

2007 Youth Worlds

Notes by Matthieu Dubreucq (double handed coach for team Canada 2007)

There are 10 aspects to be a top sailor (by Jim Saltonstall, ISAF coach):

- Self preparation
- Boat preparation
- Boat handling
- Boat tuning
- Race strategy
- Starting
- Tactics
- Racing rules
- Compass work
- Meteorology

When you go on the water to race in a major championship you need a plan and to know where you stand on these 10 aspects of sailing. Don't try to do stuff you never did. Just maximise what you know to do to do your best at that particular time of your life. Confidence will bring more confidence.

You want to simplify what you know so make sure that in a stressful situation you will be able to use your knowledge rather than get confused. For example : remembering that twist will give you speed and tight leech will give you pointing is a nice summary of sail tuning and simple enough to apply in a stressful championship.

Know that it takes 12 weeks of physical preparation to go to your physical potential and be on the podium at a major event. It also takes a lot of mileage, and experience in experienced fleets. Don't waste your time racing all the time and not training. Make a plan to start with "warm up regattas" and slowly build up to more experienced fleets (and bigger number) so you are ready to sail in your big championship. You don't need to race every week but you need to race in quality events.

At youth level boat specifics are important but the most important thing is experience in quality fleet (and bigger fleet). It doesn't really matter what boat you sail as long as you gain experience. I saw 29er sailors beat our Canadian team with far less boat handling but a lot more experience in big fleet (coming from optis for example). Others were 420 sailors coming from really experienced fleets and who had learned the 29er 2 months before the event. So don't only focus on boat handling, plan regattas that will allow you to understand how to race against smart sailors.

Reflexion on coaching :

Coaches do make a big difference but they do not bring any magic tricks. The role of the coach is to develop a professional relationship with it's athletes that will allow him/her to guide them towards their maximum potential. It doesn't really help to bring in a coach that you don't know just for one big event. You need to be able to develop that relationship with that coach prior to the event to really benefit from working with that person. The coach needs to know how you feel under pressure, how you feel when you don't eat properly or don't sleep, to know how much to push you, to know your strengths to capitalise on. If you have someone you are comfortable to work with you will see that having eyes looking at you with an outside perspective is really useful, especially in big championships.

I am not trying to say that you should have one coach only. Work with as many different style of coaching until you find what suits you best but make sure you give time to your coach to know you if you want to maximise your experience with that person.

Things to consider when you go to a major event :

1. Q. How long will you arrive in advance?

R. It depends on 2 things : budget and experience on that water site. If it will be your first time going to that water site then you will need longer to acclimate to the wind, water and particularities of the site. If you know the place then you should know how long you will need to get back into the groove (probably 3-5 days). Don't forget that you can plan a trip 1 month before the event or more to do some training on the future site or even a smaller event.

2. Q. How will you train prior to the event?

R. You can train on your own, with your own training partners or join a random group of sailors that are also training for that event. Be carefull and plan this one. Plan a few scenarios : no one wants to train with you, you realise that you go slower then your training partners, you are really fast and everyone wants to try against you, etc. How will you react? Remember that training before a event is not the event it self. How many time did I beat my training partner in training and he beat me in the event! Start to make contacts with people you work well with and plan next event with them.

3. Q. Who will coach you?

R. Once again should depend on your budget. If you can't afford to have your coach coming with you for the training prior to the event I would say you are better off with no coach. If you have to choose, I would prioritise a coach for your preparation before having a coach at the actual event. The best being to have a coach that knows you for the entire time of training and the regatta

4. Q. How long do you stay away from home?

R. You will realise that there are 2 kind of sailors. Some leave home for 3 months and do the full circuit and train on site of the next event. Others will only arrive 3-5 days prior to the event to leave the night of the last race (usually the more experienced sailors with bigger budget). On that one you need to listen to yourself and do what feels right for you. Everyone is different.

5. Q. When should I start to go to major championships? (Europeans, Worlds, North Americans)

R. When you can sail around a course without a capsize in 15 to 20 knots during a race and that you can raise the proper budget to do it right.

Summary : ask people who have done it. Ask them what worked and what they would change if they could. Ask them to give you advices. Do it with as many athletes-coaches possible, remember that everyone is different and that what works for you is probably the best thing for you but that it doesn't hurt to know what others do.