

# Meet the Canberrans in Australia's national dragon boating team, the Auroras

By Lily Nothling    Other Sports

Sat 12 Jul 2025 at 8:12am



These Auroras members train on Lake Burley Griffin in the heart of Canberra. (ABC News: Lily Nothling)

It's a fast and furious sport with an ancient past and a growing legion of devoted fans.

But when 16-year-old Jun Lee tells people he races dragon boats, he's almost always met with confusion.

"Usually it's something like, what is a dragon boat?" the Canberra schoolboy said.

"It's a pretty niche sport at the end of the day, so not many people know about it."



Jun Lee starting dragon boat racing through school and is now representing Australia. (ABC News: Lily Nothing)

Dragon boating originated in China more than 2,000 years ago.

The modern version of the sport sees teams of 20 paddlers — plus a drummer and a steerer — race distances up to two kilometres.

"I think it is one of the most high-stress environments I'm in," Lee said.

**"You have a hundred people around you trying to compete, you have the drums going, you have the water umpires yelling at you — it's crazy."**



The Canberra contingent of The Auroras, training on Lake Burley Griffin. (ABC News: Toby Hunt)

## 300 Aussies headed to Germany

The sport's popularity is on the rise, with competitive and social clubs popping up around the country.

More than 300 of Australia's best paddlers have travelled to Germany to compete in next week's World Dragon Boat Racing Championships.

The national team, called the Auroras, is made up of teens to retirees competing in different divisions, who have been preparing intensely for the past 22 weeks.



The Auroras are Australia's National Dragon Boating Team, and 32 of its members are based in Canberra. (ABC News: Lily Nothing)

That includes 32 Canberra-based paddlers, who have been braving sub-zero temperatures to train on Lake Burley Griffin almost every day.

Once a rugby league and union player, Sam Thompson started dragon boating a decade ago and now captains Australia's Senior B team.

"It took me a few years to admit to people that I was a dragon boater, but I'm very proud now," Thompson said.

**"The first time you're on the start line and look down on your shirt and see the national emblem, the coat of arms, it's very special."**



Sam Thompson captains Australia's Senior B Dragon Boating team. (ABC News: Lily Nothling)

More than 4,000 paddlers from 34 countries will compete in the world championships.

"It's going to be an extremely tough competition — if we get to the podium, that'll be unreal," Thompson said.

## '20 people to make friends with'

While dragon boating can struggle to attract younger participants, Ashleigh Wright first picked up a paddle when she was just 12.

"Mum found an ad on Facebook for it and you could do it with your parents so she thought it would be a cute thing for us to do together," she said.



18-year-old Ashleigh Wright is part of the team heading to the World Dragon Boat Racing Championships in Germany. (ABC News: Lily Nothling)

The now-18-year-old has not looked back since, and is proud to be pulling on the green and gold for the first time.

"I love the community in dragon boating," Wright said.

**"You have 20 people in a boat so that's 20 people to make friends with."**

This month's championships will also mark the inaugural appearance of Australia's paradragon team.

Among the paddlers is former paralympic cyclist Lindy Hou, who is blind.



Retired paralympic cyclist Lindy Hou is part of Australia's inaugural paradrugon squad. (ABC News: Lily Nothling)

The gold medallist swapped the bike for the boat to stay fit in retirement.

"Once I learnt how to hold a paddle and the movement, I just have to keep time with everybody," Hou said.

**"It's an inclusive sport in the way anyone can do it, regardless of ability."**

The world championships begin in Germany on July 14.

## Get a morning news briefing in your inbox

Subscribe to our ABC NewsMail bringing you breaking news from overnight, plus a heads-up on the stories that will shape your day.

Enter your email address

Subscribe

Your information is being handled in accordance with the [ABC Privacy Collection Statement](#).

This site is protected by reCAPTCHA and the Google [Privacy Policy](#) and [Terms of Service](#) apply.

Posted Sat 12 Jul 2025 at 8:12am