

Meet Diana Emmanuelli



If you participated in, volunteered for, or watched a US Sailing Championship, you have most likely met (or emailed with) Diana Emmanuelli, US Sailing's Competition Manager.

But more than just a regatta-organizing extraordinaire, Emmanuelli is an accomplished race organizer, Race Officer and Judge-in-Training, having helped with some of the biggest regattas in the Caribbean and around her adopted home of Bristol, RI.

Diana Emmanuelli grew up in Ponce, on the south coast of Puerto Rico, on the water more often than not. Her sailing experience got off to a rocky start – braving the “full on” conditions of Puerto Rico’s south coast ended in capsizes at her first Opti camp – but she eventually overcame her fear with the help of a supportive coach. Once he got her in back in the boat, she beat all her fellow classmates in a race back to the club.

“From that moment on, I was hooked,” she said. “There’s something about the experience of feeling a boat for the first time and knowing you understand the dynamic of using the elements to your favor that just clicked in my brain. I knew that was a feeling I wanted to continue chasing.”

From there, Emmanuelli delved into the world of C420s, eventually graduating to deliveries offshore and race management. The latter was a natural fit, as Emmanuelli’s father was an active volunteer at their local yacht club, and often took her out on the water while we helped with race committee.

She also had personal reasons to dive deeper into race officiating. When she was 15, her sister passed away unexpectedly, leading Emmanuelli to lean into time on the water to deal with her grief. When she was given the opportunity to volunteer on race committee for the 2010 Heineken International Regatta and 2010 Central American Games, it was a no-brainer.

“Those events gifted me the distraction I needed from my grief as well as lifelong friends and mentors,” she said. “I learned quickly under the guidance of my mentor, Ronnie Ramos, and his team and everything just clicked in a way I can’t explain. Once again, I was hooked.”

From there, Emmanuelli began taking on different volunteer and management roles in regattas around the Caribbean, until an International Jury panel recommended that she take it to the next level with Race Management certifications. When she started her certification process in 2014, her career path in sailing began to come into focus.

Emmanuelli continued to build her toolkit of experiences and skills throughout the Caribbean and United States. Since then, she has been PRO at major regattas like the St. Thomas International Optimist Regatta and 2024 ILCA North American Championship; as well as serving as Organizing Authority, Scorer, and Race Committee for countless others.

She became a National Certified Race Officer for Puerto Rico in 2022 and began working on her US Regional Race Officer certification when she relocated to the US in 2023. She currently has her sights set on her National Race Officer and Club Judge certification in the US.

“It’s been financially straining at times and a hell of a lot of work but absolutely worth it. I love every aspect of what I do,” she said.

Alongside the financial strain that can come with accruing volunteer race committee experience, Emmanuelli has had to contend with the stress of being a woman in the predominantly male world of race officials. She has had her experience questioned on the basis of her gender at times, but has been able to build her resume and reputation as a race official to counteract any negative comments she’s received.

“I’ll be frank in saying it hasn’t been a piece of cake. Being a woman and a young woman at that doesn’t particularly open a lot of doors where I am from,” she said. “But negative experiences have only served to grow my discipline and encouraged me to stand up for what perceived “minorities” are in sailing.

I am also eternally grateful to all the women who came before me who although they have not had their fair spotlight for all their hard work and years of service, they helped me gain experience, gave me wise advice in hard times, and continue supporting me throughout the years.”

Emmanuelli has also had the support of the tight-knit Puerto Rican sailing community, an important part of her upbringing. She credits the community with helping her develop skills, confidence, and a general sense of belonging that helped her grow out of her childhood shyness.

The community on the island goes back decades for the sport, and centuries for the history of the island itself. “Being in such proximity to the rest of the Caribbean islands, it’s not hard to become part of a larger community of like-minded people,” notes Emmanuelli. “Fellow volunteers and competitors turn into family almost instantly and there is a general sense of ‘we got each other no matter what’ that is very unique to the sailing world – especially in the islands.”

Emmanuelli’s ability to speak both English and Spanish helps bridge the gap between her culture, the US, and the broader Central and South American sailing community, giving her a wider perspective on a world-wide sport.

“Through my travels around the US, South America, and Europe, it is breathtaking to see how many people from so many different backgrounds can find commonalities in such a cool discipline,” Emmanuelli said. “More than anything, sailing is a force to reckon with when it comes to bringing people together in such a polarized world. Diversity is certainly important for the growth and excellence in any sport and sailing has benefited and will continue to benefit from having more inclusive leadership roles for all cultures and languages.”

Next time you see her at a US Sailing championship, make sure you come and say hi!

Submitted by Lexi Pline, US Sailing Media and Communications Coordinator

