



Supporting the Competitive Experience

Rob Fox, Fall 2011

Supporting the Competitive Experience – Evaluation Criteria
Ability to place regatta correctly into yearly training perspective
Ability to identify competition-specific factors that affect performance at regattas
Ability to communicate procedures to prepare (mentally) for a competition
Ability to facilitate logistics and support to attend regattas
Recognizes need for athletes to perform on their own terms, and the coach's role to support this process during competition
Ability to focus athletes on specific goals at competitions, focusing on tasks and not results to build athlete confidence
Ability to run a simplified race day schedule
Ability to position coach boat correctly on race course for optimal viewing, following Sailing Instructions, reducing wake for competitors, and driving through traffic in a safe manner
Ability to behave in a controlled manner, respecting athletes, officials and opponents
Ability to time manage support on-water
Uses interventions when appropriate to improve performance
Ability to implement appropriate recovery strategies
Ability to assist athletes with protest and redress situations
Ability to troubleshoot and adapt as needed at competitions
Ability to debrief regatta and communicate use of regatta as a basis to further improvement with athletes

Coaching at regattas is significantly different than coaching during training – there is less time, the venue may be unfamiliar, coaches aren't allowed to interact with athletes during racing, there is more on-water traffic, and there is more pressure. But is it ever exciting!

Regattas offer athletes the opportunity to test everything they have learned in training in the competitive environment. As regattas are the athlete's time to shine, the coaches' job is to simply provide the support needed to let the athlete test themselves on their own terms without getting in the way.

This module will cover three areas:

- Preparing for a regatta
- How to coach at regattas

- Using regattas as a basis for further training improvements with athletes

By the end of this module, coaches will be able to facilitate successful regatta experiences for their athletes that test their skills, build their confidence, and provide a foundation for further training.

Preparing for a Regatta

Much of the preparation for a regatta is done well beforehand during training in the Preparation Period. However previous to and during the Pre-Competition Phase there are a few things the coach can do to prepare specifically for the regatta, which are covered in this section:

- Placing the regatta into perspective with your athletes
- Identifying competition-specific factors that affect regatta performance
- Mental preparation for regattas

Facilitating logistics with your Support Team is another important part of pre-regatta preparation, and is covered in the Program Design and Management module.

Placing the Regatta into Perspective

If you have properly designed your YTP, putting each competition into perspective should be easy. There will be one Peak event that your athlete is ramping up for (two on double-periodization programs), and all other events are actually training opportunities for this Peak event. Using a school analogy, think of the Peak event as the “exam” with the lead up events as the “quizzes”.

Naturally this analogy helps put the training events in perspective, but what about the Peak event? Where does it fit in the grand scheme? How can we as coaches put the Peak Event into perspective for our athletes?

When putting Peak events into perspective it helps athletes and everyone else to understand that:

- Sport is all about bringing your best effort to meet the challenge – the Peak event is a special opportunity for the athlete to test the skills and character they have built for themselves over the season against the goals they set for themselves at the beginning of the season.
- Zooming out to get the bigger picture, the Peak event of the season will be one of several steps the athlete will take in their sailing career (particularly true at the Youth level).
- Zooming out even more, the relationships made, personal lessons learned, tangible and intangible skills athletes learn throughout a season culminating in a Peak event are an important part of what shapes the athlete as a person, and undoubtedly continue to reward the athlete in many ways throughout their life.

This last point underlines the importance for the coach to emphasize the holistic development of the athlete as a person. A balanced perspective of where sailing (and a sailing regatta) fits into the greater context of their life helps athletes appreciate Peak competitions and the benefits their sailing career will have on their greater life.

Identifying Competition-Specific Factors that Affect Regatta Performance

There are several specific factors to each individual competition that will affect athlete performance and include among others:

Competition-Specific Factor	Affect on Performance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Geography and local conditions of race course ● Weather, humidity, and time of year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Race course strategy ○ Clothing selection and hydration/recovery techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Fleet size and level of competition ● Venue particulars (i.e distance from hotel, access to facilities, launching, etc) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tactical considerations ○ Logistical considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Importance of competition ● Duration of competition, distance of travel, physical demands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Mental Preparation considerations ○ Physical preparation, time zone corrections, and recovery techniques
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Profile of event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Media considerations, distraction control

This list can very easily be much longer. As a coach it's your job to work with the athletes to prepare expectations for each specific event in advance of the competition and the first race.

Mental Preparation for Regattas

Mental preparation is an important part of preparing for a competition. Coaches can help athletes Mentally Prepare for regattas through several forms:

- Help your athletes put regattas in perspective (as above)
- Help your athletes identify competition-specific factors that affect their performance (as above)
- Set appropriate Performance (result-based) and Training (skill-based) Objectives with your athletes, helping them focus on the Training Objectives.
Develop a Focus Plan with your athletes. Focus plans help athletes reflect on how they currently react in competition situations, and help them work through a process to get them to focus better in those situations.
- Help athletes understand potential distractions at competitions and identify and potential solutions for dealing with distractions. Refer to your NCCP module "Psychology of Performance" for more detail on distraction control techniques.
- Help athletes use visualization (of expected regatta situations, execution of training objectives, control of distractions, and needed competition-specific performance factors in particular) to create a greater sense of comfort and familiarity for upcoming competitions. Refer to your NCCP module "Psychology of Performance" for more detail on visualization techniques.

How to Coach at Regattas

There are several differences between coaching training and coaching a regatta and as a result the coach needs to adapt accordingly. This section will cover:

- Focus priorities at regattas
- How to manage time at regattas
- Accepted coach and coach boat behaviours
- Recovery strategies
- Protest and Redress situations

Focus Priorities at Regattas

Regattas are a time to simplify, not make things more complicated. Remember that at most Youth level regattas, your athlete's success will primarily come from being prepared, good boat speed, a good start, sailing in clean air, and clean boat handling in heavier winds.

Adjust your coaching priorities and goal setting accordingly, paying most attention to making sure your athletes are prepared enough to be on the race course area a half hour before the first start.

It will be common for inexperienced racers to have poor time management, lose or forget important equipment, incorrectly re-rig their boat after transport, or not be familiar with standard RC signals and procedures. As a result, your main priorities as a coach should be:

- 1) To let athletes and parents know a FIRM schedule (encourage them to be early)
- 2) To run through the Sailing Instructions with your athletes the day before the regatta – when they are calm enough to pay attention – paying particular attention to course configurations and RC signals.
- 3) To get your athletes rigged and preferably out on the water at the venue the day before the regatta so the coach can supervise testing and adjusting of equipment after transportation.
- 4) To make sure all your equipment is ready to go the day before the regatta (including coach boat gas!)

Your secondary priority is to make sure each athlete is focusing on one, maximum two process goals each day. Focus on skill-based process goals, not results.

Managing Time at Regattas

You will have far less time at regattas than in training, and you may not necessarily control much of the time you do have. Best practices for managing time at regattas are as follows:

- Set a simple, clear and firm schedule with your athletes and Support Team for the following day.
- Have all your equipment and the athletes' equipment (including repairs), as well as food and water, ready to go for the next day before you go to bed. This will save everyone valuable time the next day and will help keep everyone relaxed.
- If unable to get everything ready the night before, have a plan to get it done in good time the next morning, potentially using Support Team members who have extra time on their hands.
- Meeting locations and times should be arranged beforehand and a system for last-minute communications should be set up.
- Briefings are ideally after the morning coaches meeting and should be kept short and relevant so the athletes can focus on being on time for the start.
- Let your athletes know where they can find you on the water (pick a spot you will stick to so they don't have to waste time looking – i.e. near the boat end of the start line), and where athletes and Support Team can find you on land.
- Have your Team launch together to avoid wasting time looking for them on-water.
- Have a system worked out with your athletes for how they can approach the coach boat if another athlete is rafted up alongside.
- Keep on-water feedback short and precise to maximize limited time and keep athletes focused on the present. Feedback items ideally should relate to your athlete's pre-regatta goals.
- Avoid speeding between racecourses to support different athletes – it wastes time and you are unlikely to observe much racing. When possible, share athletes with another coach to minimize

travel between courses, or arrange with your athletes to be on one course one day, and the other course the next.

- With respect to debriefs, be flexible and adaptable with time requirements of the athletes depending on how the day unfolds (i.e. long days need shorter debriefs, a protest hearing may cancel a debrief, last day of the regatta it may be better to just load the trailers).

Coach and Coach Boat Behaviours

Needless to say, all coaches must have the ability to behave in a controlled manner, respecting all athletes, officials and opponents.

Coaches also need to carefully read the Racing Rules of Sailing and Sailing Instructions and attend Coach Meetings/Briefings to understand procedures and limitations put on coaches during competition.

Standard expectations of coaches are as follows:

- Unless otherwise stated, the Fundamental Rules state that no competitor shall receive outside help while racing. Any coach support is considered outside help. Racing is defined as the time between the Preparatory signal in the starting sequence to when the competitor crosses the finish line.
- Unless otherwise stated, coaches are expected to clear of the race course area, usually by 100m. Some regattas permit coaches to follow behind competitors up the first beat as long as they don't interfere. When in doubt, ask to clarify racecourse restrictions, or steer clear during racing.
- Coaches are expected to have no impact on the racing or race course conditions. This primarily means staying well clear of any fleets on yours or another racecourse. It also means coaches need to be aware of the wake they generate as they follow the race (particularly on light wind days).
- Between races when there are lots of boats milling around, keep your speed down, keep alert and drive safely.

Recovery Strategies

Recovery is so important that many banned substances and techniques (i.e. steroids, HGH, blood doping) were designed specifically for recovery at the highest levels of sport performance – at great risk for getting caught cheating to their users!

We certainly do not encourage the use of banned substances for recovery, we simply want to emphasize how important recovery is to your athlete's performance, and how little attention sailing coaches have given to proper recovery techniques. Your NCCP module "*Prevention and Recovery*", and the Sport Science module of the Development Coach Program should be consulted for more details on proper recovery for your athletes. Warm-ups, cool-downs, hydration, nutrition, sleep and rest are all important parts of in-regatta recovery that are covered in these two resources. Sleep and

After the competition: Because being on the road is so hard on athlete (and coach) physical and mental recovery, the Development Coach Program again underlines the importance of not scheduling back-to-back-to-back competitions in your Team's YTP. After a regatta, athletes need time off to reflect and recuperate, and a gradual increase of training volume and intensity once they return to the training environment. This takes time and is important for recovery, injury prevention, avoiding burnout, positive and enthusiastic states of mind, all of which is difficult to do with multiple back-to-back events.

Coaches are recommended to review their NCCP “Prevention and Recovery” manuals and the “Sport Science” Module of the Development Coach Program for more detailed recovery information.

Protest and Redress Situations

On occasion, athletes will find themselves in protest room situations, or needed to make a scoring inquiry or apply for redress. Coaches should become familiar with these processes and be ready to be present for the athlete during this initially stressful experience (debriefs and other plans may have to be rescheduled).

It is a good idea to have a CYA jury member as a guest expert to work through protest procedures and situations with the Team during training, and a local jury person can be an excellent source of help if they know in advance you may be requesting their advice via telephone during the regatta.

Coaches may request and be permitted entry to protest hearings as an outside observer, on condition that they do not speak during the hearing, nor coach their athlete through the protest during jury deliberations. This is an excellent way to get protest room experience.

Regardless of the outcome, coaches need to set the example for ethical behavior and fair play, discouraging all forms of bending the truth and encouraging respect for the jury and other competitor in the protest room.

Coaches also need to be aware that protests need to be filed within the time limit to be legal, and promptly to be heard earlier rather than later. Because protests can drag out over time, coaches need to be aware that recovery still needs to take place for your athlete, while other team members can provide support by de-rigging the protesting/contested athlete’s boat and otherwise helping them prepare for the next day.

After the protest or redress hearing has concluded, coaches may have to help athletes put the protest/redress situation behind them to promote recovery and prepare for the following day.

Before leaving the regatta venue for the evening, coaches should make it a habit to check the jury board for protests and the notice board for changes in the next days’ schedule.

Using regattas as a basis for further training improvements with athletes

Post-regatta, coaches have two primary aims: 1) to ensure an adequate physical and mental recovery for athletes and; 2) to debrief the regatta to assess the success of pre-regatta goals and create new goals for training.

Physical and mental recovery was touched on in the “recovery” section above – more information can be found in the NCCP “Prevention and Recovery” manual.

Debriefing the regatta can happen at the competition site, but if possible is recommended to take place with the Team and the individual upon returning to the home training venue, to allow athletes time to reflect on their experience. Regatta debriefs should focus on pre-regatta goals set by the athletes themselves and should encourage athletes to take greater ownership in providing ideas and solutions to

training and regattas moving forward. Coaches need to facilitate this debrief, and help athletes frame their regatta experience in a way that helps them see their skill progression and builds their confidence.

Other possible areas for investigation during the debrief could include:

- Taking a look at the effectiveness of training and preparation leading up to the event and the YTP
- Analysing how the Team operated together at the event (time management, communication, mutual support)
- Identifying specific technical strengths and weaknesses and how to work on them
- Analysing the competition venue and format for lessons learned and experiences gained
- Reflecting on specific mental or physical preparations prior to the event, and recovery techniques used during and after the event
- Celebrate strengths and examine changes needed in the coaching team

Conclusion

As stated at the beginning of this module, coaching at regattas is significantly different than coaching during training. This module has provided a background for coaches to understand what those differences are, how to prepare the coach team and athletes for those differences before arriving at the competition venue, how to coach at the competition venue, and how to use regattas as a basis for further training improvements with athletes.

With this information and more future regatta coaching experience, coaches can support athletes in their opportunity to test training and character in the competitive environment.