should sit upright with a straight spine and lean slightly forward from the hip – not the waist. At no point during the stroke should any part of your body touch the side or rear of the cockpit rim.