

EDBF EUROPEAN NATIONS CHAMPIONSHIP, NOTTINGHAM 2012

AN EXTRACT FROM OUR BOOK HERE BE DRAGONS

By Tara Byrne

While the 2012 Nottingham International Club and BCS Crews Regatta was not our club's first competitive trip abroad – and not nearly as exotic a spot as Malaysia in 2011 – it felt so much more serious and professional. There was extra excitement about competing in England, as the regatta overlapped with the London Summer Olympic Games.

Our event, which was held at the National Water Sports Centre, was running alongside the 10th European Nations Championships. The national teams were so impressive to observe, even when they were just resting between races! They filled me with a mix of feelings, from inferiority to respect to envy to encouragement and motivation!

As many of us had by then bought our own carbon paddles, the decision was taken that we would transport them rather than use the stock paddles provided by the EDBF, in case they weren't good enough for us Plurabelle athletes. When organising the courier transport it became apparent how precious our paddles had become to us – would it be safe on its travels, would it arrive on time, how could we possibly compete if it didn't?! I had organised the courier and recall holding my breath as we looked for the race control office to see whether our paddles had arrived – they had!

The Nottingham course is purpose built for dragon boat racing, so first sight of it brought a real 'wow' moment. It was our first time in a Champion-style boat, which felt so much 'tippier' than our own, so the boat was filled with a lot of white knuckles at our first training session.

It is a windy course and the winds were working very hard, which made our backing on to the 'held start' positions– another first for us – all the trickier. We were under real pressure and had to do a lot of drawing to get our boat aligned. The start was called very quickly, but Marian helmed us brilliantly and we got off the start, raced hard and won silver in our 200-metre race. The next day saw us racing our first ever 500-metre race.

I think it was the first time we really understood what a race is and why fitness is so important. Our 500-metre races seemed so long and tough. So long, in fact, that Mick Doyle (our coaching partner) took to his bike, pedalling furiously to keep up, tracking our progress from start to finish! While we did not place in the 500 metres we did put real pressure on the other more experienced crews. We learned so much, felt so exhilarated and came off the water hungry for so much more coaching and competition.

As well as the racing element, we managed to apply ourselves off the water too. This is where we learned that most teams show up to the after party in their race strips, but the Plurabelles had transformed themselves into their glad rags and won gold on the dance floor!

We finished our visit with a Monday morning whistle-stop tour of Nottingham's medieval city. The club was less than two years old when we ventured to Nottingham and it went a long way towards building the club that we are today.