

NOUSE TRIES... Octopush

[Adam Philpott](#) puts on his flippers to try Octopush for Nouse

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Image: Lucy Brown

THIS EDITION OF Nouse Tries had me plunging to the depths of the York Sport Village's swimming pool to play Octopush - otherwise known as underwater hockey. It was as quirky and wonderful as it sounds, and just one of many mainstream sports to go underwater.

I was arriving as a complete novice to the sport, but not to the skills the sport involves. I thought going snorkelling a few times on holiday qualified me as a reasonably competent snorkeler. After a quick crash course - involving snorkelling, diving and puck control - with accomplished Octopusher and alumnus athlete Adam (I know, what a coincidence) I was game-ready.

Adam set me up with equipment provided by the club. All I had to do was pull on some bright green swim shorts. It's a limited contact sport, but I soon realised it was more dangerous than I first expected. As well as fins, a mask and snorkel, water polo hats with ear guards are worn to lessen the impact of a fin or elbow to the head, which, with so many players swarming around the puck and constantly coming up and down for air, was a frequent occurrence. Adam also told me that gloves, which the club make themselves during socials using colourful silicone, are also worn on the dominant hand to prevent bloody knuckles when players wrestle for the puck.

Before entering the water, I was told to spit in my mask so it wouldn't cloud up during the game - I had enough handicaps already. However, before I got the chance to put my saliva throwing to the test, Adam

had already comically spat in my mask by accident. I suppose I shouldn't leave you wondering whether I then continued to use that mask. I didn't – back into the bag of masks I went.

Then it was time for the match. On each team there are six players in the water and four subs, with a mix between male and female, students and alumni. The aim was to manoeuvre a 1.2kg lead puck along the pool floor and into the goal (a 3m metal tray) with miniature hockey sticks.

For any side to be successful in a team sport, communication is key; yet, being played underwater, there could be no vocal ear bashings from the manager on the side, or screams from players in space. Octopush instead requires each player to anticipate when to take a deep breath and be at the pool's floor in time to receive a pass or intercept the oncoming congestion. It was a fast and hectic game, with players swarming around the puck like sharks to lonely prey, and it quickly became evident that I was out of my depth.

The others could hold their breath longer, keep up with play even when resurfacing for air, and their puck skills were excellent – as was to be expected. I, however, could be found floundering on the surface of the water, coughing and gasping for air as I yet again failed to fully clear my snorkel of water. Sorry to those I kicked in the head while they passed beneath me in my frantic moment of treading water.

My team were scoring a lot of goals but it's fair to say that I didn't have much of a hand in them. After each goal, teams go back to the opposite ends of the pool and then it's a race to get to the puck first in the middle upon the restart. Or, for me, the restart resembled a welcome moment to catch my breath.

I improved as the game progressed, and started to join the swarm around the puck, but before long I had to resurface for air. It does help to be able to hold your breath underwater for long periods – but the real art to the sport is being able to know when to descend, making the use of oxygen tactical.

Since its foundation in 2006, the club has seen steady growth on campus. Roses 2017 was the first time they competed for points against Lancaster, taking the lot with a convincing win. While they don't compete in BUCS, the club plays in national competitions and are the only university team to compete in the Yorkshire League.

Although tougher than expected, I enjoyed myself, especially due to such friendly company. Well worth a go whatever your ability (I almost drowned). If you fancy taking the plunge, the club recruits members throughout the year and only requires a basic swimming ability to start.

Let's face it, very few will have played the sport (I'd never even heard of it) so it would sound pretty impressive if you brought it up in conversation on your next Tinder date. They also include Finding Nemo quotes in their emails: what more could you want.

Now, time to get that water out of my ears!

If you would like to know more, or if you're interested in Octopush, contact octopush@yusu.co.uk.



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