

EBOATING WHITEWATER FREEBOATING WHITEWATER

GET ON THE RIVER

EARLY SUMMER 2004

# RAPID

MAGAZINE

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linked cartwheels  
smooth sidesurfs  
vertical blunts  
endless 360s  
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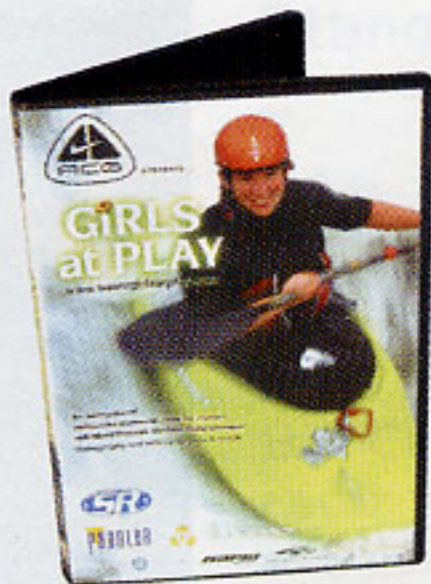
**EXCLUSIVE: Pre-Worlds Post Mortem**

+ OC1 Technique: NO FEAR peel outs + Ben "The Squarehead" RANTS  
What's on Video & DVD + COOL GEAR

## StandingWaves

### ***Girls at Play* by Anna Levesque**

This one-hour instructional video for women contains Levesque and other world-class female paddlers boating, stretching with yoga, and talking about the mental/emotional aspects of kayaking. There are some great



features including good technical advice, some inspirational comments and footage of fantastic women boaters captured by Chris Emerick's high-quality videography. This video is aimed at intermediate women paddlers with technical instruction on intermediate and advanced moves with

flatwater exercises demonstrated as well. The instruction is uniquely organized into "the four key elements of freestyle technique women struggle with." While most instructional videos take one move at a time and break it down, Levesque focuses on the four elements—edge control, balance, timing and upper-body positioning—one at a time and looks at all the moves in relation to them. I like traditional move-by-move instruction so I found this method a little hard to follow and repetitive, but some women may appreciate a new way of looking at the general principles of boat control. The joys of DVD let intermediate/advanced boaters "next track" through the 30 minutes of yoga and introduction to gear, straight to the on-water action. It's refreshing to see woman instructing and performing the moves. \$39.95 Cdn, \$29.95 US on DVD. [www.watergirlsatplay.com](http://www.watergirlsatplay.com). —Bree Cruchet

*paddle the way you want*



# Pros Talk Shop

## Unlocking the

# 6 Freestyle Fundamentals

According to the British lexicographer Mike Reilly, the saying "more than one way to skin a cat" has nothing to do with the American English term "to skin a cat"—the gymnastics move whereby **hanging from your arms you pass your feet and legs between them**. Other versions of the expression date back to the mid-1800s, and none of them, not even slightly, are at all relevant to learning freestyle kayaking's six fundamental moves. However, because I've taken the lid off the jar, they are as follows: "there are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with cream"; "there are more ways of killing a dog than hanging him"; "there are more ways of killing a cat than choking it with butter"; and, "there are more ways of killing a dog than choking it with pudding."

I got started down this inhumane historical pet-killing road when I began sketching out this intricate technique article. You were about to get one pro's best shot at teaching **the six fundamental moves in freestyle—sidesurfing, 360s, cartwheels, surfing, flatspins and blunts**. But, I thought, what if you learn differently, paddle a different boat, play a different river or she forgets the one thing you're forgetting, the one thing that is keeping your cartwheels from going fully vertical or your spins from being clean? So, without the use of cream, butter, rope or pudding, our seven pros, instructors and coaches peel away the unnecessary skin and teach you the core skills you need to be a star.—SM



## WAVE MOVES

### Surfing

Surfing is more than a controlled ferry on a wave: it's the rhythm and blues, the soul of paddling the P-Funk mothership of playboating. Shuffling about a wave is a funkadelic groove but those who can carve up a wave are the dealers of the uncut funk, members of the Interplanetary Funkmanship. Surfing is the Bomb!

You've been paddling since you were a kid. How did you figure out surfing? I remember punching the eddyline above Baby Face [wave at McCoy's, Ottawa River] in my old Dancer and repeatedly getting my nose pushed downstream. The experienced paddlers crossed the eddyline, held the angle of their ferry—it all seemed effortless. If you can't ferry, it will be hard to front surf.

—Brandon Mark

Where should you be surfing a wave? At the top of a wave you're balancing and in its trough you're just sitting. Only on the face of the wave are you truly surfing. Do whatever is necessary to stay on the face of the wave. —Ken Whiting

What do you see other paddlers doing wrong?

Most people hold their paddle low across their waist. When they steer they either have ineffective steering or put too much resistance on the water—they apply the brakes rather than steer. Also, make sure the boat

is trimmed correctly. The seat moved back makes front surfing easier but the seat slightly forward makes the boat faster. —Steve Fisher

How do you size up a wave?

When you look at a wave, decide how far across the wave you wish to go before you plan on heading back the other way. This provides your body with a cue as to when to rotate the shoulders and plant the paddle. In essence it slows everything, gives you focus. —Saskia van Mourik

What mental advice do you give to new surfers?

Think, "Look around! How cool is this?" Look where you want to go on the wave and avoid staring at your hood ornament [bow grab loop] and missing the whole experience. A more advanced idea is to create a carving rhythm, like shredding tight turns on a snowboard. Dynamic surfing opens the door to all sorts of other moves, like spinning and blunts. —Jeff Jackson

What drills can paddlers practice to improve their front surfing?

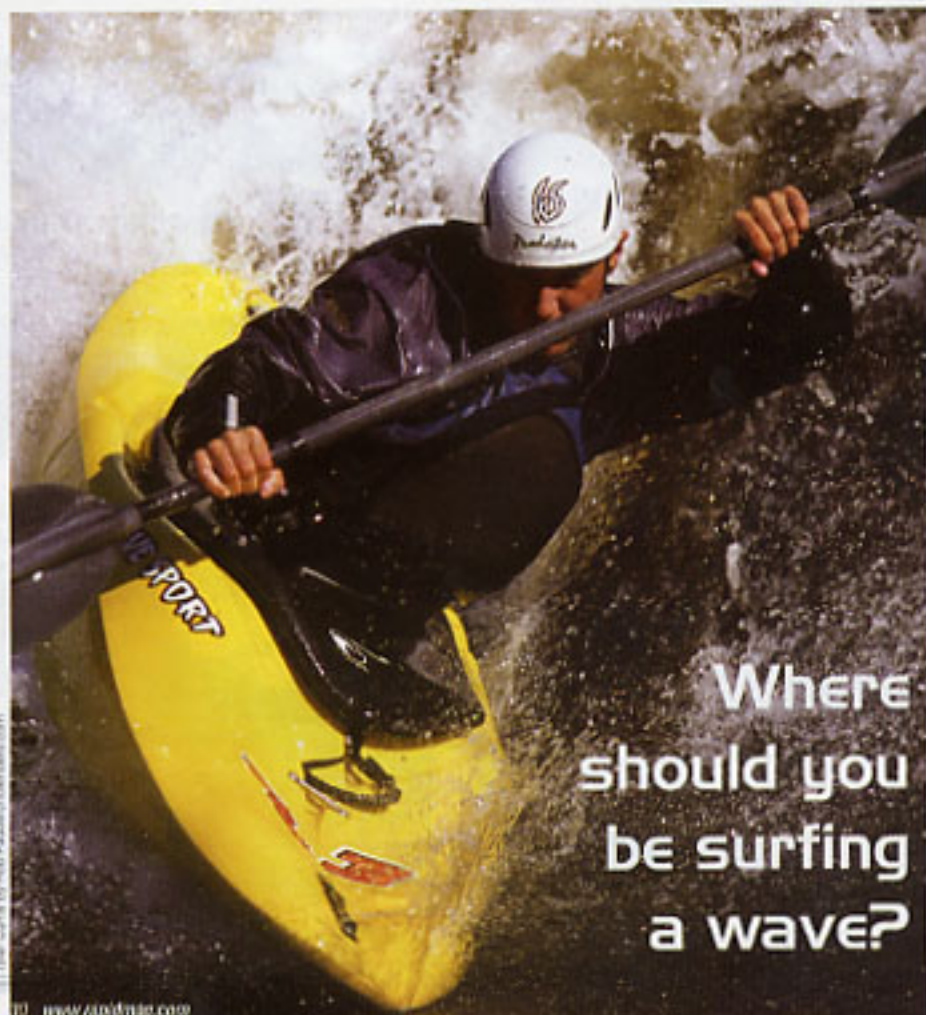
Practice carving aggressively back and forth and then practice carving without using your paddle as a rudder. When you are using your paddle to rudder, really push the [maximum] limit of how much edge you use. —Anna Levesque

### Flat Spins

"Is that boat loose?" paddlers in the early days of playboating would ask other boaters with a new design they hadn't tried. They wanted to know how easily the hull breaks free from surfing on a wave into a spin—at the time a novel concept. Ten years of



Do you remember your first front surf?



Where should you be surfing a wave?

RGD later, almost every new playboater sits above an incredibly greasy hull, a hull that almost spins itself—and probably would without us in it.

Do you remember your first flat spin? Bob McDonough handed me one of the first (Perception) Whip-Its out of the mould at the Potomac Festival in 1993. I hopped on a wave and next thing I know I was spinning. All I did was use the same technique that allowed me to move from front to back surf in my squirt boat. It really is amazing how much squirt boating has influenced playboating. —Ken Whiting

What is the most important step to figuring out or performing the move? Timing. You should initiate as you're dropping from the crest of the wave—when you have maximum speed. You should complete either a 180 or 360 before you reach the trough. The other most important thing is to always look upstream until the stern of your boat is all the way upstream, then spin your head around and look upstream over the other shoulder like a ballerina. This helps your shoulder position, paddle position and weight distribution to all be in the right place. —Steve Fisher

What do you see other paddlers doing wrong?

Not keeping their boat flat on the wave. I've noticed that a lot of beginner women tend to reach too far out [away from their boat] when engaging their strokes. When you reach with your paddle, you edge your boat, lose your balance and end up surfing yourself off the wave. —Anna Lavesque

How should paddlers get started learning the flat spin?

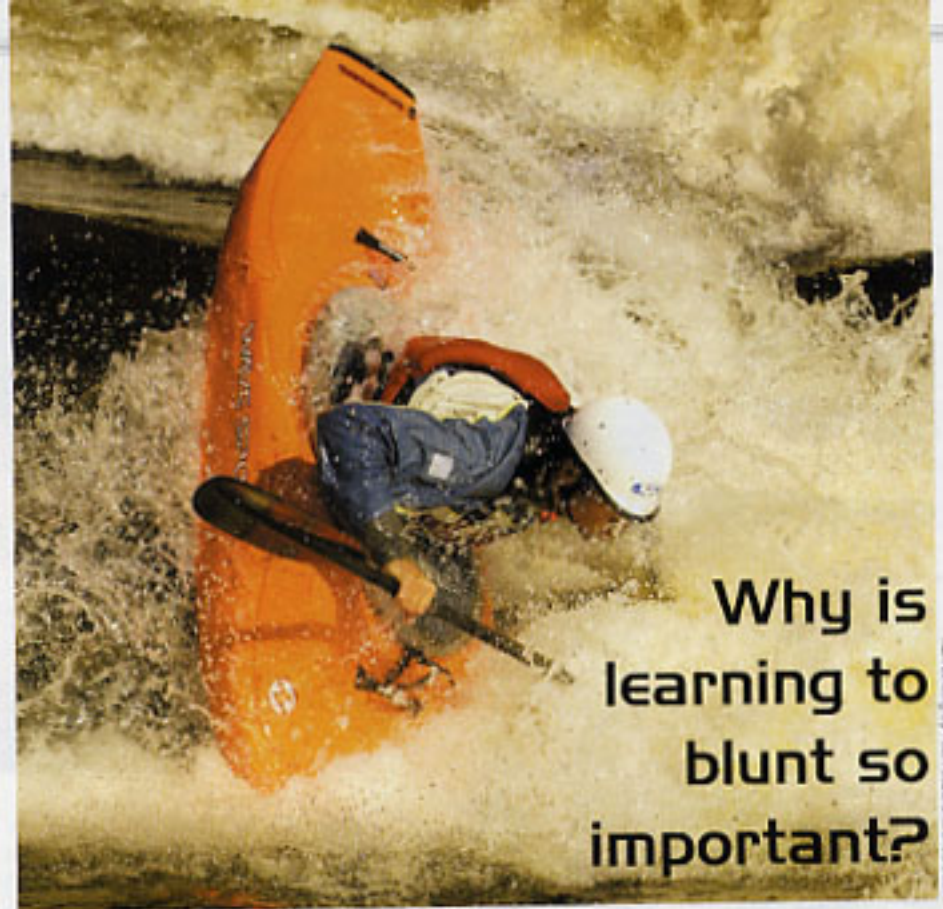
Begin in flatwater. Choose a point of shore as a landmark, do flatwater spins. Your eyes should stay fixed on the landmark, and only one slow back sweep and a slow front sweep should be required to get you around. Practice this drill 'til it's beyond easy to do. —Brendan Mark

## Blunts

Combine dynamic surfing with aggressive edging and the rotation of a spin and you'll have the blunt—the coolest-feeling move that you'll never see.

Why is learning to blunt so important for the advanced freestyle moves?

The blunt is the most basic of moves requiring an explosive use of power in combination with technique and timing. This power must come from more than just the pressure one can exert on a paddle. One must learn to use bodyweight and edge transitions for explosiveness. —Ken Whiting



Why is learning to blunt so important?

What do paddlers need to know before they can blunt?

Learning to get to the top of the wave/foam pile is one of the most important skills necessary for the blunt. You can get to the top of the foam pile by spinning or by carving. There have been times when I thought I was at the top of the foam pile, but I wasn't. —Anna Lavesque

When you break it down, what are key steps to the blunt?

Initiate on a surge—as you jet down the face or along the shoulder. Edge the boat on the opposite (direction) to which you want to blunt. Switch edges and perform your initiation (back sweep) stroke at the same time. Now push your butt up into the air and force the stern of your boat over you until it is upstream. Flatten the hull and land. —Steve Fisher

What do you see other paddlers doing wrong?

A blunt is speed plus edge transfer. Without one, it isn't a blunt. For example, some paddlers set up on top of the wave, transfer the edge and dip the bow under them, which is in fact the first end of a cartwheel. The other extreme is getting a screaming carve down and across the wave, but no aggressive edge, which makes the stern spin out and around flat—a roundhouse. —Jeff Jackson

Any boat or outfitting mods that will help paddlers get it?

The higher you can sit up in your boat, the more leverage you will have to pull up [to edge] with your knees and really get the stern flying. —Tiffany Manchester

## HOLE MOVES

### Side Surfing

Once a chundering punishment, a ballsy feat feared more than the Reaper himself, in modern planning-hulled playboats the side surf is the building block to control and the fundamental set-up tool of all hole moves. Whether you're a playboater or not, a controlled side surf is an essential skill for working yourself out of sticky situations.

When was your breakthrough side surfing moment?

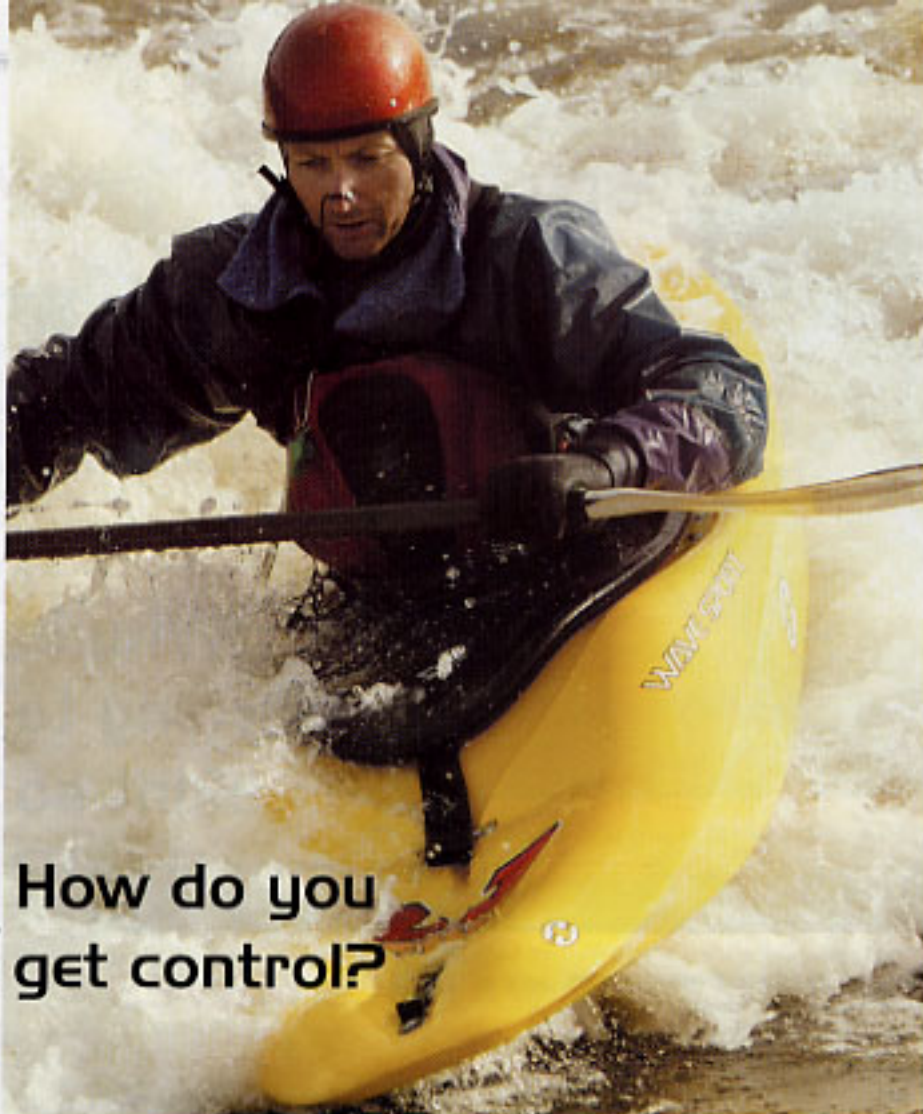
The Perception 30 on the Ottawa in '99. I wathunked over and over until I learned to lift my upstream edge. Bill [Harris] wouldn't let me try anything until I could side surf in Push Button [on the Ottawa] for 30 seconds straight. —Tiffany Manchester

What is the most important step to figuring out side surfing?

The first step to learning how to side surf is overcoming your fear of holes. Try going into a hole and moving yourself to one corner and surfing yourself out. This will build confidence and help you relax. —Anna Lavesque

What are the fundamental steps to learning to side surf?

Eddy turn out and across the hole. Then, do the same but use a braking stroke on the downstream side. To



## How do you get control?

Jeff Jackson by Scott MacGregor

kill momentum. Stay balanced over your boat, deep paddle in the foam so you can feel the green water, look [upstream] into the green water to align your shoulders and keep the boat flat. Ride it—don't allow a spin. Looking where you want to be [green water in the trough] will keep the boat in line.—Jeff Jackson

Any drill you'd suggest to improve your side surfing?

Side surfing is no different than balancing on your edge on flatwater. You can't lean on your paddle. All you can do is brace if you lose balance. With this said, the best way to improve your side surfing is to practice holding your boat on edge in flatwater. Try it while sitting still, then try it while paddling forward.—Ken Whiting

What do you consider the best place to learn to side surf?

The ocean. Or any hole that has an exit and where the entrance water isn't too steep.—Steve Fisher

## Holy 360 Spins

**"Relax, and it shall be given you; sweep, and ye shall find; look, and it shall be opened unto you; For every**

**one that then tilteth receiveth; and he that forward sweepeth findeth; and to him that knocketh the holy 360 shall be opened."**—Matthew 7:7

How should paddlers get started learning the 360 in a hole?

Master the basics! Confident side surfing makes the spin very easy. Because you have learned how to control the side surfing seesaw, you can let it go [into a spin] at the choosing and pull it around.—Jeff Jackson

What is the most important step to learning to spin in a hole?

Working with the water is important when you're trying to spin in a hole. Don't try to spin in the middle of the hole, move to the shoulders [or tongue] where the water will automatically start spinning your boat.—Anna Levesque

What do you see other paddlers doing wrong?

Common mistakes are: rushing the spin by being too aggressive with the back and forward sweep; eyes not upstream; paddle isn't in the water; and forgetting to change edges when halfway around.—Brendan Mark

Any boat or outfitting tips that will help paddlers figure out 360s? Short boats with a flat hull and lots of rocker. Be tight in your boat.—Steve Fisher

## Cartwheels

Almost forgotten by today's aerial pros, the cartwheel is a move for the people, for us plebian paddlers without screaming fast green waves on our local rivers. With a spud boat you can cartwheel in almost any pour-over, wave/hole and the local pool.

How does cartwheeling work?

The cartwheel involves using a combination of your own power, and the power of the green water flowing into and under a hole, to pull an end of your kayak underwater, while keeping your body balanced over-top. Once underwater, the end of the kayak will want to get back to the surface because of its buoyancy. Your job is to provide this end with an escape route back to the surface in a direction that keeps your boat revolving in the same direction it has started to travel. To do so, you'll need to change the tilt on your kayak. As the end slices to the surface, the other end of your kayak will be in the air, slicing towards the water surface. This energy will help take this next end underwater. Once again, your job is to provide that end with an escape route back to the surface, such that your boat will continue rotating in the same direction.—Ken Whiting

Where did you learn to cartwheel?

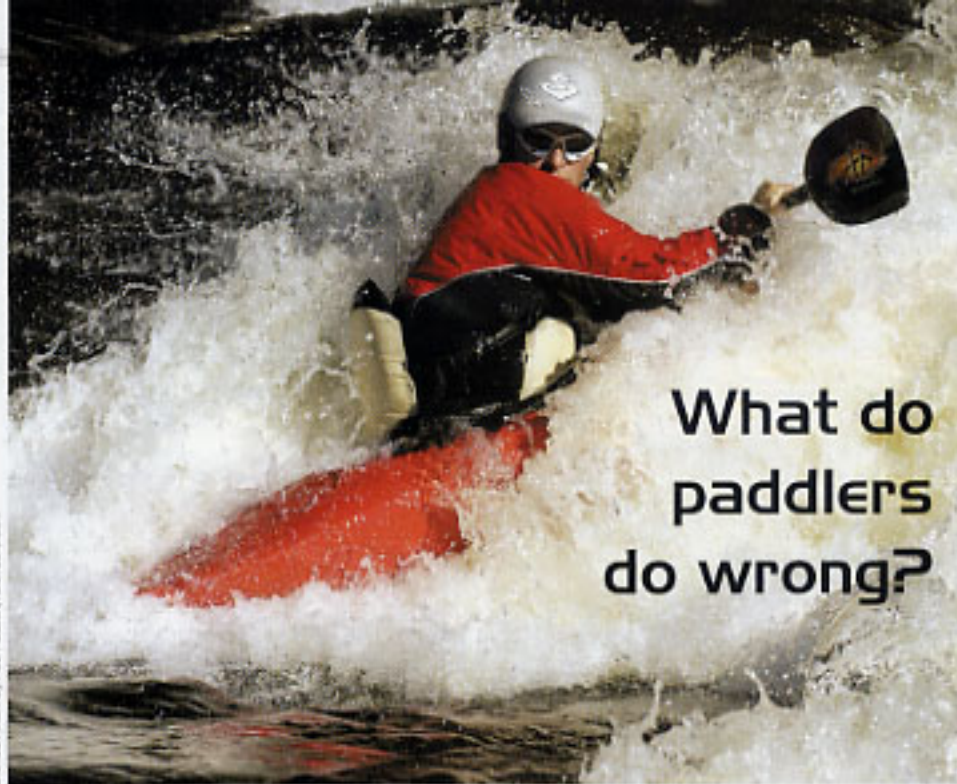
I learned how to cartwheel at Right Side, McCoy's on the Ottawa. Unfortunately, Right Side is so retentive for the longer boats that it bred a lot of bad cartwheel habits like leaning back, looking over your shoulder too early and slow upper body rotation. When I started paddling at touchier, less retentive holes I had to unlearn all of my bad habits!—Anna Levesque

What's the secret to linking ends?

Once you initiate, it is then most important to "stay ahead of the boat." This means that you initiate each end—you don't wait for the boat to initiate. Put the stroke for the next end in before you're finished with the current end.—Steve Fisher

Where should you place your ends?

The ends of the boat can make contact either in the seam between the green and the white or just a little behind the seam line for some holes. Always looking [where you want your ends to go] will slow things down and you'll have a focus point. Once you start linking more ends and getting dizzy, it's nice to have a place for your eyes to call home.—Saskia van Mourik



## What do paddlers do wrong?

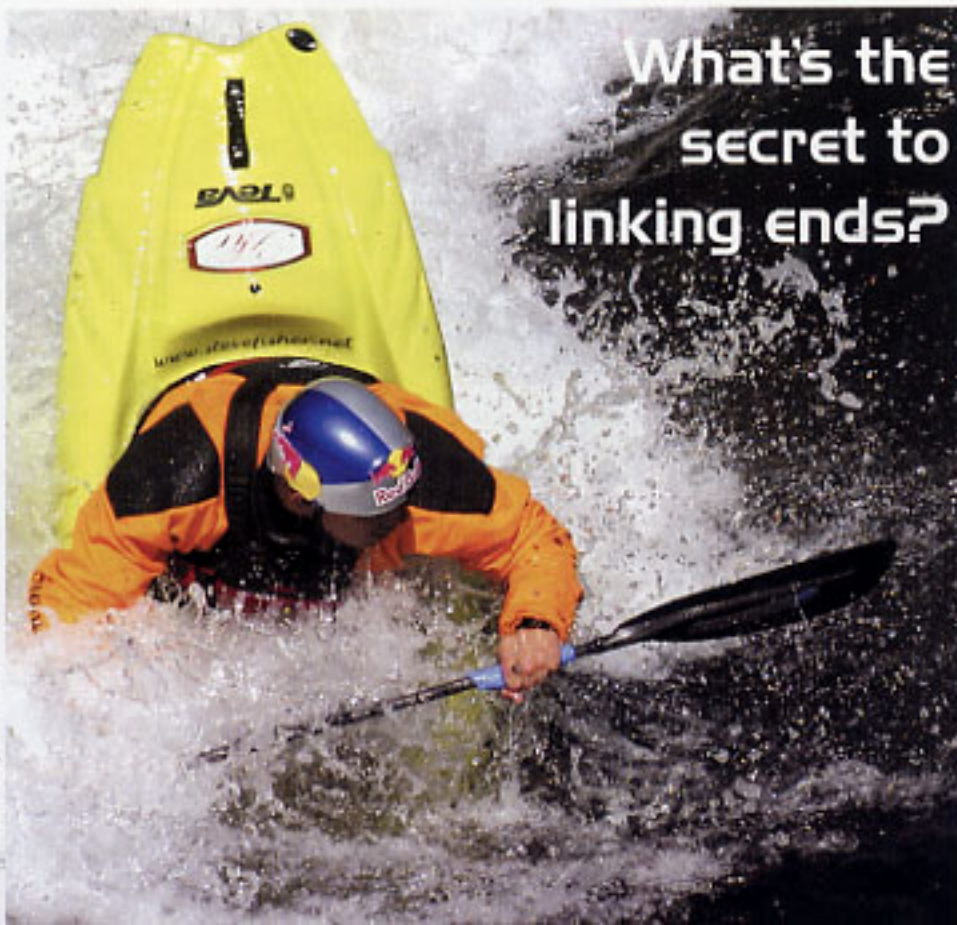
### What do you see other paddlers doing wrong?

Getting vertical bows but flat sterns because they are not forcefully rotating their body, looking into the hole, and dropping their leading shoulder to get maximum edge. They are usually holding onto the bow end too long which means they don't have enough time to get ahead [of the boat] for the stern. Longer, slicier boats have balance on their ends and slow down the rotation for learning.—Jeff Jackson

### What do you consider the best place to learn to cartwheel?

The easiest feature to learn a cartwheel is a pour-over hole. It's easy to position yourself on the pile, and you don't need to be as aggressive with smashing the bow of your kayak through the water.

—Brendan Mark ☺



## What's the secret to linking ends?

## Learning to Learn

### 9 steps to world domination

1. **Break the skill down into parts.** *Divide and Conquer!* It's a lot easier to learn a skill one small part at a time, and then once you have mastered all of the parts, start putting them together, one at a time.

2. **Eliminate Variables.** When learning a new skill it is important to eliminate distractions so that if the move or trick doesn't work, you know it is something that you did or didn't do, not because of a surge in the hole or something beyond your control. The simple application of this is to try things on flatwater first.

3. **Visualize!** It helps if you can imagine yourself doing the move. Vert skateboarder Pierre-Luc Gagnon sometimes spends days just *thinking* about doing a new trick before ever trying it. Imagine everything, especially what the trick will *feel* like.

4. **Learn both sides together.** For example if you are learning how to splitwheel, do it a couple times rotating to the left, then a couple rotating to the right. Current research indicates this may enhance our ability to acquire the skill.

5. **Focus on what you want to do, not on what you don't want to do.** The body will follow the mind and do whatever it is you are focusing on.

6. **Go to the extreme!** When you are not sure if you are leaning enough or leaning too much, try this: attempt the skill while leaning way too far, definitely farther than you think you should. Then try it not leaning anywhere near enough. See which way feels the best, and then work your way back to the middle. If you're always trying to dial in the exact "right" way to do the move or skill, you may never discover the "sweet spots" that might be closer to one of the extremes.

7. **Use Video.** As most accomplished athletes know, this is one of the best ways to figure out how to do something. Start by watching video of people performing the skill perfectly. Then when you are trying it for yourself, get someone to video you. Take a look at the video after a few attempts or whenever you are having trouble figuring out what to do.

8. **Don't think!** If you have mastered all of the elements that comprise the skill but are having trouble trying to put the whole thing together, remind yourself *not to think!* Visualize yourself doing the move, take a deep breath and then clear your mind. Your body already knows what to do, you just have to let it!

9. **Don't give up!** Michael Jordan missed over 9,000 shots in his career. He said, "I failed over and over, and that is why I succeeded." If you're not prepared to fail, you're not prepared to succeed.

—Andrew Myly