

## MC Midwinters 2018 Regatta Recap



The 2018 MC Midwinters held at Lake Eustis Sailing Club is a wrap. The MC class has been a strong national class for many years and this year's participation was no exception with 57 boats on the line. The fleet enjoyed the entire spectrum of wind conditions from the bottom end all the way to the top (steady 20 mph or gusts at 23 mph).

Lake Eustis is similar to other Scow venues. It is about 4 miles in diameter and more or less a round lake. These venues, not being particularly large, always provide good wind shift conditions.

The first day was the 'breeze' day. The key to the first day was the ability to be comfortable in the boat at the high end of the wind range and having the fitness to tack, gybe, and change gears.

The best way to get comfortable with the boat in those breezy conditions is to spend time on the water when conditions are at, or better yet, above the class maximums. We are fortunate in TX that we get chances to sail in big breeze as strong winds blow down from the plains quite often. Our year-round calendar also gives many opportunities to sail in these breeze-on conditions. The fitness part is self-explanatory. You don't need me to tell you how to be fit but if you don't work on fitness, you will not be able to sail at your full potential when the breeze is on. To be fair, in the MC class you can add crew when the breeze comes on and I always have my steady and accomplished crew (Mary Anne) when the wind is up. Our combined weight of around 280 lbs gives us an advantage over a lot of the other teams. A good number of the MC sailors take advantage of the ability to take on crew. Additionally, there are a lot of 230 lb-plus single-handed sailors in the class and they have the ability to sail well in a breeze. If you're a smaller single-handed sailor, you might consider taking on a crew for the higher wind ranges.

Mary Anne and I stretched out a pretty good lead after the first day with a 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup>. I attribute a lot of that to the fact that we were comfortable in the boat and were able to focus our efforts on being sharp tactically. In race 2, a number of competitors tacked on the downwind leg instead of gybing. I don't blame them because the wind really kicked up. Again, spending time in max conditions back at home will get you comfortable gybing in those conditions.

Day 2 was the absolute other end of the spectrum. The first race was 6-7 at the start but died to the point where it had to be abandoned. The second race got off and was 5-6 and it was obvious the breeze was dying so the RC smartly shortened at the second weather mark. At the low end of the wind velocity the wind pressure becomes super, super important. Certainly, shifts still matter but what's most important is the velocity. It's really not hard to figure out where the velocity is but it is hard to have the discipline to look for it. While sailing upwind, you're crunched down on the low side of the boat but you have to take the time to stand up in your boat and look way upwind beyond the weather mark to look for the dark water. I try to look a mile beyond the weather or towards the weather shore, whichever comes first. If you do that enough, you will have a pretty predictable roadmap of where you want to go upwind. Most people do not stand up and look around enough to develop that roadmap.

Finding velocity downwind is even easier. It demands the same discipline in that you have to turn around and look at the boats and wind velocity behind you. It should be quite obvious to anyone which boats are moving faster or slower. Those telltales (i.e. other boats) will show where the wind is in relation to other boats. The combo of the dark water and other boats will help you find the best velocity for your downwind roadmap.

On the downwind leg, there were 10-12 of us in close proximity but 2/3 down the leg, only 4 were left because we successfully managed connecting the velocity dots downwind. That turned the race into a 4-boat race. I was third that race and by the end of the day we had a 16-point lead on the second-place boat.

Winds were predicted to be light for the final day of the regatta but actually built throughout the day. I sailed by myself the first race and was way overpowered more than half the race. I made a serious mistake at the start of the first race. The winds were predicted to be SE and had been for most of the hour or so before the start. About 6 minutes before the start the breeze shifted about 40 degrees to the right. I kept gazing upwind and saw more pressure from the right-hand side of the course for the entire pre-race. The mistake I made was being over-confident about that side of the course and setting myself up for a huge potential problem if the wind went back left. In addition to starting right near the boat end, I tacked on the first small starboard header and ducked the boats right next to me. About a minute into the race, the wind went 20 degrees left. That left shift remained for at least 3/4 of the first beat. I got nervous and made the second huge mistake. I tacked off of a port lift to get to the left side where I thought the left pressure and port lift were going to hold. By the time I got to the left, the boats I crossed behind on the big port lift to get there were now on the right side of the course and enjoying a huge starboard lift. I rounded the weather mark in the 30s, eventually finished 19<sup>th</sup> and gave up the lead we had in the regatta.

An even bigger than missing the first two shifts was making myself vulnerable by tacking away from the fleet and putting myself in the position of a port lift putting me so far behind. To win races, a lot of the time you have to be confident and have conviction of where you want to go on the race course and sometimes I am confident to a fault in heading in a direction that I think will work out. That mindset contributed to us building a substantial lead after 3 races but with a 16 point lead I didn't need to win races, I just needed to not let a big number happen. If I had sailed more conservatively that big number would have been less likely.

Mary Anne and I sailed the last race and that turned out to be the right call. The breeze was on and we had the sense it was going to be a good race for us. We didn't know the exact points of the top finishers and thought we were a point or two behind Rob Seidelmann and weren't sure where others were in the regatta. The right side was way up and this time we were confident in starting next to the boat and sailing on the starboard lift off the line taking advantage of sailing on the lifted tack towards the center of the race course. Our tactical plan changed when we saw Rob take our transom on port tack so we decided to tack over to port to make sure we stayed ahead of him. We were first for most of the race and Rob was in second. Although we didn't know the exact points, our tactical decision was to go where Rob went. Up the final beat, the wind shut off where Rob and we were and the left side came in. We were 3<sup>rd</sup>, Rob was 5<sup>th</sup>. Scott Herestad won the race but we didn't know who it was until we got to the dock (he was that far ahead). When we pulled into the dock, our thought was Scott might be ahead of us now. After the scores were posted, there was a three-way tie between us, Scott, and Rob. We won the tiebreaker, Scott was second, and Rob third. A nail biter for sure!

The Nationals will be at Pewaukee Yacht Club August 23-26. There's plenty of time to sail in max conditions to build comfort, work on fitness, and practice looking for the velocity. Rumor has it there will be upwards of 120 boats so hopefully you are one of them – see you there!

--Bill Draheim