



Interview



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Lluís Rabaneda Caselles is a member of the High Competition Commission and a member of the General Assembly of the Spanish Olympic Committee (Madrid, Spain). He was appointed the International Canoe Federation (ICF) Chair Canoe Freestyle Committee in 2007. Since November 2021, he has been Vice President of the ICF.

His role was important when organizing the ICF Canoe Freestyle World Championships 2013, held on the Nantahala River, USA. Lluís worked closely with Sutton Bacon, CEO of the Nantahala Outdoor Center (NOC), to deliver the event and the specially constructed competition wave.

During the London 2012 Olympics, canoe freestyle was a demonstration event at Lee Valley-Lluís was instrumental in bringing the spectacle to the World stage.

Alongside working for the ICF, Lluís is also CEO of ROCROI, a company offering whitewater rafting activities, world-class paddling instruction and cross-country skiing.

In his career, Lluís has been Director of the annual Noguera Pallaresa River Festival in Llavorsi, which also features internationally acclaimed classic downriver and freestyle competitions.

He is somewhat of a legend within the freestyle community as he has significantly helped raise the sport's profile globally.

He told us about his favorite sport and shared information on where to practice it in the Pyrenees.

-As a member of the Spanish Olympic Committee, how would you rate the popularity of the outdoor water sports sector?

-Well, the truth is that most outdoor sports have something special besides the competitive part. They are practiced by many people who have never competed and will never compete but want to enjoy nature. This is an important point in our sports because it makes them popular. This way, everyone can enjoy the environment without having to compete.

-You have experience in organizing national and international sports events. Could you tell us about it?

-Well, we started organizing our first international competition in 1998. It was a Freestyle Kayak European Cup. Then we organized the World Championship in 2001, then a European Championship in 2004 (we held all these competitions in Sort, Catalonia) and another one in 2008 (Ourense, Galicia). Later we organized World Cups in Sort in 2014 and 2018 and Freestyle World Cup in 2019.



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VP of the International Canoe Federation, CEO of ROCROI

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Also, in 2018, we organized the world classification for the Youth Olympic Games (YOG) held the same year in Buenos Aires (ARG).

-What are the main difficulties in organizing such events? Does your sport have any traditional sponsors?

-The most difficult part is finding resources that guarantee high competition.

Unfortunately, not many private sponsors in our country want to invest in canoeing. While some companies are beginning to see canoeing as a sustainable and environmental image, the trend is slowly changing for the better.

-What is the amount of funding from the ICF, and how is it distributed?

-Our Federation, like all International Olympic Federations, access funding that comes from the Olympics (mainly from the TV broadcasting rights). On the other hand, funding is generated by the Federation itself with its own resources (sponsors, competitions, membership). The biggest expense items are the development activities of the different disciplines, the TV production and broadcasting, and the creating content to promote our sport.

-How often are canoeing

competitions held?

-Our Federation brings together 10 different disciplines and 5 more related disciplines, with more than 50 official tests in our calendar between World Cups and World Championships every year.

-Who do you think are the brightest athletes in all these different disciplines?

-I would name Jessica Fox (Australia, Slalom), Saul Craviotto (Spain, Sprint), Lisa Carrington (New Zealand, Sprint) and Dane Jackson (USA, Freestyle) ...

-What do you think was the most important step in the canoeing

development in Spain? How did this sport become popular?

-Spain is one of the world leaders in canoeing for many reasons. First, it is characterized by a very democratic practice in terms of competitions and recreational activities.

On the other hand, the Spanish Federation and the autonomous regions are doing a great job organizing competitions and inviting as many athletes as possible to their teams.

-Let's shift gears and turn to an international experience. England and Wales have a charter to ensure fair and sustainable access to

water for water sports. What is this document? Is there an equivalent here?

-Unfortunately, we do not have this type of document here. But in the countries you mentioned, most waters are private; therefore, accessing them is difficult. In our territories, we depend on hydrographic confederations in the case of inland waters and on coasts and ports in the case of the sea.

-Summer holidays are coming... Your company RocRoi organizes kayaking courses on the river or



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sea for children. Where exactly do you organize them?

We organize kayaking courses in whitewater (at Llavorsi and Murillo de Gallego) and on the sea (at our bases in Vilanova and La Geltrú). The courses come in different levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced, and range from 3 to 15 hours.

-Do you cooperate with Andorra? What do you offer to Andorran tourists?

-In Andorra, in particular, in Grandvalira (Grau Roig and Ordino Arcalis sectors), we

offer snow activities such as snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and dog sledding... We started working in Andorra in 2001, and today we have quite a large influx of people who want to engage in these activities. We are a company that offers numerous types of outdoor entertainment. It helps us to be visible.

-In anticipation of the coming summer, tell us about the most interesting places in the Pyrenees for rafting and canoeing?

-We are very lucky to have a canoe enclave in the Pyrenees, a global

HUB, not only from the Spanish but also from the French side. La Seu d'Urgell and Sort (Spain) and Pau et Foix (France) have been organizing international competitions for a long time. And at the same time, these places have a lot of tourist activities around our sport.

One of the places representing the sports/tourism binomial is the Noguera Pallaresa (a river in Spain, in the northeast of the Iberian Peninsula, which originates in the Pyrenees and runs through the province of Lleida, Catalonia). ≡

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