

Week 8 - Be Careful What You Wish For - Blake Marriner, Sarah Hatsell, Paul Craine – 12/3/2008

Two weeks ago, doing RC duty during the Fall Regatta, I was so envious of everyone sailing, as the wind and waves were the type that I enjoy. I silently wished we might get something similar before the fall season ended. Fast forward to Sunday – wish granted and then some.. With a solid, building breeze from the east, the waves kept building and stacking up during the day, to the point where in race 5, I found myself in a few sets that were more than I was looking for to play in and bailed out, looking for smaller waves to ride. By the end of race 5, I was spent and was headed in regardless if there was another race or not. Amnon Gitelson, the PRO for the day, mercifully sent us in after race 5.

My game plan for the day was to focus on boat handling, thinking that my weight would provide an edge upwind. Tim Millhiser had other thoughts though and found the right combo of vang and sheet upwind to provide more than I could handle and had me working harder than I wanted and searching for the right settings myself. I ended up with less vang tension and more sheet ease than I would normally use in that wind strength, which seemed to make the groove wider upwind, and easier to steer around the waves. The times when I cranked on more vang, my pointing ability was compromised and could never generate enough speed thru the water to make up for it.

Offwind, the waves were skewed about 20 degrees from the wind direction, which made the runs challenging. Jibing onto port in the first two races was easier to sail, but slower, while staying on starboard meant you spent a fair time sailing by the lee, with the waves hitting you on the port quarter. You had to be quick to adjust your weight to the leeward side to avoid the wave pushing you into a deathroll. But it was fast. Keeping some vang tension on and more daggerboard down than usual really helped calm the boat down.

I had the pleasure of watching Sarah Hatsell do a beautiful job in the Radials. Everytime I saw her, I thought her sail trim was spot on, the boat looked perfectly balanced and she looked in total control. I asked her to provide her thoughts on sailing in those conditions and she kindly agreed, here are her words of wisdom:

"Not sure whether I was doing anything special, I think when it is windy self preservation kicks in due to my lack of strength and fitness I can't capsize and go swimming more than a couple of times and keep sailing. I am not sure I am superfast in wind but I think that I am good at keeping the pointy end up so I will try and give some tips on that which might be helpful to people.

Upwind I was using as much vang and cunningham as I could pull on (which might be not as much as someone stronger than me could do) but I left the outhaul a little loose to give me some depth in the sail lower down to get some power through the waves. I was definitely lacking in some speed to the couple of heavier guys in the fleet out there on Sunday, if I went to the gym and could hike a little harder I could probably have reduced this deficit a bit.

Coming up to the windward mark I tried to ease the vang and blow the cunningham to make bearing off a little easier and at times I would even let the sail flap a bit and let the boat head down itself rather than fight it with the rudder or risk it bearing off to fast and capsizing to windward. Riding the waves when you could downwind meant you could gain a ridiculous amount of ground, especially on the first leg of the reach of the triangle. Steering to avoid running into the next wave and filling up your boat was a challenge this Sunday as the waves seemed close together and steep to me, someone has told me before to look for the low spot and always try and head for that, it seemed to work most of the time apart from when I tried to imitate a submarine in the last race. I am not sure about this weekend as it was tough for me to study a lot of other boats, but in the past I have noticed that a lot of people who are having trouble

and are capsizing to windward lot on the runs have eased the vang a lot more than I would do in windy weather. This is fast in light wind but makes the boat a lot more unstable due to the twist it induces at the top of the sail when a puff hits, though it is a balance as too much vang will result in you rounding up to windward with a puff so try and I would try to imitate other who look stable.

I am not sure what else to add though as I think a lot of it is practice, I have only just got used to the waves after 6 years of frostbiting, being a lake sailor before that I have felt more at ease sailing inside in the super shifty puffy stuff. "

Last but not least, Paul Craine, who was also on RC, in the crash boat had some very good observations, which may help everyone, especially those that find themselves switching from racing mode to just surviving.

1. The shockcord for your centerboard should be lead thru something at the deck blocks under the vang to keep the centerboard from completely falling out when the boat is turtled. This also prevents the shock cord from getting caught in the vang when you jibe. I'd also recommend using 3/16" or 1/4" (I can't remember what I have) shock cord to get enough tension to keep the board in.
2. If you turtle and your board can't be reached, use your foot to get it back up a bit. I'm not a big fan of telling someone to dive under their boat in cold water and waves to go get their board back up.
3. If you capsize or turtle, right the boat so you are on the windward side. There is almost always enough water where we sail to fully bring it up the other direction so it doesn't flip right over on top of you. It takes much less energy to do once, than climbing on the centerboard twice when you are cold and tired.
4. If you are having trouble getting the boat upright, make sure your vang is eased and you main is uncleated.
5. Your sail must have a method of quick release if you ever want to be towed or if you are trying to land downwind on the beach or ramp when it's cold and windy. First choice for safety is the quick release clew sleeve. It works great. The second option is to not, tie a knot, in your traveler to form a fixed loop. Then when needed, ease of your vang and uncleat the traveler and take out your traveler line and let the boom/mainsheet/traveler blocks luff in front of the boat.
6. Make sure you use a piece of shock cord to keep the upper vang key in the boom. Tape also works, but won't stick when it's raining out. Getting your vang back in isn't something you want to be doing on the water.
7. Survival mode going downwind is anytime your goal goes from trying to pass the guy in front of you, to staying upright, to stay ahead of the guys behind you. I would recommend the following to keep the boat under control when you are not. 1. Keep the board down all the way. It's more stable and lessens the chances of it falling all the way out when you turtle. 2. Keep the outhaul and the cunningham very tight. 4. Tighten the hiking strap to keep a better grip on the boat with you legs/feet. 3. Ease the vang off pretty far, so the boom is well above 90 degrees to the mast and over sheet the main. 4. Make sure your main sheet is tied with a bowline to the end of you hiking strap and tie it shorter than normal (you can then drop it when getting your weight over the rail as you are bearing off further to prevent a deathroll and the sail will be about 90degrees). These settings will let you steer in waves, keep the boom out of the water and the excessive twist will keep you from being overpowered.
8. Realize your limits. I was very surprised to see a number of people keep trying to continue racing when, in my opinion should have not been out there. Its one thing to get some experience in the condition that we don't see very often, but it's another to keep pressing your luck and risk your life or others trying to help you.