

The development of junior racing within sailing clubs salient points from RYA Club Coaching Conferences

Outlined below is the feedback from a number of discussion groups, formed by people actively involved within junior training and racing.

The general consensus of the group was that it is difficult to encourage junior and youth sailors from training into club racing. It is generally agreed that racing is not for all. However, if we are to continue to develop the membership of sailing clubs and the development of our sport we need to encourage sailors to move from training into racing

It was noted that Sport England has produced literature that supports that if junior sports people progress from training to competition they are more likely to stay in the sport in the longer term.

The following points were considered key to developing junior racing.

Junior sailors race initially because they like the fun of sailing with their friends in close proximity, which made it fun, social (we all do it together, it's a team thing.) and eventually more they enjoy the competition.

Club culture

- Establishing a club culture of “racing” with a clear “pathway” for progression is essential.
- The moment junior sailors start training, the introduction to the concept of racing in the non-threatening manner is clearly helpful
- During training. It is important to introduce the concept of racing, either through short races, or in presentations so that racing becomes a natural progression in the eyes of a sailor.
- It was felt that the most successful clubs that had established junior and youth class racing, which younger newer sailors then aspire to. This was essential to establishing “critical mass”.
- It is also clearly important that from the outset junior sailors know that they are welcome to join in the racing and it should be explained how they can get involved
- It may be appropriate for the club to have a “Novice guide to racing”. Parents and sailors alike.

The Junior/Novice Racing

- It was felt that the racing offered within most existing club structures was far too long, therefore they got bored and if this continued they are unlikely to return in subsequent weeks.
- Ideally junior/novice sailors needed their own start with short and close racing.
- The junior/novice racing needs to be properly programmed into the club's schedule of racing. Sailors can plan together when they are all going to race. These could also be dedicated junior/novice events for example junior week.
- The program where possible should consider when school exams are!
- The courses needed to be short in length with lots of mark rounding opportunities and easy to understand. (For example, using a large blow up crocodile as a windward, this makes it easy for the sailors to identify the first mark!)
- The racing should be non-threatening from established sailors and races within the club. It may be appropriate for the club to have a rule that requires more experienced racers to call the rules, for example “starboard”, but when a novice sailor doesn't react, the experience sailor should give way and explain to the novice sailor rule after the race. (Some clubs have put this into their own rules)
- Education of parents can be essential, particularly non-sailing parents. This can be:-
 - Education of non-sailing families and parents about racing
 - Helping other “sailing” families to be realistic about the sailor's progression!
 - It might be appropriate to get the parents so involved with assisting with the race management.
- The use of double handed boats, where novice sailors can crew for experienced helms. It is a good way of introducing sailors to the concept of racing. Boats that typically do this well are Mirrors, Cadets and Fevas.
- If the junior/novice racing was run as part of a larger “slow handicap race” it was considered that perhaps using an “average race” could be more appropriate.
- To encourage their junior/novice sailors where appropriate to have on water coach to help the backmarkers would be a help. Also video feedback, played back in the clubhouse later with a debrief to encourage the sailors.
- It way be worth running some fun handicapped racing or introducing team racing

Other Things To Consider.

- Considered running interclub events, it is a good way to introduce sailors into the fun of open meeting competition or the fun of going away and meeting and racing against other new sailors.
- Prizes were considered essential, a “series” or individual races with prize Trophies. Also lots of other awards recognising the commitment of the new sailors is essential.
- It was generally agreed that racing for the junior sailors should be a “social experience” therefore, events after the racing were very important.
- “Buddying Systems” where the more experienced racers were paired up with the least experienced racers can work well in helping to develop new sailors.
- If the club has an established junior class, it can be helpful, particularly for the non-sailing families for the coaches to run an “introduction to rigging and setting” up of the boats.
- If the club has access to elite sailors, it maybe appropriate to bring them in for either prize-giving’s or talks.