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RC Report: Spring Series Race Wednesday 01 June

On Wednesday light rain fell on and off, and a lack of wind made the probability of getting in a race low. At around 2:00 PM it was about its worst and we wondered if we'd be able to run a race. Michigan Spring weather can be highly variable. We have canceled some races in the afternoon only to discover the breeze filling in nicely later. On the flip side, we have also waited to the last minute hoping for rains to subside to have them hang on, hour after hour.

When on the big lake, the Race Committee has a few unwritten guidelines. With just one committee boat, the JaM and Spinnaker sections must finish at the same spot, although they frequently sail different courses. We strive to make the first leg a beat into the wind as much as is possible. When the wind is very light it tends to get spotty and blow from several directions depending on water and land temperatures as well as different atmospheric pressures. It is not uncommon to see two boats heading in the same direction on different tacks. It looks strange and makes it very difficult to establish a windward mark with patches of air blowing from different directions. This past week, when I asked for wind directions as we headed out of the channel, the report from racers on the water showed wind from different directions.

Part of racing skill requires the skipper, navigator, or tactician to put their boat in the best position to use the winds. Often one side of the course is favored with noticeably better winds. The best racers find these areas and work the starting line to be in position to take advantage in these conditions. When it is extremely light, one boat can happen to wander into a small patch of wind and run away from the fleet. This can be a case of Mother Luck more than Local Knowledge. Without some sort of consistency these conditions do not provide a test of good racing skills, rather simply being in the right place at the right time. We have a full summer of races on the schedule so when we are given a night without a base-level of wind we generally do not race.

Another factor that makes calling off a race difficult is the variety of boat shapes, weights and designs. Our boats range from boats as small as 19 feet through some large boats you can actually live on. A Lightning that weighs 150 pounds compared to older heavier boats like the Catalina 40 or the Heritage 37 One Ton weighing in at 13,600 pounds. Some of the newer designs, such as the Farr 395, the Mumm 36, or the C&C 110's can move quite nicely in little to no wind while those older heavier boats need more breeze.

We can also opt for a delay, because the conditions often change when the sun starts to set. Call it too early and you miss a chance for a good race. Wait too late and we've wasted an evening on the water swatting flies and bobbing like a cork in the water. We try to put a maximum time to wait for the weather to change. This particular race had a 30 minute delay. At that time, the light air boats were moving but not in what I considered enough breeze to be consistent enough to establish a good race course. Many people think we will start a race when there is enough wind at the start to move the boats. This is true of long-distance races but a different rule applies to our evening series. The key isn't getting boats on to the race course, but rather, finding what I consider enough air to project a finish within the time limit. This is the drill we go through on a night such as we had June 1.

Even when the weather does not cooperate, the Club is open with good food and plenty of drinks to go around. When we don't race, we still have a great place to congregate and let off some steam.

Night Navigation Race to South Haven, Friday 03 June

It started out with light air almost on the nose, and looked like it would be a slow ride. With a seven hour time limit, it was fair to worry if anyone would finish. But as the night went on, it turned out to be great racing. The lake was calm and the winds in the lower ranges, with apparent winds when going to weather between 5 – 8 knots. There were also holes—lots of them--where you'd slip ahead of a boat nearby and then drop into a hole and they would come sliding past you. The big idea was do we go inshore, stay close to the Rhumbline, or edge Westerly. It was not a night for Spinnakers in the Spinn fleet, but mostly Light #1 sails—the newer the better.

Distraction, Bill Born's Farr-designed Mumm 36 had a dog fight nearly all the way to South Haven with Gint Karaitis' new Farr 395, Imagine, which has already shown lots of speed. They were trading first-to-finish in the fleet for most of the twenty mile ride in what turned out to be ideal flat water beating and close reaching conditions. If you weren't on a boat for this event, you missed a wonderful night of racing.

Although Distraction was first to finish by a few seconds, they could not save their time over another very well-sailed boat, Dirk Kruger's C&C 110 Sea Raider, who corrected out a scant 40 seconds ahead of Distraction after

five hours of racing. Third was Patrick Nelson, on his Schock 36, which had to be towed out and back in for Wednesday's race due to a bad starter. Amazingly, he had a rebuilt starter installed by Thursday Noon so he would be ready for the SH race. Following Captain Blood on corrected time were Imagine, Elixir, Attitude and Silk. Andy Grootendorst started on Cynthia but did not complete the race.

Spinn standings for the Spring Series now have one throw-out applied, and we find Dirk Kruger in first place, with Cynthia and Distraction tied two points back, and Captain Blood close behind in fourth. However, Dirk has used his throw-out as has Andy, team Wellenreiter, and Jon Veersma on Zot. This puts Bill Born and Patrick in the sweet spot for now, as their throw-out lies ahead, rather than having been spent. Always best to keep your throw-out for as late in the series as possible. It is to your advantage to sail every race rather than miss one. Every race represents a chance to improve your series score. Taking your throw-outs by missing races is never a benefit—although at times, with time commitments off the lake, it is unavoidable.

Pre-Season Skippers' Meeting

The 2016 Pre-Season Skippers' Meeting broke records for the number of boats represented in attendance. With 22 boats there, we had more than last year or any year we can remember, and heard from two more who will try to sail with us in 2016. All of us involved with the Race program thank you for coming out, learning about the latest changes to the program, and getting your Race Schedules and Sailing Instructions. These items are also available on-line by going to RegattaNet and punching the NoR tab at either the Spring or Summer Series race menus.

Rhumblin Regatta

The 2016 Rhumblin Regatta is two weeks away, on Saturday 18 June 2016. Sign up by going to RegattaNet accessible through the SJRYC website where you check the race results every week. This is our only SJRYC race all year on with take-home trophies, and is usually a fun afternoon on the water with a longer time limit than our regular series races.. Check-in at 9:30 - 10AM, Skipper's Meeting at 10:30, Starts at Noon. Chairperson for this year's race is our VC-Fleet, Louie Tremblay. Contact her or either of us if you have any questions.

Our racing year is off and running, and this what we look forward to each season. We'll see you next Wednesday on the water.

Ken Z. & Jim S.

The Windward Sheet follows the SJRYC race fleet and is published at irregular intervals through the sailing season.