

Sailing Strategy – Tips from Howard Hamlin, as delivered in post race debriefing to the 29er class, Nov 2011:

Training Partners: Find the best training partners you can. Invite all others to join you - the more the better - three is much better than two. You don't need a coach present. Hang out, have fun and develop friendships with your training partners.

Share Info: You have more to gain than lose. Helping your teammates will make you better.

Race When Training: Find or set marks. Make the course long enough for speed to be evident but not so long that boat speed wins. Do a start and windward leeward. Regroup at the weather mark if separation is too great, otherwise keep racing. Round the bottom mark, then stop and share info with the other boats. Swap driver or crew between fast and slow boats for a race or two. This helps identify if the difference is setup, technique or weight. Try to speed up the slower boat.

Weaknesses: You win by solving your weaknesses. Focus on them. Write them down. Ask coaches, teammates and competitors to help identify and resolve.

Work: If you want to improve, work at it, on and off the water. It is a fun and rewarding process.

Pre-brief: Before each race discuss what you know about the conditions, location and what matters.

De-brief: Do it after each race and each day. With your partner discuss what you did right and wrong. With your teammates and training partners; discuss speed, settings, technique, tactics and boat handling.

Learning: There is always something to learn. Learn from everyone. Sail with different people when you can.

Teamwork: Skiffs require an equal contribution from both. The crew is equal if not more important. Drivers, make sure the crew is recognized for their contribution.

Switch, try crewing and driving. It will make you better at the position you prefer. Figure out your partner's strengths and adapt to use them.

Routine: Develop and continually refine a routine for training, racing and preparation.

Speed: Learn how to recognize when fast or slow. Did you gain or lose on those next to you. When fast make note of settings/trim/technique. If slow, make changes and ask teammates, competitors and coaches for help.

Tuning Grid: Develop a tuning grid. For every 2 knots of wind, write down the settings for all controls. See if you can reach a unanimous agreement with your teammates and coaches.

Communication: Very important. Admit when you are wrong or made a mistake. Talk to your partner. Discuss and resolve conflict...after the race. Respect your partner. These are friendships and memories that you will have for life. Cherish it. Have fun.

Rules: Know the rules. Don't push the rules. Avoid conflict. Avoid protests. Do turns. Give others a break, it will come back to you.

Covering: Loose cover is best. Abeam or off their bow. Herd them in your direction. Tacking on them only creates animosity and sends them away where they gain leverage. Save the face plant for the final race or beat; if necessary.

Take Responsibility: Take responsibility for improving your game. Take advantage of support from coaches, parents and others. In a few years you will be on your own.

Life Sport: The entire game of racing sailboats applies to all aspects of your life.

Balance: Keep it all in balance; school, family, friends, other interests. Sail other boats too. Don't burn out.