

**To: Slalom Committee**

**From: Mark Ratcliffe, Head Coach – Canoe Slalom**

**Subject: World Class Programme report 2020**

The year started without time for breath with our newly selected Olympic Team heading out to Tokyo on the back of an incredibly challenging 2019 season. For these athletes their Olympic dreams had come to reality whilst for others it was a heartbreaking time and a harsh reminder of how tough our sport can be where only one place is available for a team brimming with World Class athletes.

We have to credit each and every athlete who has put themselves out there to compete and every member of staff who have expertly supported the athletes as a team. We also must pay credit to the volunteers and parents who have worked so hard to support each and every athlete throughout the ups and downs along the way.

2020 started with high quality training camps in Dubai, with athletes maximizing the warm weather to help their physical development in the build up to what promised to be an exciting 2020 season. The programme in Lee valley also had new athletes choosing to relocate to the High Performance Centre making the commitment to the next stage in their development and settling in well with the support of the wider team. As March came the World changed for everyone with the COVID-19 pandemic taking control of all aspects of our lives with all paddlers being highly impacted in their ability to train and compete removed.

The World Class Programme made huge efforts to support athletes health and wellbeing through lockdown. The Programme also adapted quickly with home training equipment shipped out around the country and helping athletes to find new purpose and goals to support their training. Lockdown also meant seeing opportunity in ambiguity, looking to think differently with a number of projects undertaken and also to engage differently through Coach Communities of practice and athlete forums. Through this period we also continued to develop our 2024 / 2032 strategy for the UK Sport Paris Plan submission with the aim of developing excellence in a more sustainable pathway. The funding bid has been well received by UK Sport with a funding announcement expected in December. We are humbled by the public funding we receive and even more so during these challenging times for the country. Moving into the Paris cycle the connection between World Class Programme, Home Nations, volunteers and Committee is vital for the sport to thrive and so will look to maximize opportunities to engage and work together in ways to implement a whole sport strategy.

The programme was very fortunate to be able to return to training at Lee Valley through the summer months under the DCMS guidelines agreed by UK Sport and government. This meant some significant work to put COVID mitigation measures in place to protect everyone with close monitoring and distancing needed to operate safely. Athletes have taken on new levels of ownership and responsibility to meet these daily requirements and I have to thank them all for how they have operated and grown over this time. A phased approach took place to steadily increase athlete numbers at the center throughout the summer with all athletes returning in their own time to train. This meant we were able to maintain athlete development and continue preparations for the 2021 season and a revised Tokyo Olympics.

Looking ahead we hope the sport we all love can return in 2021 where everyone can reconnect and compete once more. For the programme we have a huge year ahead with a dual strategy approach to maximize delivery in Tokyo whilst kick starting the Paris cycle in tandem. As part of our Paris plans we have restructured the Coaching Team with new appointments in Academy and Podium roles. This gives us an exceptional Coaching Team and stability for the long term whilst enabling us to

maintain the World Class support to all athletes through what will be a highly challenging programme of events in 2021.

I would just finish by paying tribute to all athletes and staff who have worked tirelessly this year to deal with the impacts of COVID-19 and so we now look forward with optimism at what 2021 and beyond can bring.