

Subject: The Windward Sheet, volume 2016, number 6

### Decision to Cancel the Race

The Principal Race Officer is responsible for the go/no-go call for each race. We are lucky to have someone as experienced and knowledgeable as Ken Zimmerman in that position at SJRYC. He starts watching the weather a day or two prior to the race, even though that is too far ahead to make race decisions. What he is watching on Monday and Tuesday is not exactly what the forecast shows, but rather the consistency of the weather predictions, to understand if we are generally in a "stable" weather pattern, or a changing one. This helps him on race day figure out how likely the prediction that afternoon will be for later in the day.

On race day, Ken watches the weather at regular intervals, looking of course for the strength and direction of the wind--to plan possible courses in advance--and the stability of the forecast as well. He also speaks with members of the race team, people at the marina, and other sailors who watch the weather. For yesterday's race, there were two distinctive features on the weather map 1) The size and magnitude of the storm predicted headlined the national weather news as having the possibility of doing serious damage; 2) The predictions of the area to be hit by the storm stabilized, with our harbor at or near the center of the action.

Of course, none of this guarantees that we will be hit by a monster storm in exactly the two to three-hour window (6PM - 9PM) our boats will be on the lake. This is essentially not knowable in a precise way, as the time and location window is too narrow to perfectly predict what will happen. That is why modern weather forecasts use a percentage along with the forecast (and they do "look-back" to publish data on how well they do after the fact).

Ken was not on the RC boat early last night because he was carefully studying the latest and best weather information prior to making the call. He did not think it would be a close call, given the stability of the forecasts and the severity of the weather, but hung back at home in front of his computer looking at the various radar plots.

He made the call to cancel based on his best judgment of the possibility of getting hit by some of the serious weather heading our way. He waited until the last minute to do this to be able to visually see the changes, which, almost exactly as predicted, had the first wave of the storm dramatically change the sky at approximately 5:40 PM (predicted to arrive at 5:30 PM). Behind that was more, and as the early evening played out, St Joe was the bulls-eye for a series of disturbances.

The first storm brought with it driving rain just South of downtown, and strangely, no wind. A bit further South, and the rain was quite severe. Given that the storm moved across the Lake in a South Easterly direction, that meant the severe weather we saw hit South of downtown took a path right on top of most of our race course.

As racers, we hate to miss our chance to race. In a Mac Race or a Queen's Cup, we deal with whatever the wind god's deliver. We can and do figure out a way to get through absolutely miserable weather then, so why don't we do that here? Why not simply race in all conditions? Why ever cancel a race?

The answer is that we are not the Mac Race. We are something different. One of the big differences is that we attract a diverse collection of boats, with about half our fleet not being Mac Racers, who are not interested in racing in extremely inclement conditions. Another reason is that we race close to shore, which in some ways can be more dangerous than being out in the lake (such as a disabled yacht near a lee shore). Our open RC boat has limitations on it's ability to be in the lake in extreme conditions. Finally, we have a long series of races each season, so we provide many opportunities to win. Any one race is generally not pivotal.

Decisions to cancel races are made knowing that there is always uncertainty in what the weather will bring. Although Ken takes these decisions very seriously, we know not every call will be perfect where the weather is involved. How many of us have sat through a Mac weather briefing and found an utterly different wind pattern than predicted?

What is different about our decisions at SJRYC is that any errors made are designed to fall on the side of safety, which we view as key to our program. This means at times; Ken will call a race that maybe we could have run. That was not the case last night, but it can happen. We hope this note explains the reasons why that could happen--and why we have designed the process to make decisions that err on the side of safety.

### Final Race of the Spring Series

Next Wednesday is our last race of the Spring series, where several flags in both sections are up for grabs. We will then have the first two races of our Summer Series before taking our traditional break for the Mac race, which will be for two weeks this season.

### New Boat Coming into the Harbor

Eric Mallen has recently purchased an Ultimate 20 Sportboat, which he will be racing in the Spinnaker section. He will race in JaM with his Lightning, perhaps the rest of this year, until the U20 is ready to go.

### Commodore's Cup for Jammers

Next Wednesday is the deadline to opt-in for the Commodore's Cup in JaM. If you are interested in racing for this "take-home" trophy, you must email the Fleet Captain by Midnight next Wednesday, 29 June. The idea here is to take a look at your standings as the Spring Series comes to a close and figure out if you want to stay in the hunt for the BotY or challenge for the CC instead. Email [jimschrager@gmail.com](mailto:jimschrager@gmail.com) if you want to opt-in for the JaM CC.

Until next week, we'll see you on the water,

Ken Z. and Jim S.

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