



# CANADIAN OUTRIGGER HALL OF FAME

## Don Irvine



### Summary

Don Irvine has made significant contributions as athlete, coach-builder, and pioneer through his career of 40+ years. Don has competed at national levels in marathon canoe racing, and at international levels in whitewater kayaking, sprint kayaking, dragon boat racing, and outrigger canoeing. Don was selected to the Canadian team for the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. Don would be Canada's first IVF V1 500M Open Men Silver medalist. Don would co-found False Creek Racing Canoe Club in the 1980s. Vincent Lo and Don would co-found Six-Sixteen dragon boats in the early 1990s. Rick Nu'u, Zoe Norcross and Don would form Hana Hou Paddlesports as the top distributor of OZONE Unlimited OC6s in Canada in the 2010s.

### Early Career

Some background on Don in the 1980s had been shared by Drew Mitchell (FCRCC Alumni) and Dan O'Donovan (JOCC Alumni) and Matt Kelly (Predator Performance Designs) in 2020 interviews. Don was born September 1954 in Calgary Alberta. [01] Don graduated from McMaster University in Hamilton Ontario with a BA in Exercise Physiology. [02] While in Ontario, Don would be 1979 Canadian Whitewater Champion. [03] Don would also compete at the 1981 Whitewater World Championships in Bala Wales. [04] Don relocated to Burnaby BC in the early 1980s joining Burnaby Canoe & Kayak Club where he trained with many world-class rowers and kayakers. Don would win Gold in K2 500M / K4 1000M / K4 500M and Silver in K2 1000M at the 1983 Pan American Canoe Championships. [05] Colin Shaw, Donald Brien, Mark Holmes, and Don [06] would take 9th place in K4 1000M at the 1984 Los Angeles Olympic Games. [07] Don raced with the original False Creek Racing Canoe Club Mens dragon boat crew at the 1986 Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival that would take Silver and be the first of only two non-Asian club-based crews to ever medal in this World Championship event. [08] Paul Dever of Calgary Canoe Club and Matt Kelly shared that Don was doing custom wood-working / finishing on the Red Robin chain of restaurants in Western Canada in 1987.

### Outrigger Canoeing Achievements

In his sole appearance at International Va'a Federation World Sprints, [09] Don would take Silver in V1 500M Open Men at 1992 Sacramento IVF World Sprints – best ever finish in V1 500M Open Men division by a Canadian to this day. [10]

The BC Mens provincial team delivered a first for Canada in 2000. A crew of paddlers racing as "Team BC" from Jericho, Pemberton, and False Creek including Hugh Fisher, Rick Nu'u, and Don would finish Spec 1st Open and 1st Overall in the Catalina Channel Crossing race – the best ever showing for an all-Canadian crew at Catalina. [11] It was a major upset, especially as sponsorship for outrigger racing in Canada is nonexistent. [12]

A crew of paddlers racing as "Team BC" from Jericho and False Creek including Rick Nu'u and Don would finish 18th place Spec Open Fibreglass and 19th place Overall in 2001 at Molokai Hoe. [13] An all-Canadian crew of Bruce Blankenfeld, Cam Fagrie, Dave Jensen, Greg Poole, Shane Martin, Terry Lewis, Tony Van Buren, Vlad Tucakov, and Don would finish 12th place Spec Open Fibreglass and 13th place Overall in 2003, [14] for one of the best ever Molokai Hoe showings for a Canadian Mens crew. [15]

### Coach-Builder Achievements

A Canoe Kayak BC Legends Sheila Taylor article provides references on many of the FCRCC founders. Sheila Taylor was hired over the phone by Jim Boulding, Strathcona Park Lodge (SPL) owner and family patriarch, in 1980 as a canoe instructor. Jim's son Jamie and Jamie's sister Annie Boulding, encouraged Sheila to compete in whitewater kayaking races in Canada and Europe. Sheila trained at Burnaby Canoe & Kayak Club in the early 1980s where she met Don who suggested that she switch

to flatwater and race K1 / K2 / K4. Sheila met and trained with other Burnaby Canoe & Kayak Club paddlers at the time including Collin Shaw, Hugh Fisher, Drew Mitchell and Pete Liljedahl. Sheila would take 8th place in K2 500M and 10th place K4 500M at the 1988 Seoul Olympic Games. [16] Cousins David and Annie Boulding would be part of the initial FCRC dragon boat and outrigger canoe teams. Don would relocate to Comox in 1992 to continue his career as a luxury home builder.

Don was involved with False Creek Racing Canoe Club from the outset as a founding member when it was formed in 1985 by Sprint Kayak Olympic Gold Medalist Hugh Fisher along with Heather Taylor, David Boulding, and Patrick Couling, with help from False Creek Community Centre Director Carol Sogawa. [17]

Don would coach the FCRC Womens Team who would win the Vancouver Dragon Boat Festival from 1986-1993. The FCRC Womens Team would continue onto be the first ever Canadian Womens crew to win the Hong Kong Dragon Boat Festival International Races in 1989, 1990, 1992 and 1993. [17] This Dragon Boat success would continue at the 2009 Dragon Boat World Championships in Prague, where Team Canada with BC paddlers Heather Taylor, Annie Boulding, Pat Begonzii, Shannon Brenner, Andrea Kwon, and Don would take 1st in the Senior Mixed 2000M and 200M events. [18]

Rick Nu'u and Don met in the winter of 1990 in New Zealand. They became good friends and Don encouraged Rick to take up a coaching position with False Creek Racing Canoe Club in Canada from 1998-2001. [19]

In a Pacific Paddler magazine article from April 2015, there is mention of Don winning an OC1 at 1992 Sacramento IVF World Sprints. [20] This Jerry Montgomery OC1 and two others would provide False Creek with a small-boat fleet that Jackie Webber, [21] Heather Taylor, and Andrea Dillon would use to train for the 1994 / 1996 / 1998 IVF World Sprints [22].

The early 1990s saw an initiative where Hugh Fisher, Drew Mitchell, and Don were leading training for the FCRC Womens outrigger canoe program with a goal to deliver a womens outrigger canoe program that would be competitive at the international level. [23] FCRC had recruited 40+ women in 1993 to fill two Molokai Na Wahine crews with a Catalina Channel Crossing race as a precursor. The 1993 womens outrigger canoe program brought in paddlers including Cheryl Scribe, Andrea Dillon, Allie Johnstone, Kamini Jain, Heather Taylor, Jacinta Sheridan, Jackie Webber, and many more. The two FCRC Womens 1993 Molokai Na Wahine crews would finish 10 minutes apart in 10th and 13th place Open Fibreglass. [24] The 1994 womens outrigger canoe program focused on a single crew. That FCRC Womens 1994 Molokai Na Wahine crew, with Cheryl Scribe and Andrea Dillon switching steering, would finish 6th place Open Fibreglass, for the best ever Molokai Na Wahine showing for a Canadian womens crew - until the Jericho Women in 2001 with their 6th Place finish overall. [25]

A few years after Comox Valley Canoe Racing Club (CVCRC) was founded by Annie Boulding, Don got involved when he started coaching Highland school youths in 1995. [26] Abreast In A Boat is a charitable society whose mission is to demonstrate that those who have been diagnosed with breast cancer can live active and healthy lives. [27] Hope Afloat (Canada) was formed in 2001 and paddles in the Comox harbour on Vancouver Island. Don shared his expert knowledge, encouragement, and patience, as he coached the Hope Afloat dragon boat team during their first 4 seasons. [28] As recently as 2016, Don has travelled to Vancouver to conduct OC6 Sprints and V1 Sprints Clinics hosted by FCRC. [29]

## **Pioneering Achievements**

False Creek Dragon Boat teams manager Vincent Lo decided in the early 1990s to tackle the problem of Canadian dragon boat teams having to train in 10-person Voyageur canoes while their competitors in Asia trained in real dragon boats. Vincent Lo had two 48-foot dragon boats manufactured in Hong Kong that could accommodate 24 paddlers. These first two dragon boats were well received in Canada and when the Canadian International Dragon Boat festival wanted a fleet for their annual races, Vincent Lo and partner Don formed a company named Six-Sixteen and collaborated to build over 200 of the 48-foot dragon boats that became popular along the North American West and East Coasts. [30]

Rick Nu'u and Don achieved a long-time shared dream and established a paddlesports business in 2011 geared towards the manufacture of wood canoe paddles and providing coaching opportunities in a wide variety of paddlesports. [31] On a trip to Maui in September of 2013, Don met with Mike Giblin, owner of Outrigger Zone (OZONE), and an agreement was reached where Don would distribute the Puakea Mololo, Giblin Vortex, and OZONE line of OC1/OC2 canoes. [32] Hana Hou Paddlesports would offer demonstrations of the OZONE line of canoes as part of the 2016 Outrigger Summit hosted by Right Angle Performance. [33]

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