



JON TAYLOR
(Jonathan Barney Taylor)
13th October 1952 – 17th December 2008

The problem with trying to recognize the remarkable and extraordinary contribution of Jon Taylor when he was in the room, was that he was a man who prided himself on his ordinariness and his achievements as being too humble to deserve much fanfare. His passing away from illness, and his final farewell in December, has given the Australian and international dragon boating community an opportunity to finally speak freely and without interruption about the tremendous debt we owe Jon, and about the tenacity and vision of a man which has moulded our sport and community.

Jon Taylor spent most of the last two decades as a central figure in NSW and Australian dragon boating. When he stepped aside as President at the AusDBF 2008 AGM, he left an organisation that had grown a sport from being obscure and novel, into one that oversaw a successful, vibrant sport that all paddlers were proud to be part of.

His final act as President was to announce AusDBF's first life memberships to AusDBF's first President Trevor Huggard, Ray Leung from Sydney, and Les Williams from Canberra. Three people who had worked with Jon for many difficult and testing years, as they rebuilt and rejuvenated the sport. A couple of days later as the 2008 Australian dragon boat championships came to a close, I recognised how hard it would be to fill his shoes, but that – thankfully – his work and efforts meant the Federation's and sport's future was one of endless positive possibilities.

Jon – universally known as JT – made sure that he and AusDBF became victims of their own success. As dragon boating has grown and developed, and membership numbers swelled, most of us have simply become accustomed to seeing the sport serviced by new boats, large clubs, and colourful and successful regattas.

Those who were around in the early 90s witnessed JT's efforts to transform dragon boating into competitive sport, and ensure the needs and desires of paddlers became the priority. He came to the sport through his involvement with the Barclay's corporate crew, which competed at Sydney's Chinese New Year Festival. He became the crew's President and coach, and raised the Lord Mayor's Trophy above his head, following great back to back wins in 1994 and 1995. After winning the trophy twice, the crew moved to the 'sports' division and raced under the Barclays banner for a couple more years. When the sponsorship ceased, the club we know as Sydney Tsunami was formed.

While he went about guiding Tsunami on the water, he was also busy coordinating and organising political battles on behalf of the paddlers which lead to the formation of DBNSW Inc. with JT as the first President. It wasn't long before JT turned his attention to the state of the sport across the country, mustered the same dogged determination he had shown in NSW, and applied it to the betterment of the sport and paddlers across Australia.

The IDBF had formed, and was establishing who it would recognize as peak bodies from its various member nations. JT was joined by Ray Leung and Trevor Huggard, who worked together and presented AusDBF's case for recognition and inclusion by IDBF. This often meant lurking around hotel meeting rooms in far flung places during IDBF regattas, and shamelessly plugging for Australian paddlers. JT's and the AusDBF's relentless work eventually led to the IDBF accepting AusDBF as the Australian peak organization in 1999 at its Congress in Nottingham.

In 1998 JT and Ray Leung, resurrected the Chinese New Year Dragon Boat Festival at Sydney's Cockle Bay in Darling Harbour. It is the biggest dragon boat event in the southern hemisphere and showcases our sport to thousands upon thousands of spectators. The newly formed Oceania Dragon Boat Federation – an organisation that will promote and build the sport throughout our region – was put into play by JT. His work with New Zealand in particular, and our other regional neighbours has ensured development and opportunities for years to come.

His crowning achievement though, is undoubtedly Australia's hosting of the 2007 IDBF World Dragon Boat Championships. By then, he was well into his battle with the cancers that were destroying and overcoming his once broad, muscular body. While his struggle was visible to every paddler and spectator and his health poor, there was not a chance he would miss a moment of Australian dragon boat racing's finest moments, or diminish JT's pride and pleasure in the Australian crews' performances.

In November 2006, Jon was diagnosed with stomach cancer. He undertook all the treatment and fought courageously. By the time of the Worlds he was presenting as having beaten his nemesis and was on the mend. Officials and dragon boaters from across the country and around the world saw him bravely continue to lead our sport, but it was heart wrenching for them to watch on while JT sacrificed his comfort in order to continue chairing the regular meetings during his treatments.

As 2008 came, JT's health seemed to improve, and he began to resemble his old self physically and emotionally. But he was to again be struck by poor health, and surgery was required for a brain tumour. JT's determination was again on display as he dusted himself off and continued to throw himself into giving to the sport and the paddlers he loved so much. He seemed to recover well and spent some time at AusDBF's Strategic Planning weekend – determined to contribute and guide right to the end.

In November 2008, JT and his partner Anne were about to head to Hong Kong to watch his beloved Wallabies when his health took another turn for the worse. A blocked bile duct and a tumour near his liver meant immediate hospitalisation and treatment, and although doctors tried several procedures even Jon's famous fight and courage could not stop the dreadful disease. JT spent much of his last weeks in his red AusDBF hoodie top – a dragon boater to the end – and saying final farewells to the many paddling friends he had helped and inspired.

He told close friends that his wish was for his final journey to be on a golden dragon boat, taking him to the next world. Finally, he passed away peacefully with his loved ones around him at 4.55am on December 17th.

The mourning and dark feeling of loss that has gripped so many in the dragon boat community reflects the impact JT had on paddlers around the country and through out the international dragon boat community. As news of his passing filtered out, the messages of condolences came flooding in. His loss is immense, but the celebration of his life will take place every time Australian Championships are contested, and whenever a green and gold crew takes to the water to battle against other IDBF teams. We will long remember him as the father of our modern sport in this country. JT – thank you, and good by.

Kel Watt, AusDBF President.

The presentation of Aus DBF's award for
outstanding service given to Jon in Sep 08
Trevor Huggard (1999 – 2003)
Left to right: Kel Watt, Jon Taylor and Trevor Huggard



A PERSONAL FAREWELL TO MY DRAGON BROTHER – JON TAYLOR

RAYMOND LEUNG – AusDBF, Life member
IDBF – Protocol, Culture and Heritage Commission – Vice Chairman

Physically John was tall among men, emotionally and ethically he was as tall as the sky. Jon and I were central to Dragon Boat Racing in Australia from the outset and we put many years of energy and passion in our sharing of our vision to see the growth of Dragon Boating in Australia and the world. Jon was a strong man who seldom divulged his feelings or emotions. He was a stalwart and didn't like to burden others or disclose confidences. If something wasn't right he tried to fix it but if it meant naming anyone he would leave it alone to develop its own outcome. It was hard to stand by helplessly watching on as Jon fought his last battle in hospital.

To me Jon was a brother, a brother in the dragon boating world. We are mortal but sometimes a person comes along that seems to be outside that law until the inevitable occurs, then we wonder how, why! Jon was one of those. I called Jon my true "Dragon Brother" and he meant a great deal to me. We shared what I call quality time together and that was something I am honoured by and will cherish forever.

My relationship with Jon dates back to the early '90s. JT had a vision and goal and he never let go of that vision. He was driven and full of passionate energy, he wanted the World Championship to be hosted in his home City of Sydney. In 2003, a special meeting took place involving JT, Melanie Cantwell, and myself wherein we went through what our strongest pitch would be for a bid for the world Championship. The decision would be put at the IDBF meeting during the Shanghai World Championship. The votes closed in our favour. JT had always been a visionary, a fair player and a diligent administrator. His efforts were most methodical and detailed. He worked tirelessly to move the sport forwards quickly. In November 2006, JT found out he had contracted cancer in his stomach.

He went through all the treatment and fought courageously. I recall Jon being quite frank for a moment during the 2007 World's in Sydney where he said, "Gee!! I thought I was the goner." This confirmed for me he felt he was doing well and, as the fighter he was, he felt he was not ready to give in to his cancer; he had still too much to do.

Earlier this year, in late July, Anne and Jon visited me in my shop. At that time Jon told me he had additional treatment (surgery) for a tumour in his head and the doctor removed a tumour the size of an orange. Hell, (I said to myself), why should such a good person have to suffer so much from this condition; one episode after the other.

I have fond memories during the past weeks while I performed Qi-Gong (Energy) to Jon. It was a peaceful and surreal moment between my Dragon Brother and me. My last eye to eye contact with Jon was after a Qi-Gong session when he ate some grapes and expressed a witty moment involving recycled toilet paper by pondering the thought of "How many times do they recycle the toilet paper??" we all had huge giggles. It's sad to see that a great man was in the end mortal and has passed away, however he had demonstrated his determination to live on and refuse to be beaten. My Dragon Brother has done so much for this sport, we must live his dreams...

