

Report for XL ICF Congress Antalya, Turkiye, November 2024

Canoe Polo

Committee name: ICF Canoe Polo Committee.

Board member writing the report: Greg Smale – Chair.

Committee members during this period: Joao Botelho (POR), Dion Chen (HKG), Eva Lindmark (SWE) and Mario Perez Lopez (ESP).

Activities 2023-2024:

As the second round in qualification for the world championships, 2023 saw continental championships across the world.

2023 ACC Canoe Polo Asian Championships – Marina Bay, Singapore.

What an amazing city centre for the sport exposure and athlete experience!



Frustratingly, the Men's Final was unable to be played due to a lightning alert and HOC decided there should be joint champions. This was frustrating for the athletes but the right, and safe decision was made.

Results

| Men | | Women | |
|------|------------------|-------|------------------|
| Rank | Country / City | Rank | Country / City |
| 1* | Chinese Taipei | 1 | Chinese Taipei |
| 1* | Iran | 2 | Singapore |
| 3 | Japan | 3 | Iran |
| 4 | Malaysia | 4 | Japan |
| 5 | Singapore | 5 | Hong Kong, China |
| 6 | Hong Kong, China | 6 | Malaysia |
| 7 | Thailand | | |

The 2025 ACC Canoe Polo Asian Championships will be in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

ICF referee training and assessments took place before and during the championships conducted by two ICF Grade A referees from GBR and SGP.

2023 ECA Canoe Polo European Championships – Brandenburg, Germany

This was at a new venue in Europe and a highly competitive championships took place with the gold medals different across the categories. Denmark Men and Netherlands U21 Women made a real statement of intent ahead of the world championships this year.

Denmark in particular have been steadily rising for a number of year's and finally the breakthrough came. It remains to be seen how they can follow it up at the forthcoming world championships.

TEAM PLACEMENTS

| MEN | | WOMEN | | MEN U21 | | WOMEN U21 | |
|-----|----------------|-------|---------------|---------|----------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1 | Denmark | 1 | Germany | 1 | Italy | 1 | Netherlands |
| 2 | Germany | 2 | Spain | 2 | Denmark | 2 | Germany |
| 3 | Italy | 3 | France | 3 | Germany | 3 | Spain |
| 4 | Great Britain | 4 | Great Britain | 4 | France | 4 | France |
| 5 | Spain | 5 | Denmark | 5 | Spain | 5 | Sweden |
| 6 | Netherlands | 6 | Italy | 6 | Great Britain | 6 | Great Britain |
| 7 | France | 7 | Switzerland | 7 | Poland | 7 | Italy |
| 8 | Portugal | 8 | Sweden | 8 | Switzerland | 8 | Poland |
| 9 | Switzerland | 9 | Netherlands | 9 | Belgium | 9 | Czech Republic |
| 10 | Sweden | | | 10 | Portugal | 10 | Switzerland |
| 11 | Poland | | | 11 | Lithuania | | |
| 12 | Belgium | | | 12 | Netherlands | | |
| 13 | Czech Republic | | | 13 | Austria | | |
| | | | | 14 | Czech Republic | | |
| | | | | 15 | Sweden | | |
| | | | | 16 | Ireland | | |

Always moving forward

The Europeans is the biggest of the continental championships and winning the title is very hard, and is getting harder and harder, which is good for the future of the discipline.

Multiple referee reassessments took place during these championships.

The 2025 European Continental Championships is already allocated and will be in Kalisz, Poland.

2023 CAC Canoe Polo African Championships - Johannesburg, South Africa

This was originally planned for Namibia and a lot of preparation work done but for reasons outside of the ICF CAP control this did not go forward and South Africa kindly hosted.

Namibia travelled but frustratingly had quite a serious accident on route with significant kayak damage.

South Africa dominated the results although from the Men's final result with South Africa winning 4-2, Namibia as per the past record were not a walk over and competitive.

No information to date re advert or host for 2025.

2023 Oceania Canoe Polo Championships – Hawke's Bay, New Zealand

Some would say "but there's only two countries". At the moment yes but they make the most of it which such a competitive competition with multiple categories U18, U21, Open and Over 35's for both Men & Women and it's a good, highly competitive competition.

New Zealand is the dominant force at the moment with Australia in the past but the Australian structure seems much improved the challenge is slowly growing again.

Always moving forward

There is an agreement to alternate between the two countries each two years with the 2025 Oceania Canoe Polo Championships being in the Gold Coast, Australia.

2023 COPAC Canoe Polo Championships – Tomazina, Parana, Brazil.

This saw limited entry but perhaps due to the location. USA Women for example didn't travel. To fly such distances and then the venue being 9 hours from the airport is seriously time consuming and costly.

Brazil and Argentina won two categories each.

As the ICF we supplied a Grade A referee to go and officiate and help the officiating generally.

This was good to do for development but also in the understanding that entry would be made to the world championships. Sadly, both Brazil Men and Argentina Women have withdrawn after entry to this year's world championships so are subject to the qualification rules for 2026 and only one can now qualify in each category.

The advert for application to host next year's continental championships have in the last week gone out so no host confirmed to date for 2025.

Note re continental championships

It can be seen from the above that some continental championships have already been awarded for 2025 – the most competitive and developed championships in Asia, Europe and Oceania. This early allocation allows the maximum planning and preparation time both for hosts and athletes.

With the logistics such an issue in Africa and America perhaps the consideration of earlier advertising and allocation would help grow these continental championships more, allowing better planned trips and enabling better support from the ICF CAP.

There have been various international competitions that federations/teams have used as a warm-up/lead up to the world championships/Super Cup and include in part the following:

2nd Fraser Hill International – Pahang, Malaysia

This took place between the 13th-15th September 2024, organised by who will be the Chief Table Official at the World Championships, LIANG Song Peng.

In the open category there were 15 teams from 3 continents including national teams from NZL, AUS, TPE, JPN and Malaysia.

The U21's saw 8 teams from Malaysia and Thailand including the Thai U21 Women who will compete at the worlds for the very first time this year.



The Open category was won by TPE and the U21's by a team from Malaysia, Tangkak.

This competition will in 2025 see the trail of “mixed 4's” at the request of the ICF CAP Chair.

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2024 Asian Pacific Canoe Polo Club Championships – Ningbo, China

The ICF CAP Chair was kindly invited having tried and failed (typhoon on route) to visit previously. This time the visit was really worthwhile both to support the competition and to show international teams outside of Europe the ICF CAP do care about all continents, something known by experienced paddlers, but still seems to come as a surprise to others.



The Men's final had all the moments that make Canoe Polo. A hard competitive game by both sides, a quality goal, two players sent off for second deliberate fouls (max 2 mins off) and a missed penalty. These forming parts of and national teams present were clearly focussed towards the worlds in two weeks.

The main outcomes from this visit can be read under achievements later in this report.

Always moving forward



With the last world championships and continentals counting, the ICF World Ranking can be found at:

https://www.canoeicf.com/sites/default/files/cap_world-ranking_december_2023_1.pdf

Always moving forward

2024 ICF Canoe Polo World Championships – Deqing, Huzhou, China

Canoe Polo has its World Championships in every even year (2024, 2022 etc) and at the time of writing this report this year's world championships has not yet taken place, but I will be able to update at congress.

It is the first time since Japan 2004 that the world's has returned to Asia and the second time for a real city centre venue.



ICF CANOE POLO WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS
2024 皮艇球世界锦标赛



Entry is limited through the various qualification phases that began two years ago and it's great to achieve 93% maximum entry bearing in mind all the logistics involved, with 71 teams arriving in China within the next two weeks and that China will compete in all four (4) categories.

Teams are seeded into groups based on the ICF World Ranking.

<https://www.canoeicf.com/news/groups-confirmed-canoe-polo-world-championships-returns-asia-after-20-years>



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The live-stream plans from the venue to the ICF YouTube channel are the biggest to date with 8 different streams from the venue covering all 4 playing areas and 4 streams being for Chinese commentary and 4 for ICF Commentators in English.

The broadcast team have experience with the discipline from the CPSL (Canoe Polo Super League in China) and whose Facebook broadcast has now reached 2 million views.

Cameras will include for all playing areas 1 x pan and zoom plus 1 x mobile camera for all six days and gradually building up to 1 x tall pan and zoom, 2 x pan and zoom, 1 x mobile and 1 x drone for the finals.

I should also note something that is quite an achievement both personally and for the sport. The Competition Organiser for this world championships ZHONG Xing (Dodo) is only 34 years of age and to coordinate a world championship at such a young age is quite something and should be recognised.

2024 ICF Hangzhou Super Cup – China

Again, at the time of writing this report this multi-discipline event has not yet taken place. It is happening by chance in close proximity to the world championships and this has for a one-off occasion enabled a significant number of teams to compete.

There are 24 teams competing based on their world ranking and for any that declined entry the next best ranked federation team has been invited.

Unfortunately, a couple of highly ranked teams did decline the most notable being France who due to the timing of the invitation were unable to change their flight bookings.

Key achievements:

- Support by different means to all continental championships ranging from ball supply at zero cost, referee training and assessments and attendance in person.
- The work by both the ICF CAP, ICF Events team and the HOC for a world championship, and then additionally the ICF Hangzhou Super Cup, both in China has been very significant. Both are very close at the time of writing and look to be a success. We will only know a two weeks' time!
- During a recent trip to China, I was able to achieve a great deal in a very short period of time:
- Support the 2024 Asia Pacific Canoe Polo Club Championships including referee the final, as requested.
 - Speak at a local school connected to the club and with polo goals within their school grounds.
 - Meet tourism officials.
 - Visit the Super Cup venue and meet the HOC to answer both some of their questions, and get some of my own answered.
 - Visit to the CPS factory.
 - Meeting with live-stream manager for the world championships.
 - Two-day meeting with the world championship competition organiser.

My thanks to CPS for enabling this all to happen in such a short timescale and ultimately benefit Canoe Polo in the Super Cup and towards the world championship organisation/

- Separately, during private meetings with CPS/Yupin Sports we explored the existing sponsorship of the discipline and the potential for further support resulting in:
 - Confirmation of wish to renew ball sponsorship for world and all continental championships.
 - Potential additional world championship support through scoreboards, shot clocks and goals (goal frames).
 - Available financial support to the possible inclusion of Canoe Polo in the Asian Games in the future.

Scoreboards for Canoe Polo are very specific and must display time, shot-clock, green, yellow and red cards and if possible, the category and ejection red cards. These phrases may not mean much to the reader but they are vital to the players and smooth functioning of this team sport.

The goal frames likewise are important and even as recent as 2022 we have had goals with a bar behind the net that caused a major unintentional error in the last world championship women's final.

Any finalised agreement will not impact on venues with already fixed goals.

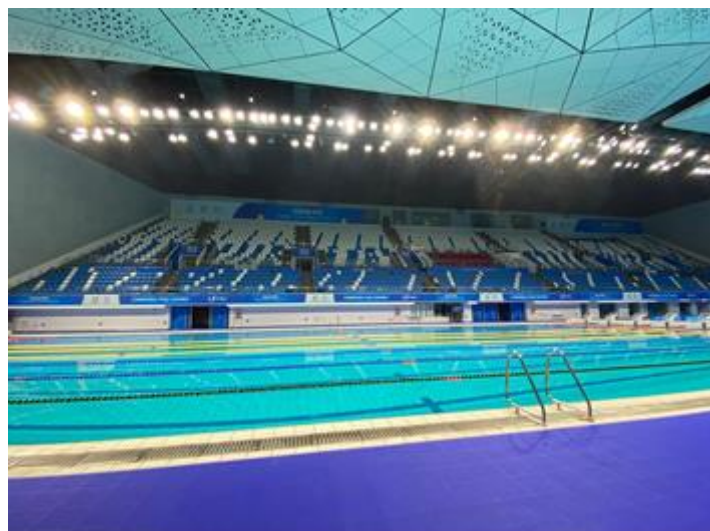
- At the forthcoming world championships, we have engaged a professional company to work with ICF CAP member Mario Lopez Perez to capture moments from games and warm-ups to use as future quality coaching material.
- A Code of Conduct for Commentators. This follows the already existing code for referees which for those who are so aware of the discipline includes fitness testing. The commentators are of course not subject to a fitness test!

Always moving forward

Strategic plans for future implementation:

2025 IWGA World Games - Chengdu, China

- The IWGA World Games are at this time regarded as the hardest, most competitive event for teams to compete in. Canoe Polo has been in the games since 2005 with great success and it is very important for this discipline to remain in the games. We need to continue to have the best teams competing and to show what a fast, dynamic, contact sport Canoe Polo is.
- Next year sees arguable a real moment to promote and spread the sport to new audiences and fans. We have been sold out tickets at every world game edition and when the venue is indoors the noise is quite something to experience.
- Next August the venue comprises an indoor 10-lane 50 metre swimming pool with very large grandstand....



- In addition to the competition pool athletes will be able to warm up in the same building in another 6-lane 50 metre pool for warming up, excellent rooms for officials and generally a very good venue for all.

Always moving forward



- Two weeks ago, I met somebody in China who knows the venue and said they had been there with a full capacity spectators and the noise is incredible.
- The discipline is a different to others, not a challenge to others, but a discipline with unique development opportunities for the ICF to promote and grow.
- As a jury member at the last world championships kindly said “**I really didn’t know this discipline had developed to such a level. The athletes are so fit and the games great to watch**”.
- Review and amendment of the qualification system for the 2028 ICF Canoe Polo World Championships – the number of teams that can qualify for the final rounds, in what categories and if any new categories can/should be included.
- Review and amendment, if possible, the number of officials required for the world championships. Canoe Polo seems high but it must be remembered that actually there are two separate world championships overlapping at the same time – senior and U21’s. If these were to separate the officials would reduce for each but there is an economy of scale to consider, environmental considerations and the development path impact on U21 paddlers to not see so closely the standards they need to strive to reach.

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- Support as and where necessary for Canoe Polo to move forward into the Asian Games.
- So far as rules are concerned no CR or PR changes were proposed to the ICF Board this year. A small number of Sport Rule changes were proposed to ensure improved game management and greater management of referee activity.
- The one significant rule change for introduction on 1st January 2027 and not 2025 is:
 - A two-stage shot clock similar to other balls sports such as basketball and water polo to discourage passive play in the second and subsequent attack phases.
 - The initial clock will remain at 60 seconds but subsequent phases by the same team will have a 30 second limit as already being used in Germany in speed polo.

To close this report my personal thanks to Dion Chen who has been on the ICF CAP for the past four years and who behind the scenes has done significant work for this year's world championships, but who is not nominating again for the next period. Thank you!