

What do sailors expect of race committees?

In most locations, race committees are comprised of people who race, but have agreed to take the time to run some races for their home club. Or they may be the wives, husbands, or friends of the competitors who, in order to spend some time enjoying their spouse's or friend's sport, help with a weekend race.

Almost all race committee members throughout this country are volunteers. At the same time, most competitors have spent considerable time and money preparing their boats and equipment for competition, making their crews ready, and, often, simply getting to the regatta.

As the desire to compete in sailboats has increased, so have the demands on those people who conduct the competition. The number of significant regattas has increased, and so has the quality of race management at most of those regattas.

Having witnessed good race management at many regattas, competitors have come to expect certain standards for race committee work. People who devote their time to running races do so because of their own interest in the sport, and the pleasure it brings to them and to the competitors.

Race committees perform a valuable service to their constituents—the racers—which few racers can or are willing to buy. The members of the committee take pride in providing the best service possible. **Both sailors and race committees should have the same expectations:**

Perfection—little short of it!

Competence—Competitors need clear, concise, sailing instructions. So do race committees. Both want the race committee to be comprised of knowledgeable people. Both want the race committee personnel to have good equipment—appropriate to the type of racing involved, and well maintained, so that running the race can be accomplished without error.

Knowledge—*of the sport, of the class, of the locale and of the event.* Persons involved in running races should understand the sport of sailboat racing, the tactics involved, and the reasons sailors compete. Competitors also expect the race committee to understand the characteristics of the boats which are competing.

As important, all boats which race either have class organizations or sail in accordance with performance or measurement rules, because such a structure ensures a particular level of racing—equalization of construction and equipment, or theoretical equalization of performance. **A race committee which ignores, or fails to recognize, the desires of the class may not provide the best racing for the type of boat or skill level of the competitors.**

A race committee which does not understand local sailing conditions will find it difficult to set fair courses, and may be unable to anticipate dangerous weather conditions. It may also cause the competitors to experience long periods of sheer boredom, waiting for the wind to fill in because the race committee scheduled the start too early for the local weather conditions to provide good sailing.

The club which conducts a regatta without assuring that its race committee has the proper equipment—adequate mark-set boats, sufficient safety boats, appropriate marks, proper facilities, and the like—will find that the race committee will have a difficult time doing a good job.

Fair competition—Everyone wants square lines, good courses, and reasonable, practical time limits. When the lines are good, starting line discipline becomes a simple matter. The racers also expect the race committee to know how to provide discipline to an aggressive fleet of starters. Knowledge of alternative methods of control is critical to good starts. For a competitor, few things are worse than a race committee which recalls his or her best start of the series for a new start.

Adaptability to and anticipation of changes of conditions make the racing more fair. The sailor has far less opportunity to anticipate a wind shift than a race committee. When the race committee changes the course to keep the next leg square to the wind, the competitors will believe that the race committee is doing its best to make the racing fair for everyone.

Flexibility is very important. A race committee which has performed its functions in a certain manner for years may find it difficult to adopt a new procedure which the class, or the racers, request. Old habits are difficult to change, but there are many excellent, relatively new race management techniques, and sailors and class associations are beginning to feel the need to experiment in order to maintain interest in the boat or class. The first time a race committee is asked to use courses with leeward gates, or a three minute sound signal starting sequence, instead of its “traditional” isosceles triangular course and ingrained five minute interval starting sequence, there is a true test of the race committee’s flexibility.

Safety and good sense—Although the rules place upon the competitor the sole responsibility to decide whether to start or continue to race, the race committee should know when to abandon or not start.

Decisiveness—Sailors have the right to expect that the race committee will make decisions when necessary and appropriate, and have the courage to support those decisions when questioned.

Fun—Who among racers or race committees does not want to have a good time on the water? Sailors will have less fun if they have reason to spend their recreational hours complaining about the starting line, an improper course change, or race results which are not posted until well after everyone has gone to sleep. Those same circumstances, and many more, can ruin an otherwise beautiful weekend for the volunteer members of the race committee.

These objectives apply to all events, large or small. The scale of the event and its importance determine the complexity of organization. The principles remain the same.

How do you accomplish these objectives?

Plan and prepare—Nothing is more critical. In designing the race or regatta, think about giving satisfaction to your competitors. At the end of the event, most of the competitors should feel that, allowing for the vagaries of wind and weather, they had fun, ashore and afloat. This requires foresight and detailed planning. Early symptoms of an unsatisfactory event are confused competitors and harassed race officials.

Understand the rules affecting race management. Know the proper race management techniques for choices you must make on the water. **Be ready to conduct the race before you leave the dock.**

Teamwork is vital—No race or regatta is the product of one individual. The race organizer needs shore-side assistance, as well as an on-the-water race committee. The race officer on the water needs signalers, timers, mark-setting personnel, recorders, and many others. Most important, each needs the others. The race and the regatta are team efforts. Use the opportunity to build a team which, at the end, can take pride in its accomplishments and look forward, as a group, to the next event.

Change is inevitable—except from a vending machine.

Know the wind—Then, use your intuition. It is much easier to have superior intuition if you know what the wind patterns are in your racing area. **Get out to the race course early and find out!**

Local knowledge—Knowledge of current, wind shifts and weather patterns is essential. The more you know about the characteristics of the locale, the easier it will be for you to deduce what will probably happen on a given day.

Know the weather forecast—Local knowledge tells you what has happened. A weather forecast tells you what the local weather service believes will happen in the immediate future.

Know the fleet—Participation in the fleet as a competitor is the best source of information. If you do not sail that type of boat, ask someone who does. Does it plane? Surf? At what wind velocity? How old are the competitors? What types of courses are they used to? What do they consider too little wind to start a race? Too much wind? What is their reputation on the starting line? Are they aggressive? Prone to numerous right-of-way protests? If you know these things, you have a decided advantage in determining how to conduct the race.

Select a good location for racing—It is very important to anchor the signal boat in the best possible position.

Select good courses—Make certain you have several courses from which to choose. Try some new ones occasionally. Make certain that it is possible to sail the course in the time allowed. Stay “ahead of the power curve” at all times. **Keep your head out of the race committee boat. Observe what is going on.**

Everyone makes mistakes—The mark of a good race committee is its ability to take corrective action when something goes wrong. The best part of race committee work is that, on the water, it is always “open book.”