

#### Week 4: Words From The New Force To Be Reckoned With

Sunday was not a steady day by any measure, the breeze, current, and even wave direction all seemed to oscillate unpredictably throughout the day.

Race 1 saw the breeze completely shut off for the start, which meant anyone not on the line with a minute to go was never going to get there. When it did come back, accelerating faster than the boat next to you could quickly turn into a 50 yard gain. In the light air, I expected the current coming down the course be a big factor, and headed left for shallower water. Tacking on the rediculously frequent shifts felt fast and seemed to be the right call until a few boats on the right (particularly Bill Dickey) taught us that the breeze would be far more important than the current on this day.

Over the next few beats, the mark had to be shifted several times and some others were able to take advantage of the large shifts before the breeze settled in. In race 4, Britt Hughes took advantage of a great shift and puff on the right on the first beat and cruised around the course to victory.

Starts were crowded, but the line was square, so priority was to get away from congestion and get off the line with clean air and speed - avoiding crowded ends and setting up with 45-60 seconds to go became important. With only a couple shifts per beat, I spent most of my time focusing on boat speed and tried to avoid getting too far out to either side of the course.

In race 3, I set up a little late and stole Andrew Scrivan's hole. I managed to squeeze him out and half way up the beat he looked to still be stuck in dirty air and falling back. I had a great beat but by the time I got to the mark Andrew had room on me. I couldn't believe it. He did a great job of showing that sticking to the shifts always more important than going to a corner in search of the freshest breeze (he ended up passing me on the run and won the race - no surprises there). In Race 5, Andrew and I were fighting so hard on the final beat that neither of us saw the last shift or the favored end and Charles Stanley embarrassed us both by cruising across the line to a win when we had both rounded with a nice gap behind us - again, keeping your head out of the boat upwind paid off.

Both the vang and the cunningham were kept on the windward side on both tacks and both adjusted frequently. I am lighter than I used to be and compensate by using extra vang to keep the boat under control. Keep adding vang until it's maxed and then play the mainsheet to keep the boat flat and the bow down. As soon as full hiking is not necessary, ease vang to power back up and keep the legs burning. If you want to see a good example of keeping the bow down, try to keep up with Blake Marriner in a puff. Even if you (like me) aren't as strong as him and have to depower and sheet out, keeping the bow down down and your weight half way back in the cockpit keeps you moving - as opposed to pinching in the puffs, which stalls you out.

Downwind is always frustrating in light air, particularly with the big waves we had rolling in from the sound. The first few runs it felt like the boat was in reverse because

the waves were going by so fast. Once the breeze started coming up, however, the waves became lots of fun. They seemed biggest on the left side of the run so I would immediately try to get out there after rounding (unless there was a pack right behind me, then I would give a little more room for clean air before crossing over). Get a clean lane and then head completely in the boat and on the waves until around 3/4 of the way down the leg.

I solidified my belief about downwind sailing by turning in the opposite direction of my instinct on every wave. My life has been spent reinforcing the bad habit of trying to head up for speed, which works in many boats, but certainly not in lasers. You have to turn down to accelerate and (more importantly) to have the boat really pointed down the wave. In the last two races, when the breeze was up enough for good surfing, I would turn down and ease so hard that I practically had to hike to leeward to keep from wiping out. A few close calls caused me to teach myself and nearby boats some interesting new words. Once on the wave, it was hang on for your hat while you head up and trim in (thus avoiding crashing into the wave in front. Somebody did not take this advice as I found a Michigan hat floating in the water). The waves were large enough to allow a second and sometimes even third turn back down in order to stay on the wave longer.

It's always more fun to sail in building breeze and waves and Sunday was a great example of a beautiful day for laser racing - the turnout proved this as it was the best I've seen so far at Cedar Point. Thank you everyone (especially race committee for doing a fantastic job of keeping up with the shifts, I was thoroughly impressed) for making it such a fun day.

Please feel free to contact me with questions about anything I have written or if you know the code to the office so we can get the beer the next time it gets locked in there after racing.

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