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NEWS RELEASE

Local athletes to represent GB in European championship

Four members of Nottingham's dragon boat racing club, Notts Anaconda, have been picked to race for their country in the sport's bi-annual European championships.

Charlie Christian, 48, Steve Calver, 50, both of West Bridgford, Jackie Lloyd Davies, 51, of Sherwood and Neil Lomas, 43, of Derby, will all be heading out to Amsterdam in August to race as part of Team GB against competitors from across Europe.

Charlie and Steve will be racing in GB's 'senior men' dragon boat racing team – a team of men aged 40 and above, while Jackie and Neil will be part of the GB 'senior mixed' crew – a team of both men and women aged over 40.

Dragon boating is the UK's fastest-growing watersport and attracts people from all walks of life – and you don't necessarily need years of experience before making the leap to international competition.

Steve Calver, a dentist, first picked up his paddle just six months ago. "I was training in the gym one day and was approached by Notts Anaconda's team coach," he explained. "He asked if I was training for anything in particular and suggested I might try dragon boating. He was so passionate about it I thought I'd give it a go.

"After a few sessions he planted the idea in my head of trialling for GB. I upped my training and went for the trials and was delighted when I found out I'd made it. I'd been quite apprehensive about going for GB trials as I was still very new to the sport, so I tried to keep it fairly quiet, but as word got round all the members of the club were very supportive and it just goes to show that dragon boating is a sport you can take up and enjoy at any age.

"The training for GB is quite a heavy schedule but I'm looking forward to it; you don't get many opportunities to represent your country in any sport."

Neil Lomas also leapt up to international competition after just a few months, joining Notts Anaconda in August 2008 and first taking part in international racing last year as part of the senior mixed crew competing at the world championships in Prague. He enjoyed it so much he decided to try for re-selection – despite the rigorous training schedule involved.

For Jackie and Charlie, international competition is a new challenge. "I decided to go for GB to give me a goal and a personal challenge," explained Jackie, a member of Notts Anaconda for just over a year. "I train about seven times a week, both on and off the water, so it's a big commitment, but everyone in the club has been really supportive and encouraging all the way."

Charlie, a graphic designer, has been with Notts Anaconda the longest of the four – training with the club since 2006. He first joined after watching the team paddle past the boat where he was living every Sunday morning. "I thought it looked good fun," he said. "I went along to an open session to give it a go and I was hooked. I decided to trial for GB because I was seriously excited about the prospect of competing at the highest level and representing the country. When I got the call and was told I'd made the team, I was thrilled. Later, it dawned on me that the training had only just begun and that I now have to subscribe to the team ethic of 'continuous, unrelenting pursuit of improvement'."

The European championships will take place just outside Amsterdam from Friday 13 to Sunday 15 August 2010. Dragon boating in the UK receives no external funding and each GB competitor is expected to cover all their own travel, accommodation and equipment expenses to take part in the competition. There are many opportunities for corporate advertising and sponsorship and any businesses interested in supporting local talent can find more information at www.gbdragonboat.co.uk or contact Neil Lomas on 07789 720545 or neilski@talk21.com.

Notts Anaconda always welcomes new members, with or without any amount of sporting experience. For more information visit www.nottsanacoda.co.uk or call Ali on 07954 424358.

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Photo caption: Left-right: Neil Lomas, Jackie Lloyd-Davies, Charlie Christian, Steve Calver.

Editor's notes:

Dragon boat racing originated in China over 2,000 years ago. The boats raced today are 40 feet long and are constructed from glass fibre, rather like large canoes. Wooden gunwales and seats help to retain a traditional look, and the boats are fitted with a colourful dragon's head and tail, plus the drums for racing. A crew consists of between 16 and 20 paddlers sitting side by side, with a helm standing at the back to steer the boat, and a drummer beating time.

Dragon boat racing is becoming one of the fastest growing and most popular sports in the world. In the UK alone the sport has estimated that 41,000 people in 850 crews take part in events throughout the summer months.

For any more information or photos please contact Ali on 07954 424358 or email alimarsland@hotmail.co.uk.