SAILING STRATEGY

Sailing Club of Washington
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TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

Strategy vs. Tactics
Winning Before the Race Begins
How to diagnose a Race Course
The Start
The First Beat
The Run
Common Rules Situations
Local Knowledge - how to win on the Potomac
Sailing Drills
TACTICS OR STRATEGY- WHAT’S THE DIFFERENCE?

Tactics – boat to boat. Small picture. Use Tactics to execute the strategy

Strategy = the grand plan – Big Picture

Setting a Strategy requires preparation, ability to diagnose a racecourse, understanding the conditions

Tactic = I will win the Pin
Strategy = The left side of the course is favored upwind
Win the Race before it starts!

Habits of the best sailors

**Before the Race**

1. Preparation! – The best sailors are the most prepared
   
   **Best Sailors –**
   
   1. Know the forecast – are not surprised by changes in wind direction and velocity
   2. Have a boat that doesn’t break – they check everything over before each race - all the small things - sails, ring dings, tiller, rudder, trailer,
   3. Know the Rules!
   4. Get to the course early and study the conditions
   5. Take notes after each race day and use them to generate local knowledge

**During the race**

✓ Know the Course
✓ Have GOOD Starts – not necessarily GREAT Starts
✓ Never sail past laylines
✓ Are great to The Crew - keep it fun! - Never yell at the crew!
✓ Know that speed wins races – know helm pressure, know sheet pressure
✓ Have good reasons to tack
✓ Always look to pass and don’t settle
✓ Turn the boat well – tacking, jibing, mark roundings
✓ Rarely if ever sail in bad air!
✓ Make mistakes and remember its just a game – no such thing as a mistake free race

The most important thing to do before a race is …. 
PRACTICE!

Golfers go to the range and hit balls

Basketball Players shoot baskets for hours

Sailors expect to hop in a boat and be great – it doesn’t work that way!

Get out and sail – practice every aspect of the game – even if it’s for just a few minutes before each race day
Knowing the racecourse is essential to developing a good strategy.

1. Current and Water Depth
2. Wind Changes - buildings, trees
3. Flags - spotting wind shifts
4. Get out early and sail the course to see for yourself
5. Develop a Strategy and Inform the Crew before the Race Starts
Understanding Persistent vs. Oscillating Winds

Examples of persistent wind
1. Seabreeze
2. Onshore wind
3. The deeper you go into a side the more/less favored it is
4. Boats on one side always gaining (or losing)
5. Wind on that side looks steadier, water is darker / more wind
OSCILLATING WIND EXAMPLES

1. Offshore wind (on Potomac think NW, W or SW)
2. Patchy wind – puffs rolling down the course
3. Wind after a cold front – mixing puffs
4. Boats are lifted and headed around the course
5. No one side is favored
RULES OF THUMB FOR OSCILLATING WIND

✓ Always Sail the Longer Tack First
✓ Tack on the headers
✓ Sail the lifts
✓ Don’t allow boats to cross you – leebow and lead to the next shift
✓ Approx 2/3 up beat Look for the last shift as you get to the windward mark
✓ Treat it as a persistent shift – sail to it
✓ In light air – sail to the higher velocity
RULES OF THUMB FOR PERSISTENT SHIFT

✓ Sail shorter tack first
✓ Allow boats to cross or duck boats in order to Sail to the shift
✓ Sail to the boats that are lifted – sail the header
DIAGNOSE A FIRST BEAT

What's the favored side?
What to look for on the beat
What's more important - Current, or wind shifts

Current - look for current relief
If no current or negligible current then Wind Shifts are more important
THE START – KNOW THE FAVORED END

How to find Favored end
1. Head to wind method
2. Mainsheet method
3. Buddy Method
HEAD TO WIND METHOD

In the center of the starting line point your bow directly into the wind - boom in the center of the boat.

The Bow will point to one side of the line or the other - the side it points to is the favored end. If the line is square the bow won’t point to either side.
Mainsheet Method

Sail from the Pin end to the boat end and see where your mainsheet is set.
Then sail from the boat end to the pin end to see where the mainsheet is set.
If the mainsail is trimmed in more going from boat to pin then the pin is favored since it is upwind.
Buddy Method

Have another boat start at the pin on port at the same time you start at the Committee Boat on Starboard. Whomever crosses will tell you what the favored end of the line is.
WE FOUND THE FAVORED END! NOW WHAT?

The KISS Approach to Starts

Keep it simple st____!

1. Favored end (Find before start)
2. On line (Line Sight)
3. Full Speed (Sail Trim and Timing) – Vanderbilt Start
4. Going in the right direction (Current or Wind Shifts)
5. Ability to Tack on the First Wind Shift
6. Looking for a good start – you don’t need to win the start to win the race
7. Right favored? Start right side of line
HOW TO KNOW IF YOU ARE ON THE LINE

Perform a Line Sight

Avoid Mid Start Line Sag
Line Sight
Risk vs. Reward of Start
Understand fleet dynamics on the line

1. Typically RC will favor pin
2. Diagram below – green is good, yellow ok, red is bad
THE START BOILS DOWN TO THIS ....

The boat or mark to windward of you (3)
The boat or mark to leeward of you (2)

Have a hole to leeward if you want to stay on starboard
HAVE A HOLE TO WINDWARD ABILITY TO TACK IMMEDIATELY IF YOU WANT TO GO LEFT OR START IN A HEADER
GOALS FOR IMPROVING YOUR STARTS?

1. Consistency
2. Focus on the little issues that make or break your starts
3. Get comfortable with a start
4. Avoid big risk - i.e. late at the boat
PORT OR STARBOARD APPROACH – WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU

1. Starboard approach
2. Port approach
3. Do you prefer to find a spot and defend? Take a spot?
4. Vision on the line - Port or Starboard - what’s easier?
Common Starting Mistakes

Over Early
Wrong End
Bad Air (Losing your lane) - too close to the boat to leeward
Not on the line
Misjudging the Current

The cure for these is to practice more!
First Beat Strategy

Sail to the favored Side if there is current/ persistent shift
Sail in Phase with the wind in Oscillating Shifts

Avoid Corners
Avoid Port Tack Layline

Sail in Clear Air at all times (know the wind shadow!)
Common Starting Line Rules Situations

Windward Leeward – distance between boats on line and time of overlap
Wind shadow extends 8-10 boatlengths. It's not stationary when the boat giving bad air isn’t stationary.
Common Pitfalls on First Beat

1. Recovery from a bad start - Do you stick to plan or try to go for a lucky shift

2. Sailing in Bad air

3. Chasing Puffs - (Out of Phase)

4. Coming to the Windward mark on Port Tack Layline

5. Fouling a Starboard boat
Downwind Strategy

1. Sail the headers (less windshifts than upwind)
2. Sail in clear air (jibing angles bring boats closer than tacking angles)
3. Sail the Rhumb line on reaches and cross current
4. Take wind pressure to the mark
5. Up in the lulls down in the puffs
6. Look for wind pressure
Jibe or Bear Away?

Remember the Windshift at the mark

If you rounded in a lift on starboard - Jibe

If you rounded in a header then stay on that Jibe
Mark Rounding Strategy

✓ Fastest rounding
✓ Tactical rounding
✓ Know the side you want to go to
✓ Know where the next mark is!
✓ If you want to stay on the same tack – slow up
✓ And let the boat in front get a lead so you don’t get pinched off
Rule Situation - Room to Tack at an Obstruction

Green has two replies:
1. Tack
2. Say “You Tack”
Room to Tack at an Obstruction

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Once Yellow Asks for Room to Tack they cannot then Duck Red

If Yellow decided to Duck Red they would have to give Green room to do so as well
Room to Tack at an Obstruction

Green has two replies
1. Tack
2. Say “You Tack”

If Green Tacks right away and there is contact with Yellow - Yellow is wrong
If Green Says “You Tack” and then Yellow Tacks and there is contact Green is wrong
Rules at Windward Mark

Mark Room

Tacking at a Mark
GOOD DRILLS

Sharks (port approach) and Minnows (starboard approach)
RABBIT START

Theoretically everyone starts evenly – good way to see who is faster
How to win on the Potomac

Sailing in Lagoon
NW Wind
W Wind
SW Wind
S Wind
SE Wind
E Wind
NE Wind
N Wind
Racing in the River

Current Locations - Channels

Favored Sides in Each Wind Direction
Best Drills for a boathandling?

Continually circle a mark! Use weight and sails to turn
Questions?

Email me with rules or Sailing Questions

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