

Some drills I use when coaching fleet and team racing...

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I would use these at a team racing practice, though some are just as useful at a fleet racing practice.

1) Nailing It Drill

Purpose: to practice being on the line, on time and at speed. To get the crew confident in judging time and distance and knowing where the line is.

let's say you had six boats in the practice.

No Limits...

a) set your watch for 5:00 ((coach gives a few quick toots 5 seconds before blowing 5 long toots at 5:00). Then the coach blows whistles for each minute as if it was the final minute, so whistles at:

5:00 (5 long toots), 4:30 (3 quick toots), 4:20 (2 quick toots), 4:10 (1 quick toot), 4:05-4-3-2-1 (1 toot each),

4:00 (4 long toots), 3:30 (3 quick toots, etc.), 3:20. 3:10, 3:05-4-3-2-1-**3:00** (3 long toots), 2:30, etc.

b) all six boats try to be right on the line at each minute at speed; in other words starting at 4:00, 3:00, 2:00, 1:00 and 0:00 (5 starts in 5 minutes).

c) when the crews thinks their bow is on the line, they raise their hand. The coach running the drill calls the boat's sail # just after the bow has crossed the line. The goal then of the crew is to put their hand up 1 second before the coach calls their sail number.

d) the boats are not racing each other. They should not try to interfere with each other. The coach makes sure there is plenty of room for all 6 boats on the line (OK to make the line longer than usual).

Stopped at 30...

a) same drill but this time each boat must be stopped dead in the water at 30 sec to go before each start. Great for practicing set-up location, holding position in the "loaded" position (slightly below a close-hauled course with sails luffing), accelerating (little heel, trim and flatten as you turn up to close-hauled), and learning when to "pull the trigger." All keys to getting a good start.

2) Geo Drill

purpose: to practice having all three teammates in their pre-assigned geographical location

The coach sets a starting line and then drops two additional buoys equally spaced between the two ends of the line (so there are a total of four marks: the committee boat end, which can be a buoy, the pin and the two buoys between them. It is helpful if the two internal buoys are a different color than the marks on the ends.

Now the starting line has three lanes (the space between consecutive buoys): Boat, Middle and Pin

No Pressure...

a) put the 6 boats into two teams (A and B). Assign (or have them assign) a boat to each location: Boat, Middle or Pin

b) everyone starts their watch at 5:00 (coach gives a few quick toots 5 seconds before the 5:00 long toot)

c) at 3:00, Team A starts (on the line on time and at speed, but also each boat in their lane: Boat, Middle, Pin)

d) at 2:00, Team B starts the same way

e) at 1:00 Team A starts the same way, followed by Team B at 0:00

Game On...

same drill, but now Teams A and B are starting at 3:00 and at 1:00, again each boat in their lane. But of course now there will be an A and a B boat fighting to win their lane (get a better start than their opponent in their lane). It will suddenly get very real. Boats will be boxed out of their lane, will be early for the Pin, will trip over each other. Perfect. Repeat until it starts to look right!

3) Waiting Room Drill...

Purpose: to practice what each boat does in various combinations.

The drill has the boats racing from mark 1 to mark 3, or from mark 3 to the finish (digital N)

The “waiting room” at mark 1 is the area to the left of mark 1 (looking upwind) on an extension from a line from mark 2 through mark 1. The “waiting room” at mark 3 is to the left of mark 3 on an extension from a line from mark 4 through mark 3.

Have all 6 boats in the waiting room on starboard tack, “heaving to” (jibs backwinded) if windy, divided into two teams.

Tell the teams what their combinations are to start the drill. The 6 boats then reach past mark 1, leaving it to starboard and race to mark 3 (around mark 3 and then stop). Send the teams in various combos (you can even adjust the spacing by having some kids delay).

After all 6 boats have rounded mark 3, they all stop, reach into the “waiting room” at mark 3, get on port tack as a team, debrief what just happened, and await your instructions on the combos, coaching tips, etc. They then race from mark 3 to the finish.

When they finish they immediately sail to the “waiting room” at mark 1, using the reach to hydrate, debrief, receive coaching tips, rotate sailors, etc. BUT all while sailing TO the “waiting room.” NO WASTED TIME. The Coach can pre-assign the combos, and when they’re ready, off they go.

If you have 12 boats, just have the second group go when the first group rounds mark 2 or 4 (unless you have an assistant coach who can take group 2 to the mark 3 “waiting room” while group 1 is at the mark 1 “waiting room.”

4) Cops & Robbers

This is a control/escape drill. Purpose: to get the sailors comfortable and expert at controlling their boats, and to work on their moves to control or escape the control of the other boat.

The boats work in pairs. Set a mark for each pair. The pair beam reaches downwind of the mark on starboard tack, one right behind the other. When the trailing boat (B) passes the mark, the game is for the leading boat (A) to round the mark to port as if it was a leeward mark so close that the crew can reach out and touch the buoy...as quickly as possible. B tries to never let A round the mark.

The metaphor is that A (the Robber) is in Jail and trying to “bust out” (round the buoy), and B (the Cop) is trying to keep A in Jail.

Once A has successfully rounded the mark, both boats beam reach on port-tack, have a brief debrief on their boats, then both boats gybe so that now B is the leading boat, and the drill repeats. There should be no more than 1 minute from when A rounds the mark until the boats are reaching past the mark again on starboard.

If A has not rounded the mark after about 2:00 minutes, the “mercy rule” kicks in, A concedes and the boats reach past the mark on port and set up for B to now be the leading boat.