

Great GreenFleet Regattas Do's and Don'ts

By Tom "OPTIGUYTOM" Coleman tom@optistuff.com

1. Who can race GreenFleet?

- a. The Optimist Class has absolutely no restrictions other than age. Skippers must be age 15 or under as of Dec. 31st of the current year. Requirements to force sailors to leave GreenFleet such as number of trophies won, years in GF etc were done away with almost a decade ago.
- b. Sailors may chose to race competitive fleet one weekend, GreenFleet the next and back to competitive fleet after that...on and on. The important thing is that they keep sailing! (See why not to award trophies).
- c. Overzealous parents occasionally register their sailor for the wrong fleet; most always placing them in conditions they aren't ready for. Sailors from the competitive fleets may join GF at any time during the regatta if they find their competitive fleets too daunting, the days too long or competition too extreme, with notice to their RC and permission from the GF RC. They can then race GF with all rights and privileges. Once they make the decision to race GF, they should stay in GF for the rest of the regatta. (Beats sitting out the rest of the regatta on their parent's boat).
- d. At registration.... I tell organizers, if a parent or coach isn't sure which fleet to put their sailor in.... suggest GreenFleet. Never had it fail!

2. Boat parking.

- a. The GreenFleet ideally needs to be assigned a land area where they can all be together for rigging. This should be marked from the time they arrive. Ideally it should allow access to launching (at least keep a clear lane) as GF sometimes launches before competitive fleet if they are in postponement.
- b. Keeping them together encourages new friendships and allows the Head Coach to conduct the initial Safety Check and subsequent rigging checks and teaching

3. Sailing Instructions. GreenFleet regattas are for beginners; write SI's accordingly, but this is also where we introduce proper SI's.

- a. See example in Symposium Notebook, also simplified SI's (handout).
- b. Boats do NOT have to go through measurement (even at Nationals), but should be safety checked (see notebook and Self Check Handout).
- c. Write SI's to be as broad as possible to allow flexibility and ensure best experience for the kids.
 - i. Don't specify number of races.

4. Head Coach / Clinician. Enlist a non-affiliated (whenever possible) dedicated coach/sailor advocate to serve as Head Coach.

- a. The Head Coach can also be PRO if they chose.
- b. Actively coaches and encourages sailors in the back half of the fleet.
- c. Should have good people skills for dealing with kids, parents, officials and other coaches.
- d. Should be Level 2 certified.
- e. Works with PRO to decide course, line and course length, when to abandon, etc. Often calls the line from the pin end.
- f. Has authority to allow "tail-enders" to cut straight to finish line or finish them in position.

- g. Should not be bogged down with the sailors who keep bring up the tail end or keep capsizing. The coaches of those sailors should be working with them.
 - h. Should be furnished with a very reliable RIB.
5. Skipper's meeting. Always have a skipper's meeting separate from the competitive fleet meeting. Usually everyone meets the first day for a general welcome and then breaks into their individual meetings. Sitting through the competitive fleet meeting is boring and confusing. The GF skipper's meeting is usually part of the clinic. Don't let a single sailor leave if they have unanswered questions.
6. Clinic. I firmly believe that every GreenFleet regatta (maybe every youth regatta?) should be clinic-style. Clinic-style places the emphasis on learning, FUN, and for each sailor to experience "winning at life" as opposed to just "winning at the results board". (See Double Goal Coach – Saturday at 1PM). Sailing, more so than any other sport, offers opportunities for kids to grow and learn healthy life-skills such as sportsmanship, self-reliance, trying new things, making friends, and responsibility as well as competition and doing one's best. ALLOW IT TO HAPPEN!
- a. Solicit the best coach/sailor advocate you can get to be in charge (see Head Coach).
 - b. Allow time... I suggest 1 hour per day is minimum. This doesn't include wasted time, but good solid quality time for "getting to know you" games, just plain "for fun" games as well as chalk talks, "walking the course", guest talks, de-briefs, rules discussions and all the "what if scenarios".
 - c. Designate a place... close to regatta activity, but to minimize distractions (indoors is often best) and for dedicated use in case of inclement weather. When conditions don't warrant racing, I believe it's important to keep the troops engaged.
 - d. Materials... dry erase board and markers, flags, a mark or two.
 - e. First meeting:
 - i. Super FUN, high energy. Defuse anxiety with FUN! (Drinking water).
 - ii. Set the tone for serious racing, lots of learning, sportsmanship, making friends and over all FUN.
 - iii. Introduce you, the RC and other coaches.
 - iv. Ice breakers and sailor introductions (5 questions)
 - f. Utilize others:
 - i. RC – to explain flags (have them to show kids), describe marks, race area, check-in/out procedure, waiting area, etc.
 - ii. Other coaches – include them and enlist their expertise on rules, racing tips, sail adjustment, de-brief, pep talks etc.
 - iii. Talented parents/siblings – enlist past Olympians, one-design class leaders, etc. to address the group.
 - iv. Stellar performing sailors – give attention to the kids who did well. Get them in the habit of helping all sailors do better, thinking about how they did well and communicating it to their fellow competitors. What was their starting strategy? Where did they go, which side and why?
 - v. Videos, pre-recorded as well as current video of the day's racing.
7. Race Committee.
- a. Must be friendly and respectful to the kids and willing to patiently teach

- b. Should worry more about safety and if the kids are having FUN than about perfect lines and courses., but fairness is important.
- c. Should expect to run more races than the competitive fleet
- d. 5 minute starts w/ load-hailer calling time on the minute, half-minute and last 10 seconds.
 - i. Do call and enforce OCS.
 - ii. Never use Black Flag. The I flag is OK.
- e. Accurate start signals and scoring are just as important as on the competitive course.
- f. Favored ends make for good coach debriefings, so don't sweat them too much... alternate them!
- g. Have some good spotters for OCS boats... be serious about this and watch for them to get clear. Do everything possible to alert them and get them to restart.

8. Safety.

- a. Conduct a Safety Check or give each sailor a "Safety Self-Checklist" at registration. Make it a requirement of regatta registration. Have coaches and knowledgeable volunteers on hand to help novice parents. In the symposium notebook is a more detailed checklist for use by the Head Coach or other knowledgeable coach.
- b. Take extra precautions to keep each sailor well hydrated. Even the parents will need to be educated on the hydration requirements of young sailors as athletes out in the wind and sun (compounded by reflection off the water). You don't have to provide bottled water, but do need to provide a ready source of water. The Head Coach should make drinking water a part of the sailors' daily clinic/regatta routine.
- c. Safety boats. Every parent, coach and spectator boat should be officially integrated as a "Safety Boat" by virtue of being in proximity to and having kids on the GF course. Many organizers have documents that must be signed stating this. The absolute min. ratio is 10: 1.
 - i. Have a brief parent/coach meeting to discuss safety, VHF channel to be monitored, emergency procedures and towing.
 - ii. All GF sailors should be escorted to and from the race course. There should be a designated safety boat for the last sailor(s) in and to escort boats leaving during racing.
- d. There must be a check-in/out system to assure the RC that all sailors are accounted for. In GreenFleet we have a bigger responsibility to keep track of EVERY registered sailor.
 - i. One system hangs a tag for every sailor. Before the sailor hits the water they remove their tag and place it in a designated bucket. The shore volunteers note which sailors didn't move their tags, then re-hangs all tags. Immediately upon returning each sailor is responsible to again, remove his or her tag to the bucket. Names left on the board after an announcement or two are cause for concern!
 - ii. I prefer to have volunteers check them in and out as they sail past a dock or specific boat. It's much more timely.
 - iii. Additionally, sailors should be instructed to sail past the committee boat on starboard tack and hail their sail number.

9. Other Coaching.

- a. I highly recommend that anyone actively coaching or with permission to enter the course during racing be Level 2 Coaches, but Level 1 is acceptable. This usually will be enough to keep

parents from coaching. It should be written in to SI's that any coach boat entering the course at any time must be registered w/ the RC, attend a meeting and agree to coach ALL SAILORS EQUALLY AND FAIRLY. Even if they are hired to coach one or several sailors they must work from the back end and assist others. Not just their own team.

b. All coaches should meet with the Head Coach and follow her/his lead.

10. Courses. (See Symposium Notebook). The GreenFleet should have their own course. This makes better racing for ALL sailors as one group is not compromised for the other. The closer the race area to the launch site, but with decent wind, the better!

a. Early on you will probably want to get a bunch of races in. keep them short and simple, but lengthen as the regatta goes on to help build stamina. Ideally GF races should be from 20 – 30 minutes and absolutely no longer than 40 minutes for first boat to finish.

b. Start with something familiar and easy. The one lap triangle (hamburger) fits the bill as everyone who knows how to sail has sailed it, if not raced it. Using the triangle helps prevent accidental jibes early in the regatta. It also allows the coach(es) to teach, watch for and reinforce good technique at the jibe mark. But, don't set ridiculously long reaches. They are boring, waste time, and not much, if any, learning occurs.

c. Transition into two lap triangles (double beef hamburger). Windward / leeward (hotdog) and W/L2 (double hotdog) can be used to keep things interesting. Stick to triangles if very windy to avoid carnage, at least in the beginning.

d. On the second day introduce and use the modified Olympic course to expand their repertoire. If you are doing a 3-4 day regatta or get a lot of races in, introduce the offset mark and the leeward gate. If explained well and in advance.... they get it. (Nobody explains this stuff the first time they see it on the competitive course).

11. Sportsmanship. Set the tone early for a culture of good sportsmanship, not only among sailors, but parents and even coaches.

a. Coaches should be available on the course to interpret and call rule violations in the back half as they happen.

b. EXPERIMENTAL: Head Coach and her/his designated coaches should be allowed to call violations in the top half.

c. Doing "spins" or penalty turns should be looked at as a good thing and highly encouraged.

d. Do introduce young sailors to Paul Elvström and his quote on winning vs. sportsmanship!

12. Parents. Parents are a necessary evil at this stage. Approach them with a positive attitude and they can be your strongest allies.

a. Parent volunteer – you need these guys and can't run a regatta without 'em! Assign them jobs, keep them busy and be sure to THANK THEM.

b. Parent coach - approach the matter of who is coaching in a positive manner. If parents recognize that good, qualified coaches have been specifically chosen to work with the regatta, they are more apt to stand back and let others do the job. The designated coaches should be looked at as a positive experience for their kids. It's a chance for them to sit back, watch the races (and yell at their kids in between).

c. Parent Race Committee – parents of the competitors should NOT be on the Race Committee if at all possible. That being said... RC is often at a premium and you will not have such a choice. Second best is to have a parent boat close by that their children can go to between races for

hugs, reassurance, tear drying, snack getting etc. The RC should not allow their own children to tie-up even between races.

- d. Parent expert – use them! There are many. Seek out the ones who are “good at working with children” and are GOOD communicators w/children. Give them some time during clinics to address key areas.
- e. Parents are highly encouraged as spectators (cheering for every finisher) and safety boats (make it known - with duty not just for their kids). Emphasize the FUN of regattas.

13. Protests. DO allow protests.

- a. The initial talk by the head Coach should be about sportsmanship. That should transition into a discussion on the Racing Rules of Sailing.
- b. Eventually the question of protests will come up. Emphasize that proper sailing and sportsmanship have little to do with protests.
- c. Do not discourage protests rather encourage “doing the right thing”... penalty turns (or dropping out).
- d. The head Coach should explain the protest procedure as outlined in the SI’s (see SIs). Conduct protest hearings in front of all GFers and parents as a great learning tool. The maximum penalty should not be harsher than 20% scoring penalty. Give prizes to the protestor and protestee. Good sportsmanship cannot be overemphasized and should be rewarded early on.

14. Award ceremony.

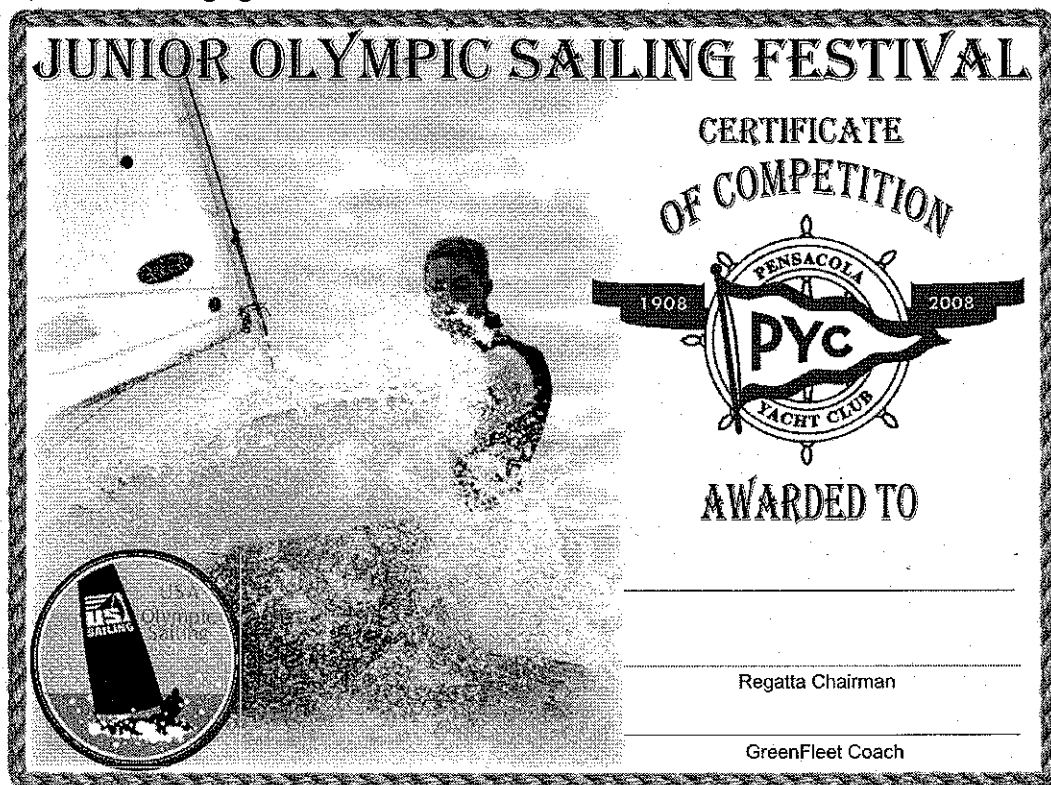
- a. In GreenFleet, some programs don’t even keep score. Some keep score, but don’t post results, while some post, but don’t announce results. Despite a nearly ten-year-old USODA Class policy, a few still insist on awarding trophies to top finishers.
- b. Awarding trophies:
 - i. Keeps kids in GreenFleet longer (and for the wrong reasons – to collect trophies)
 - ii. Creates a high level of anxiety over performance (something they’ll get plenty of later “if” they persist).
 - iii. Causes parents to get emotionally involved... *and often, not in a good way!*
 - iv. Very costly for only a few recipients
- c. Awarding something to each racer such as “Certificates of Competition” or a medallion is a way to reward each sailor that what they did was special... and it is! It’s a great memento of the regatta and the look on each sailor’s face as they get and proudly display their certificate is priceless. Group photos are nice too, but do make the certificates something special that they

would want to keep and be proud of for years. Another option is a medallion such as USODA sells inexpensively for GreenFleet regattas.

- d. At the award ceremony, even if you chose to give placement trophies (shame on ya!), have each and every GreenFleeter come up as you call their name and remain until all are assembled to receive the thunderous applause as the next generation of "winners" are proclaimed.
- e. Please don't "give" the last place finisher the Sportsmanship Award unless they really did something to deserve it. Merely finishing each race is an achievement for many, but at least in my opinion, cheapens it for recipients who are well deserving of this high honor. You don't "always" have to award it! Be discretionary and set the bar.
- f. Remember: The real prizes these sailors take home should be the life lessons and friendships formed, hopefully treasured, long after tarnished trophies have been discarded or forgotten about.

15. Extra special

- a. Have 2 GreenFleets! The most successful GreenFleet regatta I've ever participated in was Opti Nationals (2004?) at Norfolk Y&CC. We asked 100 GreenFleeters to divide into 2 groups. One group was described as being for very "green" sailors, sailors who were experiencing their first or second regatta. There would use 3 minute starts, no protests, smaller, simpler courses, more explanation and heavier on the clinics. The other group was for more advanced racers, 5 minute starts, protests allowed, advanced courses, less clinics, etc. The obvious result was better racing for everyone.
- b. Bring them in for lunch. Gives them a needed break, at least in the first day or two. Allows time for a better lunch, potty time, change of clothes. Perhaps the best reason is to allow the Head Coach some board time to review the morning's races and suggest improvement, answer questions or to explain a new, more challenging course.



OPTIMIST SAFETY SELF-CHECK LIST

Competitor is NOT officially registered until all safety requirements are met, certified by an adult via this form and form is turned in to registration.

BELOW ARE MINIMUM SAFETY STANDARDS REQUIRED TO COMPETE AT THIS EVENT. COMPETITOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR COMPLIANCE WITH OTHER CLASS OR LOCAL MARITIME RESTRICTIONS OR REGULATIONS.

Competitor: _____ Sail number: _____

___ US Coast Guard approved (not Zhik, Gill, etc.) properly sized Life Jacket

- whistle attached by lanyard

___ 26'3" - 30' Bow line in good condition, 5mm minimum diameter (1/4")

- Secured to mast step
- Knot free between ends (if knots cannot be removed, replace it)
- Roughly 6-8" diameter bowline at outer end
- Floating, but not slippery polyethylene
- Must NOT be passed through drain hole in bow (bow loop optional)

___ Bailer - 1 minimum at least 1 liter, tied to boat. (2 strongly recommended)

___ Air Bags - 3 (even boats with side covers), must be firmly inflated and obviously able to hold air

- Each external bag must be well secured by three straps

___ Rudder Retainer Clip (to keep rudder secured to transom)

___ Daggerboard lanyard (to prevent it floating away in capsized)

___ Mast Tie in system (line and/or locking collar)

___ Bridle/mainsheet connection

- Must be a shackle-type device capable of easy/quick disconnect (screw pins or tying with line is not acceptable). MUST NOT BE SELF OPENING OR ABLE TO SNAG CLOTHING, LIFEJACKET OR TOWLINE.

___ Mainsheet Bridle - No looser than 100 mm (approx. 4") from the boom at any point. (to prevent head entrapment)

___ Paddle or Praddel

I have personally checked and this Optimist Dinghy meets ALL Safety Requirements above.

_____ Date _____

Signed (must be adult over 21yrs of age)

(tom@optimiststuff.com)

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

Department of Chemistry

Office of the Director

1155 East 58th Street

Chicago, Illinois 60637

Telephone: (773) 707-5555

Fax: (773) 707-5555

Internet: <http://www.uchicago.edu>

Director: [Name]

Deputy Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]

Assistant Director: [Name]