

November 2021	<b>Race Training – Major Incident</b> <b>Winter conditions</b>
	<b>Case Study</b>

At a routine winter training session  
**Subzero temperatures – rescued from capsized — CPR – defibrillated twice –  
airlifted to hospital – on a ventilator – coma for two days**

### IT CAN AND DOES HAPPEN

#### What happened?

At the beginning of April 2021 two highly experienced racing paddlers, both senior members of the club undertook a normal winter training session. A 5-mile time trial from the club house with the air temperature just below zero.

From a handicapped start B set off first and expected P to come past before the finish. On arriving back at the club B waited for P for about 5 minutes before getting back on the water in his K1 to look for him. He found P just 100m above the club in the water and unable to empty or access the bank due to heavy growth and high walls. Unable to rescue P from his K1, B returned to the club got a GP kayak and recovered P to the club house with the help of a passerby. By this time P had been in the water for a significant period of time.

At the club the emergency services were called. Hypothermia took hold, P's condition deteriorated rapidly. He stopped breathing; rescue breaths were administered. When his circulation stopped B commenced CPR.

B continued with CPR until the ambulance service arrived and where ready to administer oxygen. P was defibrillated twice in the club house.

His condition was critical and an air ambulance was called. P was flown to Kings College Hospital, London where he was immediately put on a ventilator and spent the following two days in a coma.

P finally woke up 4 days following the incident. After several weeks in hospital P was able to return home. A few months later he returned to light training.

Kings College Hospital have used the incident as a case study to highlight the evacuation and techniques they used to save P and have shared this across the medical profession.

#### What can we learn from this?

The club has in place the necessary operating procedures, risk assessments, training and emergency procedures. The two paddlers were so experienced that no one in the club expected either of them to be in such a situation. **This can happen to anyone.**

Subsequently the club took the following action:

- Reviewed its rescue and first aid training
- Time trials in similar conditions have a dynamic risk assessment and an alternative session is undertaken where paddlers can remain in sight or contact with each other.

First aiders

- Have trained first aiders in sufficient numbers to cover club activities. In this incident both paddlers had recently renewed their first aid certificates, a factor that was critical in achieving a positive outcome.
- First aider to always stay with the casualty even after they have been evacuated to a safe place
- Never give up on CPR

Good practice

Prevention is, of course, better than cure so preparation for the conditions is vital:

- Carry out a dynamic risk assessment on the day. Assess the conditions and the risk, then act accordingly
- Don't assume the training session will be incident free, go out on the water prepared.
- Carry out practice rescue drills
- Wear the right clothing for the conditions
- Check that your club has the right procedures in place and you are able to call and direct the emergency services to the right place.

Learning from incidents and near misses is important for the future safety of the sport.

British Canoeing would like to thank Maidstone Canoe Club for their role in ensuring that their experience is shared across the sport.

To report an incident or near miss to British Canoeing or the National Associations please go to:

<https://www.britishcanoeing.org.uk/guidance-resources/safety-1/incident-reporting>