

2013 Fall Dinghyfest

David Hoye and I had a conversation about sailing in the MC fleet before the weekend, and my biggest piece of advice was to avoid taking a "digger"-if executed properly, everything would then work itself out and you he would find himself in a good position. Sounds easy right! This is my goal going into every regatta.

To be successful you need to anticipate what the fleet is going to do and "manage" things from there. For example, at RCYC in breeze right of 180, I know that most people like to play the right side of the course, couple this with a boat-end favored start and I can pretty well tell you that it's going to be a sh*t storm by the boat and only one or two people will get off safely.....in cases like this, you'll typically find me starting to leeward of the boat pack, but far enough away to avoid getting caught up in the chaos. In an oscillating breeze you'll almost always find me starting in the middle of the line, even if one end is slightly favored-if it's heavily favored in an oscillating breeze I may shift towards the favored end, but just a little bit. With this conservative approach I rarely win a start or end up in first right away, but most importantly I'm rarely in the back trying to find a clear lane.

Race 1-Wind was SW (right of 180) @ 8-10knts. Usually this direction you have to pick a side to stick with-most people like the right side, but there is usually a big lefty to "save" the guys who hung it out on the left. I found this race to be a bit unique as it was a truly oscillating breeze and I think those who played the shifts rather than shooting to a side made out best here. I found myself eating too many headers and was disappointed in myself for not picking up on this trend. Get out to the racecourse early and figure out what the trend is.

Race 2-Same breeze as above, but maybe a little lighter. This was a typical SW breeze. You needed to be on a side. The right side was the safest bet, but I was able to squeeze myself out of the left to round the top mark first. On the second beat Doug and I rode a nice lift out to the right, then basically single tacked back when we got headed.....we had nice separation from the rest of the fleet. I still cannot figure out why the fleet tacked off a 20deg port tack lift when rounding the leeward mark?? If you are pinched off after rounding the leeward mark while on a lift, just take a clearing tack, don't just stay there. This requires a decision to be made before you execute your first tack off port-if you wait until you are on starboard to decide if you are going to tack back on to port, you will almost always second guess yourself, and you will find yourself eating a header for too long.

Race 3 (Sunday)- I had a great start at the boat 1/3 of the line and had a nice lead on the first two legs. The forecast I saw was for the breeze to trend to the right, but Jeff Grinnan and others were able to make the left work upwind and downwind to close the gap. Billy Draheim showed the power of separation and staying in the breeze on the downwind and made big gains.....I think there is a lot to be learned from this point. I've said this before, but one thing I have noticed about the MC fleet is that we seem to be more concerned with each other than doing what's right on the race course. If you are confident in your decision making process sometimes it is worth separating from the pack so you can play the shifts and the puffs the way you want to. If you are stuck in the pack, your options are limited.

Race 4. I did not like this race so I'll leave it to someone else. Lesson learned-don't ever do what I recommend in above (Race 3) when you are winning the race.....play the odds and stay between the competition and the finish line, duh!

Race 5 Dying breeze. You had to keep your head out of the boat and look upwind. There were two different breezes on the course-far left corner and far right corner. As it turned out they both worked equally well, as both sides arrived at the weather mark at the same time. Those who tried to work their way up the middle paid dearly. In dying breeze, get your head out of the boat.

Parting words. Avoid taking the big digger right from the start (start conservatively), and try to have a plan at every mark rounding. If you watch the guys in the front, they always know exactly what they are going to do when they round a mark, you'll almost never see them looking back to see what the other guy is doing before they make a move.....be proactive, not reactive.

Congrat's to Billy Draheim!

Kenny Wolfe