



PHRF PERSPECTIVE
March 2003

Staying out of trouble – Staying in the race

Because PHRF is an inclusive handicapping system that encourages all kinds of boats to race, mixed fleet competition presents the opportunity, challenge and potential hazards of racing against boats with characteristics different than your boat. Different boats with varying performance capabilities and speed potential need to be considered from a strategic point of view when forming your game plan and while racing.

Various characteristics of your competition present challenges not usually associated with level or one-design racing. Depending on the "width of ratings" in the class you are racing in, some PHRF boats will be noticeably faster or slower or point differently than your boat. Some are less or more maneuverable than yours. And that can present the potential for getting into a protest situation when these performance differences are used for a competitive advantage.

It's easy to see how speed or maneuverability differences can be used against you on the racecourse...or how you can use a performance difference against your competition to your advantage. An example might be the knowledge that you have a faster rated boat and can work your way out from under a slower rated boat you have tacked to leeward of. In this case, your boat speed is your advantage knowing that you will shortly have your bow out ahead of your competitor and cause him to have to tack away. That same leeward position under the same boat as yours with equal speed might have trapped you there or caused you to get rolled. So it's really a good idea to consider the performance variables of your competition.

A slower or faster boat trying to cross may cause a protest situation to develop as it may be a little more difficult to judge who's crossing whom by how much. A faster boat may roll over you just after the start (if so, you should have started away from him). A higher pointing boat may successfully pinch you off. A more maneuverable boat may put you in a situation where you might have difficulty staying clear. It's just easier to get into a protest situation with these performance variables than with like-kind boats!

So what do you do about protests? I have (from personal experience) found that the best thing to do is **STAY THE HECK OUT OF THE ROOM!** Our racing rules permit you to do a 720-degree turn (without admitting guilt) for possible violation of a Part 2 (Right of Way) rule. Some Race Committees change this to a 360-degree turn - one tack and a gybe - that is a lot less costly than doing a 720. If each of you are protesting the other, do a turn! Then, if the Protest Committee (PC) finds you violated a rule, they can't throw you out! If your protest is sustained, your competitor is disqualified and you remain in the clear regardless of any negative findings against you! That's called cheap insurance.

Why assume that there might be negative findings against you? Why assume your protest won't fly? Well, your best odds are only 50-50 unless you have credible third party witnesses...and even then, you can't be sure. I have lost six protests in a row and 5 of them were no-brainers! Protest Committee people hear what they want to. Few of us (except for Dave Perry, Lord Buckley* and Johnny Cochran) can present a case that can overcome prejudices-sub-conscious though they might be, preconceptions, pretzel logic or false testimony.

There are more horror stories than ink to print them with: Despite there being no testimony to support it, a PC member (and USSA Judge!) once recalculated the speed of my boat in his head and then took away my inside overlap and my right to be there-3 hours and 3 miles removed from that weather mark! I then experienced the joy of paying for repairs to the other boat that turned directly in front of me. Some Protest Committee curmudgeon completely ignored self-incriminating statements made by the slower starboard tacker that he lost control and altered course to weather (violating Rule 16.2) going head-to-wind and preventing me from crossing cleanly! You guessed it...I got tossed and this guy is now empowered to continue to ignore the rules.

It's unfortunate that these travesties occur but it happens more than you would think. Sometimes it happens because people make mistakes, misinterpret the rules, don't like you or, perhaps, are just goofy. Is it worth the risk?

If you do a turn, you may drop a place or two...but you can many times make that up by sailing smart. If you get tossed, you will probably not win the Regatta. During the recent Mid-Winters, a port tack competitor misjudged his ability to cross me. I hailed "Protest" and for him to do his turn. He didn't and, as a result, was disqualified and lost his first place standing. They could have easily recovered from a 360 turn and won the Regatta! In short, if you want to finish a race or regatta with the best possible score or placing, just do a turn and **STAY OUT OF THE ROOM!**

What to do if you wind up in a Protest Hearing? First remember that there is your story, the other guy's story, what the PC figures happened and the truth...and rarely do any of the four versions touch. Second, be honest and clear in your testimony. Third, get witnesses...third party ones from the Race Committee boat or other competitors. You really only need one witness from your boat unless there are different points to make. Fourth, summarize your position quickly and don't waste time. Finally, be polite.

The PC members are volunteering their time and going without brew and burgers to try to sort out the mess. Some may be your friends. Don't blow your top as I did if your protest is disallowed or you are DSQed even if the other guy lied! It does no good and I've learned they just think you are a/an _____ (fill in the blank). If you really spew epithets, you may be subject to a rule 69 hearing and the consequences can be really serious like suspension. So chill and remain so.

The rules permit you to request the protest hearing to be reopened if there is new evidence like a witness that sobers up or other pertinent information like a video or a certificate violation coming to light, etc. But good luck!

Keep in mind you always have the right of appeal if, for example, the application of a relevant rule is questionable in view of the facts found. If you feel inclined to appeal, follow the procedures very carefully and quickly as outlined in the USSA rulebook. You simply need to notify them of your intention to appeal and then follow up within the time limit. Verify first and trust no one as you have a good chance of getting bad information on how to file your appeal (even from USSA!). And then your appeal gets kicked. And you won't get your filing fee back either.

Even if your appeal is heard, don't be surprised if the diagram is misread or your facts ignored or misinterpreted or worse. You are dealing with humans and that says it all.

Your head might be spinning by now of the potential for disappointment, disqualification and paperwork by going into the Protest Hearing room. My belated New Year's resolution was to avoid trouble, stay out of the room and win on the water. I may have screwed my boat half way through earth's mantle by doing 360s or 720s before mid-summer but after the race I'll be with friends at the bar rather than in that room. Where do you want to be?

*Lord Buckley is a word-jazz performer from the late fifties worth hearing...but only if you have a sense of humor. There are still a couple of his CDs around.

Contact PHRF at 562-438-6712 or by e-mail - fleetoffice@phrfsocal.org

Jerry Kaye

VP

So Cal PHRF