

When we play fair, we all win. When one skipper does not, it hurts us all.

I had the pleasure of talking with a wise old skipper today about this sport and the importance of playing by the rules. He said the first thing he thinks about in any endeavor, is why am I here? What do I hope to gain from this? What is it that we are trying to do? And so, I ask the question to all of you, why are we here? Why do we gather together at the lakeshore with our boats?

For some, it is the opportunity to test our skills. Not just in competition, but in boat building or sail making. For others, it is the chance to join in fellowship with good friends. And still for others, it is the drive to excel in a sport. But I think that first and foremost it is about having fun. We are here to enjoy ourselves. And we need to remind ourselves again of the reasons we are here.

As humans, we are competitive by nature. Competition is what brings us together at the lake in the first place. Competition drives us to excel. It pushes us to want to win. It excites us and challenges us. But it can also prod us to do things outside of the rules to get that little bit closer to victory. If not checked, competitiveness can make us do things that we would not want others to do to us. It is what pushes us to charge into a crowded mark rounding on Port tack. It's what tells us to run down the start line rather than bailing out and coming back around for a clean start. It is what makes us think it is ok to do only part of a penalty turn, or worse, none at all.

If the desire to compete and win is pushed beyond the bounds of fair play, we all lose.

“You haven't won the race if in winning the race you have lost the respect of your competitors.”

— Four-time Olympic Gold Medalist, Paul Elvström

Sportsmanship and the Rules

Competitors in the sport of sailing are governed by a body of *rules* that they are expected to follow and enforce. A fundamental principle of sportsmanship is that when competitors break a *rule* they will promptly take a penalty, which may be to retire.

This statement of principle is located in the rule book just before Part 1. Dave Perry writes... it is no coincidence that the subject of “sportsmanship” is given a status above all the rules in our sport. At the heart of what makes our sport so fulfilling is the principle that we have a competitor-enforced, “no-referee” rules system; that is we have the responsibility to follow the rules on our own, to self-penalize ourselves when we break a rule, and to protest (“enforce” the rules) when we believe another boat has broken a rule.

We must be willing to accept the penalty for our actions on the race course. If we do not, we risk losing the respect of our fellow skippers, and generally making the whole reason for being there a great disappointment. In short, it is not fun.

We are all prone to make mistakes. Some are just learning and can have a slip of the thumb. The distances from the shore can affect your depth perception, causing boats to touch. An unexpected puff of wind can turn us into another boat. Or simply poor judgment in a crossing can be a disaster. All of these things are excusable and par for the course at most regattas. But what is not excusable, is not owning up to those errors when they happen.

Even if you had nothing to do with that puff turning you into the other boat, it is still your responsibility to acknowledge it and do your penalty if need be. When you acknowledge the foul, but then only do one jibe or one tack instead of both you send the wrong message to your fellow competitors. Worse still is not doing a turn at all or simply not even acknowledging the protest. In doing so, you let your fellow skippers know that you don't care about them or about their enjoyment. Can it really be fun to side-step the rules? Is there really joy in beating someone by fouling them?

Those who ignore the rules when they work against themselves are often the most vocal protesters when the rules are in their favor. Why is it ok for you to jam into the mark on Port, but not for others. Why can you barge at the start in one heat but cry foul when someone else barges in on you in the next heat.

If you expect everyone else to sail by the rules, then you had better sail by the rules as well. Nobody wants to be bullied around the lake. All of us spend the same amount of time and money to come to the regattas. We all look forward to the thrills and challenges the racing provides. Most of us are happy in defeat when we know we did our best, but lost out to a better skilled skipper. We look up to that skipper and study them and seek to learn how to improve ourselves so that next time we can give them a better challenge and maybe even beat them.

But none of us go home happy when we are beat up, intimidated, or ignored. Ignoring the rules when they work against you is the same as being a bully. Winning a regatta or even a single heat is not a win at all if you did not play by the same rules as everyone else. It diminishes the experience for everyone.

The Florida EC-12 Association is about friendly competition and social interaction. Winning heats and regattas is the added bonus we all strive for. When just one of us chooses to not play fair, we are all hurt.

Therefore it must be made clear to all our members that the racing rules of sailing must and will be adhered to by all who wish to sail with us. Race Directors are empowered to enforce the rules. Skippers are expected to make their protests heard and understood. Those being protested will acknowledge and either promptly do their penalty or calmly state that they plan to go to committee. When taking a penalty, it must be a full turn (or two turns when it applies) which includes one tack and one jibe in succession and in the same direction. In the event your actions caused another boat or boats to be unable to continue in that heat, you shall retire from that heat. Doing a turn does not exonerate you when the other boat is waiting on the rescue boat. If you gain a significant advantage as a result of breaking a rule, you shall retire.

Rule 44.1(b) does apply to radio controlled boats. Contrary to popular belief, Rule E4.4 does not turn off 44.1(b). E4.4 speaks only to reducing the number of penalty turns from two to one.

If need be, stronger wording will be added to our sailing instructions. When an RD or judge witnesses a skipper not complying with the rules, they can and will ask that skipper to take his boat out of the water. If that skipper continues to ignore the rules, they will find themselves sitting out the remainder of the regatta.

We can no longer allow one skipper to upset the enjoyment of so many others. **WE WILL ALL SAIL BY THE SAME RULES!**

Furthermore, I encourage all the clubs within the Florida EC-12 Association to take similar measures on their own ponds. Let your members know that deliberate violations of the racing rules will not be tolerated.

And so I return to the question, why are we here? If you have come to enjoy the company of fellow skippers and compete in the Corinthian style, we welcome you with open arms. However, if you come to win at all costs, do everyone a favor and find another diversion.

Sportsmanship and fair play is the order of the day at all Florida EC-12 Association regattas.

See you at the lake.

Joe Walter
Chairman