



Dragon boating has come a long way from the male-dominated sport of the 1980s, with women accounting for nearly 30 per cent of paddlers in the DBS regatta. PHOTO: DIOS VINCOY JR FOR THE STRAITS TIMES

# WOMEN PADDLING AGAINST TYPE

More are taking up dragon boat racing despite its gruelling nature

By GOH JUN YONG

THIS weekend's DBS Marina Regatta at Marina Bay will see eight women's dragon boat races, a huge jump from just one in last year's inaugural edition.

There will be a 200m and a 500m race in each of the four categories: International Premier Women, Singapore Premier Women, Tertiary Women and Corporate Women.

For a sport that started in Singapore in 1978 as a male activity, this is a clear sign that women are increasingly drawn to dragon boat racing despite its gruelling nature.

Indeed, this year's Marina Regatta will see 688 women, out of a total of 2,412 participants, taking part in the eight races, compared to 450 in two races last year – the women's and the mixed races.

Said Jason Chen, 31, founder and director of Dragon Boat Innovate (DBI), which helps promote the sport: "It used to rely on mixed events, where both men and women row in the same boat, just to get female rowers into the sport. This is no longer the case."

"Female participation in the sport is now at a level where dedicated women's races are demand-

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**REAPING THE REWARDS**  
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– Stella Tay, captain of the Singapore Management University women's dragon boat team

ed. Since DBI was founded in 2010, we have reached out to about 10,000 people through workshops and training programmes. There could actually be more women than men among those 10,000."

So what do women find appealing in dragon boat racing, a demanding sport that sees its exponents spending hours under the unforgiving sun and paddling up to 40 tortuous kilometres a week?

For Stella Tay, captain of the

Singapore Management University (SMU) women's dragon boat team, it is precisely the toughness that appeals to her.

Said the 21-year-old, who started racing five years ago in her Republic Polytechnic days: "I'm someone who loves a good challenge. So when I heard my friends raved about how tough dragon boat racing is, I decided to join the sport and challenge myself."

What started as a challenge soon grew into a passion. Tay has even given up an internship with a prestigious organisation this year, because it clashed with her training schedule with the SMU team.

It is a sacrifice that she feels is worth it. She said: "The sport has given me so much, both mentally and physically. I'm also a lot more disciplined and confident in the things that I do."

Not only are female tertiary students taking to dragon boat in droves, but corporate women are also picking it up.

Two months ago, Judy Ong, 48, vice-president of institutional sales at DBS Vickers, signed up with her company's team, the DBS Asia Dragons, when they were recruiting new women members for the upcoming regatta.

Said the mother of one: "At that time I was looking for an alternative sport which doesn't require too much stress on my knees, which are worn out from

strenuous exercises in the past.

"One gets a very good workout from the training sessions. It also offers good opportunities to build camaraderie among friends and fellow colleagues," she said.

Still, some women are worried that they might become too muscular – and masculine – as they bulk up for the bursts of power required in powering the boat.

Tay had such reservations too, but discovered that her fears were

unfounded.

She said: "Yes, I've grown stronger and darker physically, but I'm happy with how I look."

The sport has come a long way since those men-only days in the early 1980s.

Said DBI director Chen: "Women are starting to realise that dragon boat is a sport that is also meant for them. This will drive the sport forward in a big way."

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## Take your best shot of regatta

THE organisers of the DBS Marina Regatta have launched a unique "Phoneography Awards" in conjunction with the dragon boat races this weekend, and the Bay Festival on May 24 and 25.

Athletes and spectators are encouraged to snap pictures and record video footage of the events and share them on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Vine and Twitter.

Such user-generated content will then be compiled into a video to be unveiled in a ceremony on May 25.

Six "phoneographers" will receive awards for: most vi-

brant shot of the festival, most emotive portrayal of participants, most inclusive shot of social enterprises, most sporting shot of the races, best effects and best Vine video.

Three contributors with the most voted photos via Facebook will also stand to win a degustation dining experience for two worth \$600 at Restaurant Andre.

Interested contributors can upload photos of the DBS Marina Regatta from May 18 to 25 to: Instagram, Vine or Twitter with the hashtag #DBSMarinaRegatta2013, or Facebook app ([goo.gl/3cZnq](http://goo.gl/3cZnq)).

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