Racing Rules Book Club

Engaging Sailors to Collectively Learn the Racing Rules of Sailing

By Clark Chapin, US Sailing National Judge and Club Race Officer

Introduction

Learning the Racing Rules of Sailing is one of the least attractive aspects of our sport, but a new, interactive technique leads to better discussion and engagement from beginning and intermediate level sailors. The traditional method of a lengthy presentation by a local "expert" is both time consuming and maybe a bit off-putting to new sailors ("Why should I have to put in six hours of training just to try out this new game I'm interested in?")

Oddly enough the COVID-19 Pandemic handed our club an opportunity to change all this. In late February of 2020, one of our members had initiated a combined social and learning event using Dave Perry's "100 Best Racing Rules Quizzes". At his home, he posed a quiz to the assembled sailors and, after discussion, disclosed Dave's answer. With the new travel and meeting restrictions that immediately followed, Portage Yacht Club in Pinckney, MI took the bull by the tail and faced the situation to maintain communication with our members, their crews, and other "camp followers". Using the ubiquitous computer application Zoom, we developed a means accomplish several goals:

- Engage all of our sailors, not just the skippers, during a time when there wasn't likely to be much organized sailing;
- Take some of the mystery out of the Racing Rules of Sailing. Many of our competitors, especially the crews, do not even own a rule book, or perhaps have one that is decades old;
- Improve the understanding of the current rules, especially among our long-time sailors who think that their understanding doesn't need improvement. (Does your club have sailors who still hail, 'Mast abeam!');
- Improve communication among our sailors, especially those on different boats and those who might not attend our post-race social events due to distant mooring locations.
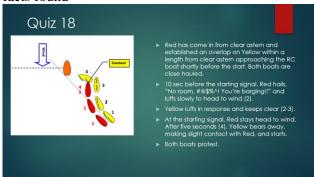
Overview

The basic format was simple:

The Club set up a Zoom meeting and sent invitations to a wide net of members, crews, the "sailing curious", former sailors, and anyone else who might be interested. This was handled by someone who had already paid the fee for Zoom Pro that didn't have a 40-minute time limit.

Dave Perry (bless him), granted use of his quiz materials for educational purposes, providing that attribution is given and links are provided to the sites where his other materials are on sale, such as: Signed by the Author.

Remember to use the current edition of Perry's quiz materials so that the rule references and interpretations are up to date.

The meeting organizer created a PowerPoint presentation that consisted of:
- Some basic, introductory slides (Title, ground rules, links to US Sailing and Dave Perry sites, etc.).
- A series of quizzes, each with three slides:
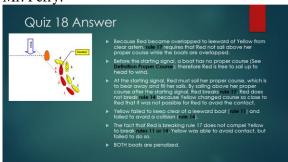 - A slide with a diagram (left side) and a set of facts found

- A slide with the salient rules, copied from the Racing Rules of Sailing;

- A slide containing the answer, according to Mr. Perry.

Each 90-minute session used 5-6 quizzes and took about three hours to prepare, once the format was set up.

The key to success was, after posing the problem, to call upon as many of the participants as possible for their thoughts and ideas, not merely relying on the more experienced sailors. In fact, the more knowledgeable sailors should be called upon the least.

Quiz Selection
The quizzes focused on rules situations that were of most interest to the beginning and intermediate level sailors – mostly the rules of Part 2 When Boats Meet and Part 3 Conduct of a Race, although other rules were scattered about.

Other sources for quizzes were:
- the US Sailing Appeals Book;
- the World Sailing Case Book;
- the Sail Canada and Royal Yachting Association Appeals, available on line through a simple Google search, although it is important to remember that these interpretations, although interesting and instructive, are not necessarily reflected in protest decisions in the United States;
- Situations posed in on line forums such as RacingRules.org; and (most importantly)
- Situations or problems submitted by the participants.

Diagrams
Most of the diagrams were constructed using Angelo Buscemi's Protest Diagram Kit which is simple, easy to use, and comes with instructions. Other programs, including those that construct animated scenarios, are also available. You can also use boat models to construct a diagram and then take a picture, although the file sizes can become a problem.

Spreading the Word

The series was advertised on social media sites and included the URL for the Zoom Meeting and an exhortation to forward and share the meeting info as necessary. A Google Calendar meeting was also created with the Zoom URL, similar wording to the social media invitation, and a similar exhortation.

In addition to our Club's sailors, we had participants from other clubs in SE Michigan as well as attendees from Ohio, Indiana, and northern and western Michigan. Unfortunately, we didn't take attendance so there are no statistics to share.

Computer Hardware
The presenter should have two monitors available so that one can be shared with the participants and show the presentation in slide show mode while the other can display the Zoom meeting participants.

Other than that, the only requirement is familiarity with PowerPoint and screen sharing on Zoom.

After-Session Follow Up
Each presentation was also saved as a pdf so that it could be easily emailed to a regular participant who might have missed a session and wanted to catch up.

Summary
We found that this was a great way to maintain engagement with our sailors during the winter months – pandemic or no pandemic – and plan to repeat the process in coming years.

A sample presentation is available HERE.