



## Race Strategy

You will often hear people talk about race strategy and race tactics as if they were the same thing. They are not. Your race strategy is the plan you have for sailing around the course in the shortest time in the absence of other boats. Tactics are the methods you employ to get the best outcome in your interactions with other boats on the course.

### ***Why have a Strategy***

A well considered strategy is important as it encourages a number of desirable race behaviours:

- Gathering information about the race course prior to the start – wind behaviour, course geometry etc.
- Making a plan for the first beat to the windward mark.
- Developing a compatible starting plan.
- It is a basis for making sound tactical decisions during the race.

However, a race strategy is of little use if your boat is slow or you finish up in irons at every second tack. There is no substitute for a fast, well balanced boat (particularly off the start) and good boat handling. So:

- Find time to practice and become slick at executing basic manoeuvres.
- Get out on the course with time to select your rig size and tune the boat to prevailing conditions.

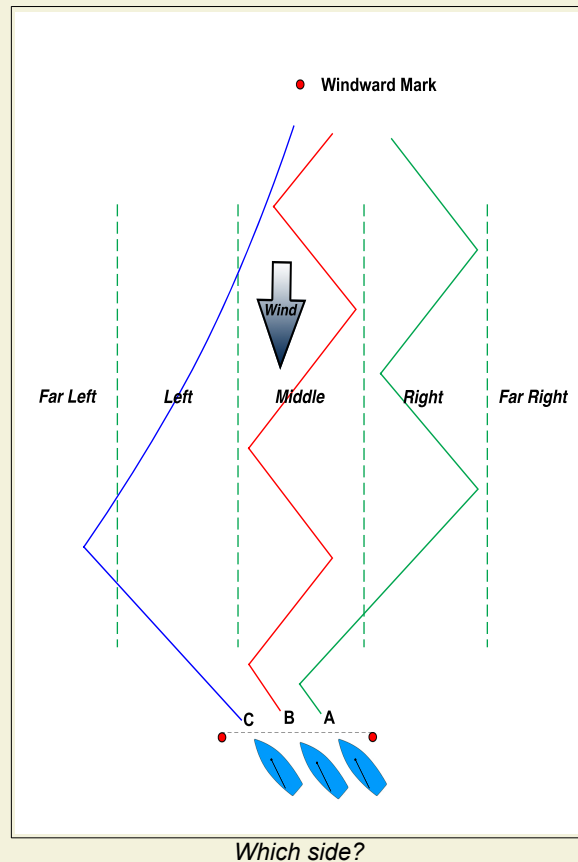
### ***Plan the First Beat***

As you sail around the race area prior to the first start of the day, ask yourself the wind questions (see ***Wind on the Course***). Based on the answers, decide if you want to go left, up the middle, or right.

In the diagram below:

- Boat A – Wants to go right to get into higher pressure down that side, but not all the way right. A has spotted that wind gusts develop down the far right, but they are occasional and she will still need to sail the shifts in between. She also wants to stay in touch with the rest of the fleet so doesn't head all the way to the right hand side.
- Boat B – Wants the conservative middle and plans to play the shifts in order to get leverage on the other boats. B will need to keep an eye on boats out to the sides to ensure they are not moving ahead, but being in the middle does give her greater flexibility should the strategy need to change
- Boat C – Wants to go left to take advantage of a bending wind along the shoreline. C believes this wind pattern is so pronounced and constant that she is prepared to risk all on this approach.

Going so far left will give C increased separation on the other boats – great if it pays off, but no so good if the wind pattern changes and the advantage swings to the other side of the course.



### ***Plan the Start***

The start of any race is a critical moment that can have a big effect on your ability to follow your race strategy. Plan to start near the end that gets you sailing in the right direction up the first beat. Be aware of any line bias, but don't make that your only consideration. If the upwind end matches the side of the course you prefer, your choice of where to start is easy. But if your preferred side of the course is at the downwind end of a biased start line, you have to decide which one is your priority.

So how would our A, B and C boats above, plan their start?

- Boat A will want to start at the right hand end of the line with no other boat to windward, so she will fight for the premiere spot right at the mark. If that option isn't available, A might consider starting behind the boat in the premiere spot so that she can tack across onto port and head right immediately after crossing the line.
- Boat B wants the middle, so will choose a spot slightly down the line and away from the crowd at the right hand end. She will control boats starting further left (preventing them from tacking) while looking for an opportunity to tack back herself. She must sail quickly off the line at the start, or risk being controlled by boats to windward and forced to go further left than she wants.

- Boat C will want a start that allows her to get quickly out to the left, so may start at the left hand end of the line. C could start nearer the middle of the line allowing her to control boats to leeward, but this just forces more of the competition over to the side C believes to be favoured.

Remember: Success at the start means getting off the line cleanly at the spot you wanted with clear air and good speed.

### ***Plan the Second and Subsequent Beats***

The plan for the second and subsequent beats from the leeward mark may be a copy of the plan for the first leg, or you may want to vary it due to different wind conditions or course geometry at the leeward mark.

### ***Stay Flexible***

As the race progresses, you should continually assess whether conditions have changed and if necessary, revise the strategy.

Keep looking around. You spent some of that pre-race time getting your boat balanced and going fast so now you can afford to take your eyes off it for short periods of time. Keep an eye out upwind for wind patterns on the water. Look around at competitors. Are they still behind you? Is someone taking a flier to the other side and looking dangerous? Know what's going on in a wider context than just your own boat. Keep gathering information.

### ***Let Tactics Support the Strategy***

During the race, think strategically. Don't abandon your race strategy to have a little duel with another competitor. At each interaction with other boats, think about which way you want to go. If you're on port, should you tack or dip? Dipping a starboard tack boat that is heading to the wrong side of the course can be a rewarding moment.

If your strategy has paid off, the last beat before the finish is about consolidating gains or protecting your position. This is the time to think tactically and cover other opponents. If you're ahead, sail conservatively and stay between opponents and the finish line.