

# GET OUT THOSE PADDLES: WOMEN'S CANOEING IS FINALLY AN OLYMPIC SPORT

[Carter Robinson](#) | [February 25, 2016](#)



Canoeing and kayaking are similar sports but the boats involved are different. There are also two different races in the Olympics: slalom and sprint. Canoeing and kayaking have been Summer Olympics events for men since the Berlin Olympics in 1936. Until 1972 Olympic Canoeing and Kayaking was exclusively a men's sport. Women were told that the rigours of these two similar rowing sports were dangerous to their overall health and especially to their fertility!

## **Motherhood Befits Many Female Canoeists and Kayakers**

As Laurence Vincent-Lapointe now says, "Who knows how many of us have given birth...?" Vincent-Lapointe began canoeing as a young girl. She openly admits that she never liked kayaking but immediately loved canoeing.

## **The Women's Movement in Paddling**

In 1972, the slalom in women's kayaking for individuals, known as K-1, became an Olympic sport. Then, it was eliminated as an Olympic sport until 1992. Women's K-1 kayak sprint was first recognized in 1948 at 500 metres. The women's k-1 200 metre sprint was added only in 2012. The women's K-2 for 500 metres made its Olympic debut in 1960. The women's K-4 began being an Olympic event in 1984. And the women's 1000 metre race will be run for the first time later this year in Rio de Janeiro.

Where the kayaking and canoeing men have been recognized as Olympic level athletes since 1936, the women have had to struggle for recognition throughout.

## **Kayaking was in; Canoeing was out**

All this history may have obscured the fact that women's **kayaking** has been recognized albeit in fits and starts. But **canoeing** still lagged behind.

## **A Champion Ten Times Over**

Laurence Vincent-Lapointe was very fortunate to have been in top shape as an 18-year old in 2010 when women's canoeing was first accepted as a sport for the World Championships. Vincent-Lapointe won the C-1 World Championship that year and every year since except in 2015. Altogether, Laurence has won 10 World Championships in both C-1 and C-2 races.

Hello! Is Anyone There?

And yet, the International Olympic Committee never came calling.

The IOC Talked to the ICF and Voila! Olympics

Now, the good news is that the International Canoe Federation has worked out a protocol with the IOC to include women's canoeing in the 2020 games in Tokyo.

## **Can Laurence Stay Competitive Until 2020?**

Vincent-Lapointe is tall so it took her some time to learn how to stay in her canoe without tipping over. In her earliest races, she occasionally tipped over for no apparent reason. In 2020 she'll be 28 years old. No one really knows when the downhill slide for female canoeists begins. So Laurence is training hard to be in the best possible condition for the Tokyo Olympics.

## **Will Doctoring Cut into Laurence's Competitive Fitness?**

Despite her rigorous training program, Laurence is studying to be a doctor. She recently graduated Biomedical Sciences from the University of Montreal. No one, not even Laurence herself, knows how this will play out. Four years are a very long time to train hard whilst pursuing a medical career. Here's hoping that we can report in 2020 that Laurence Vincent-Lapointe is an Olympic champion.

## **Jennifer Abel**

The 24 year old from Montreal won two World Cup medals in Rio this week. She won the bronze medal in the three metre springboard and the silver alongside Pamela Ware in the three metre synchronized dive. Jennifer won bronze in the three metre synchronized in London in 2012. Winning the silver at the World Cup events bodes well for a higher medal later this year.

## **Roseline Fillion**

Only two months after breaking her ankle, Fillion was competing for a spot on the Canadian Olympic team

## **Meaghan Benfeito**

Meaghan has been to the Olympics twice and at 26 years of age may be looking at her last Olympics this year. She was shocked when her coach told her to stop practicing a particular dive. The shock was because Meaghan had been practicing this dive for ten years! If you are familiar with diving, please bear with me. The dive in question is called the “back arm stand triple tuck”. This is an especially difficult dive for anyone because you begin “blind”, not seeing the water. In Meaghan’s case, she often nailed this dive but just as often missed her vertical entry point and lost many points as a result.

Benfeito’s coach encouraged her to scrap the old dive and work on a new one called “back arm stand double with one and a half twists”. I have enough trouble doing one and a half twists when I look for where my wife has put the taco chips bowl!

Meaghan was reluctant to scrap a dive she had worked on for so many years but her coach, Arturo Miranda, insisted and Meaghan relented. The biggest selling point is that the dive itself is much different than the old one but is more in keeping with Meaghan’s skill and is only a fraction less difficult in Olympic competition than the other one.

The bottom line for Meaghan is that if she learns to nail the new dive, she’ll have a good chance to compete for a medal!

## **Women’s Soccer Team**

The Canadian women’s team qualified for the Rio Olympics by defeating Costa Rica 3-1 but lost to the strong U.S. team on Sunday. The women have a lot of hard work to iron out the kinks in their game going forward.

## **My Eyes**

Will be glued to the television whenever Canada competes in Rio this summer.

<http://www.gamingpost.ca/canadian-sports-news/get-out-those-paddles-womens-canoeing-is-finally-an-olympic-sport/> (accessed May 16, 2016)