

# Sailing in One-Design Regattas

## Strategy and Tactics

A regatta is a series of races run over a period of a day or two. A boat's final score is determined how it scores over ALL races, not just one race. Some regattas allow a boat to "throw-out" a poor score or two. But the result is the same. A regatta is generally won by a boat that sails consistently. It is not necessarily won by the boat that tries to win every race. Often a boat with the "most seconds and/or most thirds" wins a regatta. Because all races count, it is just as important to avoid doing poorly in an individual race as it is to win a race. A regatta requires a different mind set than when you are sailing one race at a time with your local sailing group.

We are going to assume you have learned how to sail your boat sail reasonably fast. That means you have learned how to tune and sail with the shifts of the wind. That is a subject of other articles. And many of the other boats have also learned how to sail "fast enough". Remember, you are sailing in a "one design" fleet, so many of the boats will be fast and of similar speed.

So now that you are "fast enough", how do you do well and sail consistently in a regatta? You do well by thinking beyond speed. You need to sail the individual races like a chess game, thinking through your moves in advance. You need a "Plan" of how you are going to sail the course. This Plan will greatly help you sail more consistently and place higher in the fleet.

The "Plan" of how you are going to sail the course has two parts:

**STRATEGY and TACTICS.**

What is STRATEGY? Think of strategy as the way you would sail the race course as fast as possible in the absence of all other boats. In other words, how do you get the boat across the start line, around the course, and to the finish line in the least amount of time. A strategy must be developed before each race.

Here are some examples of STRATEGY:

- a. Where on the line do I want to start?
- b. Which tack do I want to be on at the start?
- c. Where are the parts of the course to avoid ( for example, due to wind shadows)
- d. How do I want to approach the 1st windward mark?
- e. How do I take advantage of wind shifts?
- f. What is the fastest course downwind? "Wing on wing" or reaching?

Think though and develop your strategy. Then, before any races begin, try out your strategy on the water many times. Start where you want and sail up to the first mark. How did that go? Did you run across a bad wind shadow that you need to avoid? Adjust your strategy and try it again. Try starting at a couple of different places on the line.

After several runs around the course you will get confident with your Strategy. Many top skippers go the lake early, well before a regatta is to start, in order to have time to develop and test their strategy.

So what are TACTICS? Tactics are actions you need to take because there are other boats on the course. You often cannot sail your preferred strategy because other boats are trying to sail the same course you are. Or other boats are just in the way. Tactics come in to play a lot at the start, because that is when most boats are close together.

Here are some good examples of TACTICS at the start:

- a. Always have your boat moving fast at the start. Fast and a bit late at the start is always better than early and slow. You want to try to "blast away" from a majority of the boats at the start. Being fast at the start and not over early requires lots of practice.
- b. Start just away from the crowd. Many boats will be trying to start at the same place. Try to find a "hole" where you can get clear air. Many boats sailing close together are always slower than one boat sailing by itself.
- c. At all costs..avoid contact with another boat. Contact is SLOW. And then, there goes the fleet ahead of you.

After the start, put your mind back to your preplanned strategy. Work the boat for speed. Where is the next wind shift? How can I now approach the 1st mark the way I want? How can I avoid those "wind shadows". Try to sail the race the way YOU want to. Don't get distracted too much by other boats.

As you go about sailing the course the way YOU want to, tactics will still come into play, because there are other boats on the course.

Here are some good TACTICS after the start:

- d. Don't race other boats. If a boat gets a puff and seems to be faster, let him go. It is just one boat. If you start luffing another boat, the whole fleet may pass you by. Remember, you are racing the whole fleet, not just that one boat. This is not a "match race".
- e. Avoid a "bunch" of boats at a mark. Sail way around them. Sailing into the bunch often leads to the train wreck of multiple collisions. And you may be protested and have to do one or more penalty turns. Then the fleet will pass you by and you are going to have a poor score.
- f. Don't miss a mark. Sounds obvious, but it happens too often. Go a little wide, just to make sure.
- g. At all costs.. avoid contact with another boat. Contact is slow. You will end up being part of a protest and get totally distracted. The best strategy can go to waste if you hit another boat. Even if you are on starboard and the other boat is on port tack, avoid contact and protest.

So STRATEGY and TACTICS are both important. But often skippers don't take the time to develop a good race strategy and try to implement it. Not sure what a good strategy is? Watch some better skippers practicing their starts and how they approach the first mark. And just ask others some questions: I am thinking of starting at this end of the line... what do you think? Are there wind shadows here or there? You'll be amazed that the best skippers are very willing to share their ideas. At lunch break, engage some other skippers about their strategy. Tell them yours.

Sailing a regatta is much more than just sailing your boat fast. It is also figuring out the best way to sail the course (STRATEGY) and maneuvering your boat (TACTICS) so you can sail YOUR race.

Once you get the hang of sailing fast, developing a strategy, and using tactics, you will find regattas are much more enjoyable. Regattas are really like playing a chess match with many other people at the same time.

Good luck at your next regatta. Speed is important, but STRATEGY and TACTICS are the game. Enjoy!

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