

Korea looks ahead

The 2013 World Rowing Championships will be held from 25 August to 1 September at Tangem Lake in Chungju, South Korea, and preparations are well underway.

World Rowing spoke with Ken Lee, International Director of the Korean Rowing Association and Secretary General of the Asian Rowing Federation, about the World Championship venue and preparations for 2013.

“Although we have a rowing history of over 50 years in Korea, it is not yet a popular sport in our country; we count less than 700 rowers throughout Korea

ranging from junior to university to professionals,” says Lee. “The more popular sports are baseball, soccer, short track, taekwondo, volleyball and figure skating (especially with the Olympic Gold of Kim Yu-Na). Rowing’s best ever result was at the Asian Games five years ago, where Shin Eun-chul won gold in the men’s single sculls. At the time, rowing received attention, but it faded rather quickly afterwards.”

The assurance that the rowing course will be amongst the best in the world is what drives the Korean Rowing Federation onwards to 2013. Much effort is also going in to several key promotional initiatives. Firstly, 50 minutes of rowing highlights were shown for the first time in Korean history on sports channels after each international rowing competition. Yet the television coverage does not stop there. One of the main broadcasting channels hosted a show called ‘The Unlimited Challenge’, in which celebrities with no prior rowing experience trained for two to three >



> months, and then raced international college crews. Thirty-five thousand spectators came to watch the celebrity crew race in the men's novice eights race at the STX Cup Korea Open Regatta. The story was filmed over months and captured the attention of a wide audience.

Lee believes that "'The Unlimited Challenge' is a real success story for rowing in Korea. After only the first two episodes, the Korean Rowing Association's website crashed because so many Koreans showed interest in learning more about rowing. Initiation lessons given on Saturdays and Sundays are fully booked for more than two months now!"

The aim for the 2013 World Rowing Championships and beyond is undoubtedly the development of rowing.

"We first want everybody in Korea to learn what rowing is and understand it," says Lee. "This should enable us to attract more people, even athletes from other sports who could move over to rowing. The final aim is for rowing to become popular. We need to promote rowing, but we also need more venues and wider and safer boats for beginners. Today, we are already running a promotional programme in five different locations: two of them are emblematic in Korean rowing: Missari, the 1988 Olympic Venue, and

Chungju which we put in the spotlight in view of the forthcoming World Rowing Championships."

But what of the Korean national team? With such high hopes for 2013, the preparations are well underway and it is not just the senior team who look towards Chungju 2013 with excitement.

"During the winter our crews train in Australia and we are building an exchange programme, asking foreign coaches to come to Korea. We are aiming for our crews to make the A-finals at the 2013 World Championships so that people can see them on television – that would really be a great achievement." >

Jun-Ha Park from Korea racing in the A-final of the AS men's single sculls at the 2011 World Rowing Championships in Bled, Slovenia. South Korea qualified two adaptive boats for next year's 2012 Paralympic Regatta.



> The women's quadruple sculls who competed at the 2011 World Rowing Junior Championships also look forward enthusiastically to the future home-water World Rowing Championships. World Rowing spoke to You Jin Lee, Jeong Yoon Choi, Sun Mi Pi and Si In Lee.

"It would be great to volunteer at the World Championships," says Jin Lee. "I would love to be a boat holder as I could see all the important athletes up close, and I like the atmosphere at the start – the tension and the concentration. As a boat holder I could be part of this. But it would be interesting as well to be something like the Nations Liaison. As a rower I know the needs and wishes of the athletes."

Yoon Choi cannot wait to watch the racing: "My favourite races to watch will be the women's quadruple sculls and the women's single sculls. I would like to know how strong they are and what their technique is like. I am really interested in their training methods."

The development of Korean rowing is already present in these younger athletes. Whilst the majority will not row in Chungju at the 2013 World Rowing Championships, their passion for the sport beyond the home championships is clear.

"I watched the finals of the women's eight and the women's quadruple sculls at the 2008

Olympic Games in Beijing," says Jin Lee. "I was so fascinated by this sport and by how aesthetic it looked. I immediately wanted to try it as well. I recommend rowing to young people. I cannot describe in words how I feel about rowing, it is just so attractive. It is amazing to sit in a boat that is gliding well. I think everyone should try it out."

The Chungju rowing course will stage the Asian Olympic Qualification Regatta in April 2012, which will serve as the test event for the 2013 World Rowing Championships. It is currently being used for national training camps and competitions. Behind the scenes, the Korean organising committee has been conducting

extensive research at most World Rowing events this season to understand what is required to host a successful World Championship regatta.

"I hope Chungju will leave a legacy," says Ken Lee. "In 2013 all teams and spectators will come for the rowing but they will also have an opportunity to enjoy Korean culture and visit other places as well, for we are not that far from Seoul. We want to showcase our 5,000-year-old culture as well as the modern and dynamic soul of Korea. The World Rowing Championships will reflect this."

● Pat Lambert / Laura Fell

You Jin Lee (b), Jeong Yoon Choi, Sun Mi P and Si In Lee (s), the Korean junior women's quadruple scull, racing in the heats of the 2011 World Rowing Junior Championships in Eton, Great Britain.



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