

A Typical Regatta

by Barry Fox

This is not an official kind of document but is representative of what might be found at a normal regatta.

Prior to the event it is good to have some group of folks to help organize the event and make sure that arrangements are all in place for the facility, and that all the equipment needed is arranged for, etc. These people can be folks who will actually compete in the event as their jobs will be done before the event starts. The list of things that need to be arranged for is listed following the next section.

People

Having a good sized operation crew just makes it a bit easier on everyone and the minimum number is actually one. But that one person will get burned out quickly and in the end may not do as good of a job as they would like to do and will be frustrated and hard to convince to return to help again. Not a good way to build a competent team.

I think the right number for these events is three.

The first is the PRO (Principal Race Organizer) or RD (Regatta Director). This person is in charge of the flow of the event. They are responsible for things like:

- the course layout, operating the start countdown system,
- ensuring a fair start,
- keeping the shore side banter friendly and down to a dull roar and
- Acting as a back up judge of fact for close finishes.

They are the person who makes sure the schedule is kept and that skippers have reasonable notice to get their boats in the water. They are the centre of attention for the entire meet. However, they do not have to be the event overall organizer, their real responsibility is running the actual event.

If you can find someone with previous race experience and that reads winds well that is a plus as they are responsible for calling the course, making course changes due to weather changes, maybe calling short delays to let the wind settle in, etc.

Second is someone to act as the official scorekeeper. For bigger events this is a bit more complicated position but for our series it shouldn't be too hard. They do need to know who should be in whatever heat is on the water in case someone asks if it is their turn or not but they have little to do while the races are actually on, until the finish of each heat or race. Then they need to be in a place where they have an excellent view of the finish line and record the finishing order accurately. Regardless of the race format this is usually a paper record which is kept as a backup trail and subsequently entered into a computer based scoring system. For these events I will supply the computer and the software. It isn't very hard to use and once the first heats are out of the way it really does a good job of calculating points, race drops, and positions. Depending on the split of fleets and classes there will be at least a couple of versions of the spreadsheet running at once as it isn't a good multi class system so we will keep one sheet going for each class. I suspect that number is 3 but we'll have to wait and see. This sounds like a lot of work but it goes in bits and

spurts so it really isn't too bad. Very little typing is required once all the boats are entered into the system once. So someone with a bit of computer savvy is a good idea.

Third is to have someone dedicated to operating the rescue boat. Which of course denotes an upcoming topic, a rescue boat. It is better to have someone dedicated to this job so that you don't have panicking skippers fighting for or jumping into a strange boat and then putting themselves in the middle of a race and messing that up. IN addition, at the direction of the RD only, this person will run around and set the initial course and make any changes that may be necessary because of changing winds. Depending on the weather this can be a very easy job. If we get nice consistent winds, people don't snag each other, etc. then there is not much to do other than the initial effort to set the course and then gather it all back up at the end of the day. This person can maybe do some other tasks around such as maybe help the scorekeeper or

Courses can be almost any shape but there are 2 generally accepted styles.

The Olympic style course is one option. It is popular with some clubs and extends the course. If the winds are of decent strength and fairly consistent then it is a good option. The advantages are that it helps space the fleet out a bit at the first windward rounding as the lead boats are going to sail away from the rest of the fleet and gets everyone settled in. The disadvantage is that it tends to turn the races into processions as it introduces two reaches into the course and so all the boats will typically sail well and be fairly fast so not many tactical opportunities.

The other normal course is the straight windward/leeward course. If this is set up with an offset mark at the windward end then that introduces some of the benefits of the Olympic course as it moves the lead boats away from the windward mark and cuts down on the traffic jam of boats coming into and leaving the same mark. If the leeward mark is also comprised of two floats then you can turn that end into a gate and allow roundings to either side and that introduces some interesting options if the winds shift a little during a race. These courses are typically shorter than the Olympic ones but they also lend them selves to doing multiple laps. So this lets you run one lap if the winds are soft but then move to two lap heats if the wind comes up. With the course set properly, and depending on what the winds typically do for your location, this setup can handle large wind shifts without requiring as much course re-setting. If the wind is prone to making 180 degree shifts then with these marks set you can simply reverse the direction of the race and sail on. Most races are conducted using this style of course these days.

Event Equipment and facilities

For our events you don't need to supply very much. We want people to bring their boats, equipment and supplies with them and be somewhat self-sufficient. If it is possible to have bathroom facilities nearby that is a big plus and if there can be some light snack or beverage capability that is good as well but not necessary. Whatever will, or will not be supplied, just needs to be listed in the Notice of Regatta (NOR) so that it isn't a surprise. It is not expected that the entry fee covers anything other than small incidental expenses for awards, paper, maybe some postage costs (not likely in this day of email).

Depending on the course selected you need some number of rounding marks. These don't need to be anything fancy. They do need to be easy to see and it is a good idea to mark them with visible vertical stripes. The vertical stripes allow everyone to see if a boat has hit or rubbed a mark on rounding and helps to cut back on the "yes you did- no I didn't" discussions. If the stripes are twirling around, you hit it.

There are as many float designs as there are people building them in the world. It is a good idea to make them harder to snag and get tied up in. A number of the boats you will get at the event are deep keel boats and that keel will swing over and grab the float line on a close rounding. If the

floats have about two feet of small PVC pipe hanging right off the end of them, and then the anchor line off the end of the tubing then the boat will still snag the mark but it will not get tied up in the line and will more likely be able to back off the mark on its own and not require a rescue. It is pretty easy to do.

You will need a reliable retrieval system as in a rescue boat. Doesn't really matter what it is but it needs to be able to respond to runaway boats or the need to move markers kind of on demand. Everything from a sit-on-top kayak to large pontoon barges have been used. As long as it is big enough to get a one metre sized boat in it to bring back to shore that is good enough. Powered is maybe better so if someone has a trolling motor or whatever is acceptable on your lake then that makes the retrieval and course setting go that much better, particularly on windy days.

If you have access to any pop up tents it is not too bad of an idea to have one or some. It is nice if the organizers at least have a cover to work under if the weather gets iffy. In the case of Nanaimo maybe you can get use of the coffee shop for "race central" which would be great.

The start sequences can be burned to a CD and can be played on a portable boom box. I will burn you copies of the 1 and 2 minute starts as well as the 5 minute hold. I can bring my iPod based system as well so there is backup for it. We'll talk about the start sequences soon.

Race Sequence

The race day starts with everyone arriving. You need to be able to check them in so you know who is there and can form up the heats. I think that we will likely have individual fleets of IOMs, Solings and the catch-all Sport Class.

People set up their stands and boats and get ready. Usually there is free sailing for everyone until the skipper's meeting.

At the same time the RD is getting the course finalized and ready to use. A race is usually about 15 minutes or so in length. Depending on how close the boats are it can take another 5 minutes or so to get everyone across. If the slower boats in a heat are quite away behind and well spaced out it is usual for the RD to call for a finish in place and have those boats just sail to shore so you can get on with the next heat.

The skipper's meeting is usually short and includes welcoming everyone, making sure they know the lay of the land as far as using the facilities, review the overall schedule and then review some of the rules of the day that always get asked (what is the procedure for over early (round the end is the cleanest way – no dipping the line), the only marks you can hit are the start line ones after the start and before the finish, etc.), warn everyone to not be obnoxious (just do the penalty turn), call out your sail number when crossing the finish line, how to call someone for a penalty and so on.

Then you call the first heat to the line by telling them the first race will start in XX (usually 5) minutes. With 2 minutes to go you start the start sequence CD. The normal deal is that at 2 minutes the call is to put the boats in the water. All boats in that heat are to be in the water by the 1 minute mark. Any boat not in the water and free from the skipper's hand at 1 minute is held at the dock until the race actually starts. The sequence then gives a remaining time every 10 seconds until the 10 second mark and then does a complete countdown followed by a loud bell sound for the start. The RD will call any boats that are seen to be over the line ahead of the bell and they must take the penalty assigned for an early start.

And away they all sail headed, usually, for the windward mark. Depending on the wind and the course the boats complete the lap(s) required for a full race and as they cross the finish line they

call out their own sail number twice (62, 62). The scorekeeper can by courtesy confirm that they have collected the number as well.

As soon as the last boat in a heat crosses the finish line you will call the boats for the next heat and start the 2 minute sequence again.

And so on, and so on.

The lunch break should happen close to on time regardless of where you are in the sequence. You don't have to break at the end of one full cycle of heats just whenever you get a race completed close to the time.

Then you pick it up and continue on.

The RD can call a hold on the sailing anytime to make a course change or maybe to wait for the wind to come up if it has just gone into a big lull. There is great debate over it but many events allow each skipper to call a 5 minute hold for repairs, once per day. And there can only be one hold per race. In other words you can't have one skipper call a hold and then another one call one just as that one expires. It just slows racing down too much. People need to get in the habit of making sure their boats are ready to sail and then get on with it. If we have separate heats there should be no need for skipper holds as there will be at least a 15 minute break before you go out to sail again, maybe even a half hour if there are 3 separate fleets.

Depending on the boat numbers, it may be advantageous to sail more than one fleet at a time but maybe stagger the starts (1 or 2 minutes apart) so that the boats really do sail with their own performance group. That can save some overall time and let you get more races in the day. It would be nice to get close to 10 races for everyone.

At the end of the day the scorekeeper gets busy again and compiles the scores to find the winners. It is good to do a couple of intermediate calculations through the day so that people can see where they stand and see if they need to get ahead of someone to gain places. The program is just an Excel spreadsheet, it's free and not all that hard to use but is a whole other topic.

Then everyone is gathered around and awards are handed out. The top three in each class is all that is needed and they can be as inexpensive as you want to make them. They can be small dash plaque kinds of things or just a small sized certificate in a dollar store frame. They don't have to be personalized and if you use the framed piece of paper approach you still have the frames to use for something else if not enough boats are there.