

WELFARE SECRETARY REPORT APRIL 2019

PURPLE WARRIORS

Some members may or may not know that one of our staunch members of the association, Mr Brian Morgan, has for many years now been involved in the Purple Warriors competing in Dragon Boat racing. Having seen one of Brian's recent entries on his Facebook account, it caught my interest and went on-line to find out more. The information below has been gleaned from the site and reproduced below for ease of access:

Who are Purple Warriors?

Purple Warriors is a new dragon boat club, created specifically for serving and retired members of HM Forces who have some form of disability or impairment as a result of their service.

Purple Warriors has been formed to give you the opportunity to take up a new sport, to train (hard!) and then to compete – on equal terms – against club dragon boat crews from around UK (who will probably have no impaired paddlers!).

We believe Purple Warriors is a world-first. However, the gauntlet has also been thrown down to allied nations in the hope that Purple Warriors will have the opportunity to compete against similar impaired military crews from countries such as Australia, USA and Canada.

Who is eligible?

To be eligible to join Purple Warriors, you must:

- be serving, or have served, with HM Forces
- have some form of impairment (physical or mental)
- have grit and determination
- be willing to learn new tricks
- want to be part of a team again
- want to meet fresh challenges head-on and overcome them
- be willing to be exhorted to greater effort and to do things in time (just like the old days!)
- want to make a difference for your team mates (this is not an individual sport)
- want to challenge perceptions
- want to inspire others

If you tick all the above boxes, they want to hear from you!

About Dragon Boating

Dragon boating is a paddling sport that has its origins over 2,000 years ago, and which is steeped in Chinese history. However, as an international sport, it really only goes back to a relatively recent 1976. In that year, overseas crews were invited, for the first time, to race in the traditional Hong Kong Festival Races. Since then, some 75 countries have registered with the International Dragon Boat Federation, the sport's peak body.

Races are usually between 'standard' boats or 'small' boats. A standard boat carries 20 paddlers, a drummer (at the front, facing the paddlers, to beat the time) and a helm (at the rear to steer the boat). A small boat has 10 paddlers, drummer and helm.

In all boats, paddlers sit on benches in pairs, facing forwards. The front two paddlers are known as the 'strokes' and set the pace. The drummer beats the time as set by the strokes.

Races are typically over straight-line courses of 200m, 500m and 1,000m. In these races' crews go head-to-head with each other. There is also a 2km 'turn race', where crews set off at intervals (typically 15 seconds) and race two laps around an elliptical course. Much longer races are also sometime held (for example, the Great River Race on the River Thames is 42km long!)

Many races are undertaken by age and gender:

- Junior: 12-18 years
- Premier: Any age (over 12 years)
- Senior A: 40 years plus
- Senior B: 50 years plus
- Senior C: 60 years plus

- **Open:** Any number of paddlers of any gender
- **Women's:** All crew must be women
- **Mixed:** At least half the paddlers must be women

Thus, a typical race might be: 'Premier Open, Standard Boat, 500m'

However, for Purple Warriors, it is intended to race all ages and any mix of genders in the crew.

Can I Really Do It?

Almost certainly, a resounding 'yes'!

If it is possible and safe, we will provide support to help you paddle almost regardless of your degree of impairment.

If you've lost limbs or lost the function of one or more of your limbs. No problem. Even though dragon boating is a paddling sport, we can probably sort you out provided you have one functional arm.

If you are wheelchair-bound. So what? If you can get yourself onto the seat in the dragon boat (with or without help), you can paddle.

If you are vision-impaired, or blind. Not an issue. Dragon boats paddle to the beat of a drum. Around the world there are numerous dragon boat teams that comprise only vision-impaired or blind paddlers.

If you are hearing-impaired, even deaf. Easy. If you can see, you can pick up the timing from those in front of you.

If you are suffering from PTSD or some other mental health or neurological issues. Who cares? We certainly don't, and you may even prove to be as powerful and strong as the best paddlers in the world.

How Do Things Work?

Purple Warriors is a national club with no physical 'home'. Instead, they get together about once a month in a centralised location to train or to race. A centralised training day is usually a full-day event. It will normally have three sessions on the water and video analysis, briefings and presentations between sessions. We provide a hot meal afterwards and always try to provide a hot breakfast on arrival. It is a wonderful opportunity to mix with other Purple Warriors and also for families and friends to meet up – they too draw support from being among each other and we encourage them to come along as well (although they won't get to paddle). A typical paddling session would last about an hour and would focus on a particular aspect of technique or be a more of a demanding endurance session. Because everyone is in the same boat (literally!), no one gets left behind or left out, and there are no 'stars' strutting their stuff; all you are asked to do is the best you can and to try to make a difference. We are inspired by everyone who tries – some are clearly strong and fit and go a whole session without appearing to break sweat while others need a short break here and then to catch their breath and reset their aching limbs.

Race events are different. These are held around the country and each attract most of the dragon boat clubs from around UK. Race days usually have two main events: a competition over either a 200m or 500m course (straight-line racing with boats in lanes and with heats, semi-finals and finals) and a longer 'turn' race (usually over about 2km) where teams set off at intervals and race around a course that involves turns. These culminate in the National Championships in September each year and these comprise a range of events (by age, gender, distance etc) and are run over a whole weekend. When Purple Warriors competes, it is normally the only impaired crew on the water, but our performances have been far from impaired and we mix it with the best!

Racing is demanding and training centrally once a month is really not enough to be seriously competitive. So, they have teamed with a number of local dragon boat clubs who have agreed to host Purple Warrior paddlers and allow them to train on a more regular basis. These clubs were chosen because of their geographic location (we want to cover the country), their facilities for the physically impaired (wheelchair access etc), and the presence of ex-military in their membership (who would obviously be more likely to understand issues our paddler face). That said, all dragon boat clubs in UK would welcome Purple Warrior members and there is nothing at all stopping you going along to a club other than one of our five teamed clubs. The five clubs we are teamed with currently are: Hurricanes (Wraysbury, west London), Exe-Calibre (Exeter, Devon), Bristol Empire Dragons (Saltford, south east of Bristol), Crusaders (Crosby, north of Liverpool), and Powerhouse (Stockton-on-Tees, County Durham)

For further information or to make contact, follow the link below:

<http://purplewarriors.org/contact-us/>

Interested? If so, please feel free to make contact through the site or contact Brian via the association sites and I am sure he would be able to tell you more.