

The Leading Edge

By Hal Smith

The Committee Meeting and Instructions

It is so disappointing and frustrating to sail an entire race or more in a series and to find your name on the notice board as DSQ, disqualified, for failure to do something properly. This recently happened to me. Others at this same regatta were also victims of the same error, but the standings were final. The DSQs permanently altered the trophy recipients. The lessons here are simple:

1. Be familiar with typical race instructions and regatta rules prior to the event.
2. Register as early as possible so that you may read the race instructions thoroughly.
3. Attend the skippers' meeting with the race instructions in hand so that reference can be made as clarifications and changes are announced (make notes).
4. Ask questions in the skippers' meeting to eliminate any confusion.
5. Keep your instructions with you during the regatta for reference.
6. Monitor the regatta notice board for any changes.

Do not assume that the race committee will be completely clear with their instructions. I have attended countless regattas and have never found a committee which intended to be misleading, but they are human and are subject to overlooking a detail like anyone else. Having read the race instructions, review in your mind the starting sequence as described and mentally sail the course, rounding each mark and finishing. Look for restrictions and special instructions which may be inconsistent with some normal rule, whether expressed or not.

You have four sources of instructions:

1. Notices posted on the regatta bulletin board.
2. Verbal instructions given during the skippers' meeting.
3. The race instructions.
4. USYRU and class rules.

The above are listed in the order of precedence in the event of any conflict. This allows the race committee to make adjustments as necessary during the regatta. Complete guidelines for race management are outlined in the USYRU rules with few liberties allowed. Whenever you feel the race committee has gone beyond the

bounds of the USYRU or class rules, you may protest the committee in the same manner as any other protest is filed, but you should observe your highest priority instructions up to the resolution of the protest hearing.

Rarely is a committee protested, but you should be aware that their mistakes can go that far. The members of the committee are not professionals, even at national regattas. There are many details which can be overlooked and cause confusion.

Normally when a problem arises, it is a misunderstanding rather than an outright mistake made by the committee. The burden is on you to get the instructions straight. Do not be worrying about some new gadget, a new sail, different crew, the weather, etc. rather than giving the committee your undivided attention during the skippers' meeting.

It should be noted here that new racers are usually offended when they go up to committee members after the meeting, perhaps on the course, and ask questions and are told that the committee can no longer respond. This is proper. This procedure is designed to eliminate confusion by giving instructions to a few racers but not the rest. Take care of this business during the committee meeting and you will receive eager responses.

The following items have a high potential for being the source of confusion and should appear in the written instructions receiving your special attention:

1. Course description - and how it may be altered by signals from the committee boat.
2. Order of starts and time between fleets.
3. Are you required to show your sail number in the vicinity of the committee boat during prestart?
4. Is alt. rule 51.1c, Round the Ends (1 minute), in effect at the start?
5. Is the line (gate) open or closed?
6. Is the 720 rule in effect?

Items 1, 2, 3, are self explanatory. The other rules can be a mystery to beginners and costly to veterans if overlooked.

Rule 51.1c is usually called the "Round the Ends" rule or the "One Minute" rule. This requires a racing yacht who is on the

course side of the starting line ANY time within one minute of the start to return to the starting side by going around either end of the start line. You may NOT simply duck back across the line even if the start signal has not sounded. This applies equally to a yacht casually sailing on the course side jockeying for a start position with 50 seconds left and to a yacht "over early" by just a second. Normal rights-of-way apply to a yacht returning for a proper start, which usually means the returning yacht is burdened to yield.

An open or closed line means that, if the starting and/or finishing line (also called the "gate") is said to be open or otherwise unspecified, you may sail through it any time during the race as if it does not exist and its ends do not count as course marks. If the line is said to be closed, you may only sail between the ends when either starting or finishing. The closed line requirement is frequently employed when multiple fleets are racing, to reduce possible scoring confusion and interference with boats competing in another fleet.

The 720 rule is an optional way of exonerating yourself from a penalty to avoid disqualification. Most race committees allow this. If you have infringed another yacht's right-of-way, you may do two complete rotations/spins of the yacht through tacks and gybes. This must be done on the same leg of the race during which the infraction occurred, but it may be done at your convenience. You must be clear of other yachts even if this means sailing above or below your desired course in order gain necessary room. Sometimes you are required to notify the committee boat upon finishing that you performed a 720 as a result of a protest by the appropriate yacht. It never hurts to provide this notice even if not required.

Ultimately this is a gentleman's sport. Take pride in your sailing conduct as well as skills. If you realize that you have violated the instructions, retire and notify the committee boat of your actions. The satisfaction that we take home in terms of self respect is much more lasting and complete than a useless trophy. The fellowship of our yacht racing is as important as our improving skills. We trivialize this if we cheat.

In case you are wondering, I took a channel marker on the wrong side to be disqualified. It did not shorten the course, but it was part of the race rules. It was my fault for being confused. Go prepared to race next time with a good understanding of the instructions. I know I will.

Hal Smith is a former Catalina 22 National Champion. If you have questions, write to him at: 101 Deerwood, Easley, SC 29640.

