

On Thursday, August 10, 2006 2:13 PM, I sent the following ... Responses to this message are shown below.

I am looking for your input ...

At the Dragon's Breath Race last weekend, I tried something new.

Last winter I attended an Ensign Regatta in Florida wherein the Race Committee was very 'vocal' on the radio .. they announced which fleet was about to start their sequence and when (seconds to go) and lots of countdowns during the sequence. There was NO WAY anyone would not know where they stood as far as timing is concerned. At first I did not like it, as a purist, but it grew on me as the 3 days went on. So I decided to experiment on you this weekend.

A few have passed a comment or two. I would like to poll all people who were there so as to get a consensus. I will either continue this in the future or abandon it based on your feelings.

Please advise where you stand My feelings won't be hurt.

If you know someone's e-mail address that I have not included and who was skippering a boat at the regatta, please forward this to them.

Thanks for your help,
Bill

I liked it. Although we watch for flags and sound signals, it doesn't hurt to be reassured that we are all on the same note at the countdown.
Congratulations on your excellent work managing this regatta! Thanks,

I really appreciated the radio communication..... With so many boats in so many different fleets, it's not always easy to be within sight or earshot of the RC to get the timing "exactly" right, or know "who's on first"..... trying to stay clear enough of fleets I think may start ahead of me may sometimes make it difficult to even get back in time to start. I felt like the Cruising "B" fleet finishes were determined by who had the best start. Unfortunately I lost all three starts to Doug, but our "dinghy/one-design" backgrounds were evident.

You guys did a great job of running concurrent races on two different courses, with that many boats, and getting everything off so quickly. Thanks!

I was flabbergasted to hear all the VHF instructions. I have never experienced such, in fact as I'm sure you know, the accepted idea is to never respond to a query on the water, forget counting down the time. So I bounced it off a couple of experienced skippers. To my surprise they were both for it, because, and I paraphrase, "it's so more less experienced people will come out". Maybe that's true but I've been there where the rules and procedures were waffled and the result was that the "less experienced" never got the experience. Your racing instructions were very complete (you could maybe add the starting sequence routine),
..... (More but on other details)

Absolutely loved it. Kept all racers informed of current situation vice just seeing postponed flag on RC boat. Most importantly, kept starting line and maneuver area reasonably clear for each class that was starting by announcing class start sequence and timing. With a 45-50 boat fleet made up of 5 starting classes, it is cumbersome at best for all racers to approach the RC every 5 minutes to determine next starting class and class course by using only the Class wqrning/prep/1-

min flags and the course displayed on the RC boat. Hell, think of all the radio calls you received for info/clarification as it was. What would have been the result of those same people wandering by the RC boat thru-out each start sequence? Does the term ZOO ring a bell? Great job thru-out regatta. Good control of fleet/fair consideration of each racer/ and accurate scoring.

A few rambling thoughts in response:

Use of the radio by the race committee as you used it is very helpful. However, I think too many folks will start to rely on it: more than a few boats called the CB for information that had already been passed or was in the sailing instructions. The racers should not call the committee boat except--and only--in emergency situations, to advise of safety issues, or declare they are withdrawing/retiring etc. This must be spelled out at the skipper's meeting and in the instructions. More than once the CB was called when the RC was obviously busy, in a starting sequence, coordinating movement of marks etc. There were occasions when the shared channel was used by non-regatta boaters blocking or delaying RC transmissions. There may be situations where there is so much "outside traffic" that the CB is unable to provide the volume of information that you did. Skippers should listen and stay off unless called. Sailors must know that the radio information is supplementary only and must not be depended upon: they must rely on the "official" information from the course board and from the flags. Even horns and whistles are supplementary.

Thanks again for another job well done....

Personally, I appreciated all the help--- I need all the help I can get ! If it wasn't for one of our crew talking all the time we could have heard the directions better--- how about putting him on the committee boat next time--- I'm sure there would be no end to the chit chat. You folks ran a good race--- we enjoyed it. About those PHRF ratings-----

A few years ago I read that sailboat racing was going to be more helpful and less purist. I have not seen that much of the more friendly in other venues. I think the more vocal was very helpful especially to those that don't race that often. I thought it was great.

We're all getting older and some of us can use all the help we can get ! Vocal 'guidance' from the committee would help some of us - at least - be better competitors. After all, making certain that every boat has a decent start goes for better racing.

I wasn't skippering this time, but was crew on both days. In my view, when you're out there trying to concentrate on your job, watching for boats, and trying to hear the radio over the crew chatter, more and more often information is much appreciated. My vote is to stay with it.

I personally thought it was great. There were so many boats on the starting line that we tried to stay away unless we were in sequence. You could not hear the horn, nor see the flags, when we were upwind. Your announcements on the radio kept us on track.

We did the NCYRA in Beaufort where they had a female who apparently is a professional race committee member. She was on the radio for every sequence, and it left no doubt about what was going on and the timing of such, plus allowed us to focus on fighting the 10 foot waves and the wind!

So – I vote for keeping it up! You were awesome, and we ALL really appreciated all you did for the race!!

I thought it was GREAT!!! I think it will encourage those who might be intimidated and not a frequent racer to come out more often. I think the future in Oriental racing is with PHRF boats. We need them on the river

It was really helpful and I liked it. I have seen similar announcements at recent big events I have been to and it really helps with allowing boats to not have to be on top of the committee boat to get their countdown clocks started.

However, I think it should be done in moderation. I like to hear instructions from the R/C, but there was a little too much chatter on the radio last weekend. The chatter wasn't your fault, but was the fault of a couple of boats that felt it was acceptable to engage in 20 questions. I would announce at the skipper's meeting that the racers need to listen up but not ask the race committee questions over the radio.

For example, I would announce the order of starts and the course twice, do the countdown to each flag/horn and that be the end of it. If someone says, "could you repeat that, I wasn't listening" don't respond. Also, during the course of the race, questions about the course and the location of the finish line should go without a response. It seemed like when you responded to the first direct question, it opened the floodgates about all types of questions.

The R/C work for ODC continues to be top notch and it is a pleasure to participate in your races.

A vocal committee does set themselves up for causing some boats to be informed and some not. Unless there is a regulation that radios are required and must be left on, then any (that's any) change, however small, that is made can prejudice some boats.

I noted that many boats called the RC for clarification of their announcements. That implies that there was some confusion. How do you know that all confusion is clarified?

I guess I prefer clear printed instructions to both skippers and RC. Then both have the responsibility to read those instructions and are individually responsible for following them. In the previous J24 regatta when I was on the RC, all the leading boats in the first race assumed that W2 meant two laps instead of 2 legs in the first race. The last two boats sailed correctly and finished the race 1 and 2 on the first downwind leg. The rest sailed another lap and were recorded accordingly. Does the RC volunteer information or answer calls on this? We let them go since any action on our part would have prejudiced some boats and probably caused the race to be thrown out. We got a couple gripes but after reading the instructions, they all understood their error.

We had no problems that I saw last weekend except that the RC used the same leeward mark for both downwind and triangle courses. Bad choice, since the downwind boats hold an overlap on all reaching boats as soon as the reaching boat gets to 2 boat lengths of the mark. Luckily the fleets were far enough apart so that the situation did not occur, or I did not see it happen. Last year the boat I was steering was not so fortunate and had to give way to several boats carrying their spinnakers right to the mark. As a result we were blanketed and driven well downwind of the mark before we could start upwind. This is not necessary and should be corrected by using separate marks when fleets on different courses converge like this.

As long as the RC follows the instructions properly, there is no real need for verbal instructions over the radio. Announcements between races like announcing the end of or that there will be further races is not likely to cause any confusion.

I just take what the RC does and try to make the best of it, whatever it is.

All in all, considering the various starts with other boats not finished, I thought it went well. I believe that some of the radio problems were due to the weak radio on the committee boat. The use of the radio does make it easier for the bigger boats to focus on pre-start maneuvering as opposed to staying near the RC so you can see the shapes. However, the smaller boats need to

prop a handheld radio somewhere convenient and can pose a problem due to cockpit size and available storage. And, yes, the RC should not respond to questions concerning the course, start sequence, etc.

Thanks for experimenting and thanks for the opportunity to provide feedback. It was just plain Great!

As a J24 racer that travels all across the eastern US to high profile Class regattas and to the various NOOD events, I have seen this trend toward what I like to call the 'Kinder, Gentler Race Committee.' I have seen this approach in several NOOD regattas where as many as 15 classes may be starting on a single race course. It just makes the day more enjoyable for everyone trying to make sense out of a very confused environment.

I like the trend and hope to see the majority of RCs and PROs adopt it.

It is my opinion that this person is obviously a seasoned sailor ... who over the past 20-30 years learned what the starting rules meant. However, there are those of us who are still trying to learn, and who don't quite get the gist of the confusion of the printed instructions. Case in point, only two sailors in the J-24 race understood the instructions correctly ... that sounds like a major confusion to me, especially since there are many seasoned J-24 racers.

I would suggest that we realize that the fleet is getting younger, and that we (actually I am a younger racer, but not a younger person) don't have the benefit of years and years of experience. There is no Dick Johnson to teach us how to race and what the very confusing instructions mean. You actually have to have been the skipper or the navigator on several boats in the past to have been able to understand this years' instruction. That is why I am so grateful for your verbal instruction. I love to race, I love to sail ... the water is in my blood but I have only been sailing for 8 years, and racing for less. I have been able to race only by the seat of my pants and what I could pick up along the way. Your verbal instructions made it so much easier and so much clearer. Maybe Tom would like to do a weekend instruction course for those of us who aren't as seasoned as he ...

Again, I thank you for the effort you made in trying something new – the verbal instruction definitely worked well during the NCYRA this year !!

(signed)

Again, Bill – you were awesome, and the effort you made went above and beyond. Thank you SO much!

Mark and I agree with both Tom and John, in the sense that the Instructions should be the defining document, well-, clearly-, and completely-written, AND that the RC being on the radio is a positive addition.

We do not think the RC should be answering questions, nor should it bear the responsibility for every boat carrying a radio, or calling sail numbers in the event that boats are OCS (for example). However, when a transmission is garbled, RC may choose to respond to a request to repeat.

In short, RC on the radio is a positive and pleasant addition, but no boat should be able to protest based on radio transmissions. The visual signals, course board, flags, are the only official communication between RC and competitors.

Thanks for asking. It's been a pleasure to sail in Oriental this summer.

I would prefer a 'flag' run event. The problem is that not all boats have VHF's heard easily in the cockpit. This gives other boats an advantage. This applies, I believe, more to general information than to a count down sequence. For example, we missed earlier announcements of the class start sequence on one race. When we called, Bill White provided the information but made it clear that would be the last time he would give it. What if someone else had missed it? With so much 'information' being given, to most boats, it amounts to a lot of noise that has to be sifted through. This also leads to unsafe conditions when helmsmen are being distracted. As I said, these comments apply mainly to the non count down chatter. I objection there is probably just being too purist.

Thanks for the great job you folks did running the Regatta.

I like it. There is no reason to keep any secrets.

Verbal Response .. paraphrase:

Major events in a one design .. communicates only course, heading and sail numbers / boat numbers over early.

However, in general thought what I did was good idea except responding to questions from boats on the course.

My limited perspective is from crewing a few races last year and serving two this year. I liked it; it greatly helped me to understand what was going on. Perhaps as I gain experience, it would strike me as redundant. If so, I can simply "shut it out."

Another observation, no one's hearing appears to improve as they age. Many of the crowd around Oriental, including me, need all the help they can get.

I thought the use of VHF radio to communicate with the fleet of racers went well. We had a lot of crews that have not raced to any extent and I think the radio usage was a comfort and help to them. Our object as a club is to encourage more participation and additional membership.

I think that the racing rules are explicit as to radio communication while a race is being run after the start and states that all communications are to be available to all boats. After all the VHF radio has been around for decades. If we abolish radio communications why don't we also go back to wooden boats, cotton sails and the Morse Code!

A clear understanding of the status of a start and info about the course is important for good racing -- which is why we all go 'out there'. Clear communications from the committee boat should make for better starts, and therefore better competition. Using radio for communications relative the start and the course, might even get a few more folks on the water. This might even be carried into the count-down for starts. Kinda' hard on 'tradition', but isn't the purpose -- to have fun'.

I didn't have a radio, so I wasn't affected.

I think the commentary on the radio was very helpful and would urge you to continue to do it. The race was well run and the results published very promptly.....

The race instructions (printed) were quite clear ! Some comments suggested a leg was a lap or did not think a radio was needed have difficulty reading the same instructions they suggest confused them.

The rule book is quite clear about radio information given to the fleet (I suggest the participants read the rules for a number of reasons) & the captains meeting was quite clear as to the announcements that would be made. Those that read the rule book know the flags take precedence over all other forms of communication including both horn & radio !

The radio communication as to class next to the line & stating the sequence status is very helpful to making a pleasurable day for many inexperienced sailors we have in this community. The more info they get the faster they will learn & will improve our over-all racing experience.

I don't believe a 10 sec count down would be appropriate but sequence announcements & warnings to keep the start finish line clear is only going to improve the event experience for all levels of sailors participating. PHRF events should always REQUIRE that channel 16 & a channel chosen by the PRO to pass race info be monitored. USCG requirements must always be met on the water ways. We have very heavy commercial traffic in our area & over 5 barges passed our race course with 1 pass through,so if you participate in a PHRF event in Oriental get a radio. This is not an in shore dinghy event it is for boats that are expected to be in the river where all types of traffic will & must be expected.

For the very experienced sailor racing in Oriental don't assume the boat along side of you reads the rule book on a regular basis.....some think mast abeam still applies, even though it was dropped in 1998 ! I hope that the committee boat continues to broadcast as much information as possible & I trust it will bring safer & more enjoyable events to ODC !

Someone mentioned that VHF transmissions are not available to everybody, unless the SIs required a VHF on board..... I would think that nobody should be out on the river WITHOUT a working VHF, especially after the debacle last February when 2 people died. I think the SIs did say you'd be transmitting on Ch 72. If PHRF doesn't require a VHF, it should, although there was at least one other boat out there that didn't seem to have all the other stuff required by PHRF.

Sorry to be slow getting back to you, Bill. I thought you guys did a terrific job on the water, including using GPS time for all starts on Sunday. At Block Island two years ago, they used the radio for everything: announcing starting classes, course and distance to the mark for each start, race course, countdown to each gun, all clear. The philosophy is to make things as clear and easy for the racers as possible, and I think it's a very good idea. Since VHF radios are so cheap, it is presumed that every PHRF boat can and should have one. And the arcane views that the RC should be totally mute and that racers should know what they are doing or not come out, are not helpful in attracting new sailors to the sport.

My only complaint has to do with the sequence of starts. I know that you were trying to arrange the starts so that the finishes would not be too spread out or too close. Good idea, and it worked well. But you did not make it clear enough often enough what the sequence would be. That made it necessary to stay close to the RC to spot the flags. When we did that, we were chastised for not staying clear of the starting area. Keep repeating over the radio what the next start will be and the remaining starts.

Altogether, a really well-run regatta. Thank you and your entire crew.

Bill, since I was not there I cannot comment on your experiment. But, thanks for trying to improve things. There's always a better mouse trap as they say. Thanks also for your thorough communications - can't imagine how much time you devote to it.

Bill, I wasn't skippering a boat or even there, so I don't know how you used the radio, but for whatever it's worth to you here is my general opinion of the matter.

Use of the VHF to communicate race management information between committee boat and competitors encourages dependency and rewards the lazy. The more you use the radio, the *more* you will *have* to use it for people who aren't paying attention or haven't (or won't) read the sailing instructions (much less the racing rules).

Also, it's just one more thing for a short handed RC to manage and to be *distracted* by, taking focus away from more critical matters.

I'll grant you that with multiple fleets of larger boats and a good bit of time between races, such that boats get dispersed, that some radio communication can be helpful. However-- I would limit such communications to specifics and to put those specifics in the sailing instructions. {Appendix L(25)} That way you could tailor the radio signals to the type of fleet(s). I can't think of any one-design fleet that races here in which the advantages (if any) of radio communication would outweigh the disadvantages--except of course, for matters of life, limb, and property.

Unless you are quite specific about what information will be communicated by radio, each RC will have a different tolerance level for radio use which could to a level of expectation by competitors that may not be met each race--to the annoyance, if not hard feelings, of all concerned.

I would also include in sailing instructions, if proper, wording which puts radio communications in the same category as those sound signals which accompany visual signals.

Bill – I agree with (*name omitted*) in that there cannot be any changes to the NOR or race instructions over the radio, even if there is a requirement to have a radio on all the time. Batteries run down, things break. Clear, concise instructions with a question period at the skipper's meeting should be sufficient and the rule of last resort. That said, I think it appropriate to announce the class starting before the commencement of the sequence. Not a big fan of the countdown, tho....takes part of the responsibility away from the boat. Thanks for the poll

That was great soliciting all of the comments on radio communications. I also used the radio extensively 2 yrs ago, but not quite to your extent.

My personal take on the radio is that: 1. It must be clearly stated in the SI's that VHF will be used, and how, see appendix L, rule 25. Don't forget that oral instructions cannot be given at the Capt meeting. 2. I used VHF to inform yachts of the start sequence and upcoming starts, I personally would never give a countdown over the radio. Since I always had 1 minute between sequences, I had time to advise of the upcoming start as soon as 1 class was gone. I believe that if they can't keep time with 3, 4, or 5 people on board, they shouldn't be out there. I can start my watch in a 100 boat fleet, everyone should be able to do it in a 10 boat fleet. I guess the main concern is prejudicing the crews that can keep time, vs giving an advantage to those that can't. Also if you change rule 26 in writing to allow VHF, you paint yourself into a box, i.e. one failed communication and it's a PP, all the more reason why the SI's must be crystal clear.

I guess no one had read the recent discussions on Scuttlebutt about using VHF's. Basically, several PRO's talked about problems where someone had a stuck open mike, which totally wiped out their intended VHF comm, thus making their good intentions mute. The other problems are obviously bad equipment, dead batteries, lots of chatter, etc.

Taking all of the above into account, the key is very clearly written SI's that state exactly how and when VHF will be used (hopefully not to replace a stopwatch onboard), and what, if any, questions the RC will respond to. And to emphasize that VHF is a courtesy only, sailors cannot count on it, and it will never supersede the flags.

.....
