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## **Olympic Discipline Hires New CEO and Changes Long Term Strategy**

**Oklahoma City, OK** USA Canoe and Kayak (USACK), the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic paddlesports governing body is preparing for 22 men and women’s Canoe and Kayaking medal events at the 2016 Olympic (16 medals) and Paralympic (6 medals) games to be held in Rio De Janeiro. Last night USACK announced the new CEO and the shift in its strategy to recruit and develop paddling talent.

The new strategy involves partnering with the American Canoe Association (ACA), which was formed in 1880 and is currently the oldest and largest paddlesports organization in the United States. The ACA was the Olympic paddlesports governing body from 1924 until the early 1990’s when the organization split. ACA committed to focus on recreational paddling, developing educational programs, stewardship, exploration, recreation and competition. USACK was formed to focus on elite competition such as the Olympics, Pan AM Games, and Paralympics. USACK’s Board Chair, Bob Lally, announced yesterday that ACA’s Executive Director, Wade Blackwood is the new Chief Executive Officer of USACK in addition to his ACA role.

Paddlesports realized when the ACA was splintered and USACK became a separate organization, the U.S. stopped winning Olympic medals. In the 1992 Barcelona Olympics Scott Strausbaugh, Joe Jacobi (former USACK CEO), and Greg Barton were the last three American men to medal (gold, gold, and bronze respectively) while Rebecca Giddens was the last American woman to medal (silver) in the 2004 Athens Olympics. Robert Lally, USACK Board Chair explained, “There is an old saying that if you continue doing the same thing over and over again, do not expect different results. When the ACA and USA Canoe/Kayak Team separated a lot of our canoe/kayak disciplines stopped competing at the highest international levels. In order to change our results and outcomes, we have to dynamically and strategically change the culture and direction of our nation’s paddling enterprise. Creating a partnership, once again, between the ACA and USACK is that dynamic and strategic change required for USA to compete at the highest levels in all canoe/kayak disciplines.”

Sharing CEOs is a bit unusual but in this case it demonstrates unity in a relatively unique market. ACA’s Board Chair, Anne Maleady said, “Over the last 4 years the ACA has grown significantly by focusing on education and stewardship programs under Blackwood’s leadership. The shared CEO role has the opportunity to give the millions of Americans who engage in recreational and elite paddlesports the ability to find programs of interest under a common organization. Whether its stewardship activities or healthy competition; our organizations will offer something for paddlers of all abilities.”

Blackwood said, “I feel like I’m the first grandchild of two great and influential families -- and there are high expectations. We want to create a fun and enjoyable path for anyone with an interest in paddling. Having the recreational and elite competition disciplines under a single leadership creates opportunities to build a pipeline of generations of great paddlers.” Blackwood also mentioned, “Paddling is a healthy outdoor activity and many of the great elite paddlers started by enjoying a family canoe trip or having a great summer camp experience learning to kayak.”

Oklahoma City, Oklahoma is in the process of building a \$42.5 million whitewater paddling course and will host the 2016 Olympic Team Trials for both slalom and sprint. Under this leadership model the future of Olympic paddlesports looks bright. "Re-uniting the family of paddlers is a good thing. It's about time!" said Frank Havens (age 90) 1952 Olympic Gold Medalist.



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