



# More Than Just a Sport, Unforgettable Dragon Boat Experiences in Tainan

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Ahoo ! My name is Beam from Thailand. I have been in Tainan for almost 2 years for my master degree in IMBA, NCKU, Tainan, Taiwan. Since then, I have tons of wonderful experiences no matter it happens inside the school or somewhere on the sidewalk. One of my greatest moment that could not avoid to be mentioned is the moment during dragon boat festival and I believe that it would be even more useful for everyone if I have a chance to share this fantastic experience from the lens of foreign students.

One day in March 2016, one of my Philippines' friend, Athena, came to invite me and my Thai friend, Taz, to join the dragon boat team of our department, namely Spartans. At that time, I absolutely had no idea about the dragon boat except the old fable about the origin of this festival, dated back more than 2,000 years, in order to commemorate the legendary of a loyal officer, Qu Yuan, that I learned from the Chinese class. We went to the place of Rhea, another Philippines' friend in IMBA who had dragon boat experience more than three years and were the captain of the team in

the year of 2015, for further discussion in details. Fortunately, the dragon boat training was planned to divide into two sessions, ground training and boat training, where we realize that, at least, we could fulfill the physical training for the team. We both accepted to be the ground trainers of the team in that year though we still lacked of the knowledge about the physical needs to achieve the best body condition of dragon boat paddlers. In the week later, we started to recruit the crew through many social media and traditional channels. Not only our IMBA friends, but also many friends of friend from other departments





were interested to experience this unique sport which is not available in their home countries and, finally, we are able to form two dragon boat teams divided by the gender of players. It can be said that our team was one of the most diversified team in the competition since it consisted of more than ten nationalities of the team members from any part of the world i.e. Thailand, Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines, Netherland, Belgium, United states, Honduras, France, Mongolia and etc.

My real new journey of dragon boat has started since that time even though that this sport has never attract me before. I remembered that our ground training schedule were pretty tight with my Chinese class on every Tuesday and Wednesday night, so that I had to suddenly jump out at the end of every class in order to present myself, as a trainer, at the training on time. After short discuss with another head coach of the team, Ralph, we agreed to separate our training into two sessions, chest and arms strength were on Tuesday and training for back muscle and core body were proceeded on every Wednesday. Our training had not gone smoothly since many of our team members

had never experienced any workout before, while some of us regularly train themselves. This physical strength gap is even larger for female team which is extraordinary challenge for the trainer on how to balance both team's

improvement and maintaining everyone's attraction on track for three months duration of training before the real race competition days. If our practices are too intense, many of team members might abandon their commitment and left the team. On the other hand, trivial exercise might also benefit only a little if we plan to prepare our team for the real competition. To deal with this challenge, we separated the intensity of every training into two categories, male and female. Although in overall female team definitely has lower strength than male team, but every member of male team plays a critical role on how to urge and boost up the strength and stamina by cheering up female team. These atmospheres of toughness, On the other hand, psychologically created the harmonic of the teams that consist of more than 50 paddlers. The paddling experiences of Rhea and Ralph play an important role on how to start learning dragon boat practices. We firstly tasted the actual boat training in lotus pond, Kaohsiung, where we all applied every single technique that had learned during the ground training. From my personal point of view, I totally agree that the synchronization of the paddling is the fundamental of this sport. Without this simultaneous movement of the paddles of all members, the boat should not be able to sail swiftly on the water surface. Nevertheless, only the synchronization might not be enough to lead the team to be the winner of the competition. Every single paddling movement should incorporate with large amount of force to move the boat viciously. With three months of sweat and friendship, we were more than ready for the competition.





The place of competition is located in Anping river, the main blood that helps grow up the city of Tainan. The race was divided into many sub-categories, but Spartans were registered in the international league with total 14 teams in this league. The first race of male team was not a big deal, it is relatively tough for the female team who had to face the champion of the competition. Although our female team could not advance to the next round, our male team was capable of getting the final ticket to sail on the final round. One of the most difficult decision for the leaders of the team was how to pick the best paddlers for the team as well as to let every member experienced the moment of

competition. On the final round, we agreed to increase the speed of our paddling technique to the ultimate level which had to trade off with the decreasing of stamina for 300 meters competition length in the long run. The nightmare came true since we were defeated by the second winner only less than a second in the last three meters before the finish line. Although the result of the competition might be difficult for all Spartans to admit, it was wholeheartedly impressive and was very meaningful experiences for the first-year paddlers like me. All of our sweats are paid off by the third prize runner-up as a result of the first-year dragon boat competition in 2016.



Pain is temporary, glory is forever. This is the motto of our team which derives from the real experiences of the leaders of Spartans. I am quite sure that only if you have ever experienced the dragon boat practice, you could realize the real meaning of this sentence. My second year of dragon boat experience was even more amazing since our reputation from last year competition was widely spread out from mouth-to-mouth and, therefore, a large number of people submitted their applications during recruitment period. The teams were more competitive with the bunch of strong guys who regularly train in the fitness center or even the guy who used to be U.S. army. Finally, we decided to separate the team into two competitive teams, not by the gender, but by their physical condition and experiences on the dragon boat competition. I would really appreciate this strategy since we were able to filter only the best paddlers on one team no matter the paddlers were male or female. As a result, we set up many dates for physical assessments which consists of pull-ups, 1.2 kilometers running and sit-ups in an attempt not only to motivate all the members for further physical improvement, but also the fairness of the members who were qualified into the almightiest team. However, the competitive team did not come with only the positive effect to the team. Because they have been intensely trained even before they joined the team, their mindset was already packed with their own experience and was not simple to be trained. As leaders of the team, we had to be rigorous on every single detail of trainings, practices and, especially, the goal of them team. This process took us a large amount of time for the leaders to coach and guide the team smoothly. After we had strived over the arguments throughout the moment of trainings and discussions, our team was strongly rigid than ever before as well as the congruity of harmony.

The moment of happiness became true. Our competitive team revenged the second runner-up last

year during the semi-final round and, then, advanced to the final round again. Although we still need another three seconds shorter time in order to be the champion, we ended up at the finish line in the second place. This is the highest reward of Spartan that have ever achieved since it has been established for more than five years. This was one of the happiest moment in my life and I believe that all my teammates had exactly the same feeling. Every journey has its end, and my efforts put on dragon boat competition ends with this unforgettable moment.

Even though my studying experience in Taiwan might be a little bit different from other foreign students, the dragon boat experience gave me a bunch of lesson learn and meaningfulness for my life. Moreover, every friendship happens during the trainings and practices of this international team broadens my horizon toward this world and strengthen my personal concept that if you believe that you can do it, you will be on the half-way there. It is my highest honor to share this experience to you and If there is any opportunity of you to participate in this sport, please do not hesitate to try at least once in your life. Ahoo !

註：「Ahoo！」是該龍舟隊的口號，用以提升士氣，鼓勵隊友。所有支持者也會用此為隊員打氣。

