

T H O M A S R . L E I T H

March 3, 2008

Dear CYC Skippers,

If you don't know me, my name is Tom Leith, and I am the 2008 Sail Fleet Captain. For the past four seasons, I have been the tactician, trimmer, and trainer-of-crew on Joan Hall's J-24, RJ. Before that, I sailed at CSA on any number of boats over the years, including my Star, *Not Sirius*, which I sold when I went to grad school in 2000. Tom Wyman asked me this past summer to stand for election to the Sail Fleet Captain post, and I am now convinced that absolutely nobody knew what he was getting into with this.

I have heard from many CYC members about the state of the racing program, and have received many suggestions about how it might be improved. So has Stacey. You could say we've gotten an earful. Stacey convened a committee of the best minds at CYC to help me out with this. I sincerely thank Tom Wyman, Terry Burke, Jim Stephenson, Bob McLaughlin, Dan Moriarty, John Huhn, and Bob Laker for all their help and advice. After a great deal of thought and discussion, I have made several revisions to the Buoy Racing Program for 2008. The most prominent features are new Divisions in the Jib and Main (nee "non-spinnaker") Fleet.

Besides numerous conversations at the club and on the phone, more than 50 people responded to the Jib and Main (JAM) Fleet survey and I've heard that too. The big concerns about the program seem to fall into a two areas: time commitment, and the disparate fleet of boats we have trying to race together. All the new ideas in the program address one or the other of these concerns. The Notice of Race (NOR) describes in a formal way the program for 2008. What I want to add here is some insight into what it all means, and where CYC might go in the future.

The CYC Handicapping Committee is being revived so to speak, and will take a good hard look at ratings. Their work is very difficult: we are a small venue with lots of different boat types and so comparison data is hard to come by. Again, some of the best technical minds at CYC are volunteering their time and energy to improve the program, and they deserve our thanks. I know they will do the best job that can be done under the circumstances. For 2008 CYC will continue to use the PHRF Methodology for both Fleets. There has been a discussion of creating a new Fleet that sails under a measurement rule like ORR or IRC, and the Portsmouth Yardstick was also considered. It is my opinion that moving towards a measurement based system is best for sailboat racing generally, and best for CYC's program. These systems provide more objective ratings than PHRF does, but it won't be this year. But this will be a very big change, and more study is needed. I hope that development of the program along these lines continues.

JIB AND MAIN DIVISIONS

The JAM Fleet now has four Divisions. The plan is for all JAM Fleet boats to start at the same time so that everyone races together: the more the merrier. But scoring is a different story.

Wet Sailed Division

Hardcore racers with big boats keep them on a \$20,000 HydroHoist®, or send a diver below, or haul them out to clean the bottom before every race. Hardcore racers with smaller boats keep them on trailers. Lots of sailors aren't this hardcore, and this Division is for them. Bottom growth on a sailboat slows it down considerably: under some conditions it may be as much as 20%, or two

minutes per mile. That's a whopping 120 PHRF rating points. And the effect varies: in light air it'll be worse; in windier conditions it'll be less bad. Light growth hurts less than heavy growth, and it all depends on the boat too. There really is no way to "accurately" handicap boat condition, so we have created this Division in the JAM Fleet. Basically we presume your boat is clean on the day of the first race of each series, and that it isn't cleaned during the series. A boat disqualified on eligibility grounds will be disqualified in this Division for the remainder of the races in the Series.

JAM Division

The JAM Fleet has a JAM Division which includes the Wet Division boats. This may sound a little confusing. Its sort of an "overall" Division – it is possible that a boat in the Wet Division can win two series honors; one for the Wet and one for the JAM Division.

Once a Month Division

Several skippers said they do not participate in the Buoy Program because of the time commitment required. So for 2008, we offer a Division with a series of only six dates that spans the sailing season. The NOR has the dates.

Level Handicap Division

Here's the biggie. Handicapping in sailboat racing traditionally addresses the potential performance differences between *boats as they are designed*. The assumptions are that the boats are maintained in pristine condition, sport new sails, and are expertly crewed. There are many systems used to do this, and they all make these assumptions. PHRF is one of them. But this kind of game isn't for everyone.

Tens of thousands of amateur golfers and bowlers play their respective games under a handicapping system that puts everyone on an equal footing, and tells them "play better than your own average". In golf, if par is 72 and your handicap is 12, then so long as you shoot 84 or better you do well in the match. In bowling, if your handicap is 80, so long as you shoot 220 or better, you'll do well in the match. Under this kind of system, if everyone plays his average game, the tournament is a tie. Overall braggin' rights come with a low handicap – like being a scratch golfer. But anyone can win any round. This seems to be lots of fun.

The Level Division does the same thing for sailboat racing. Sailing does not have the concept of "par" or "300", so your handicap is calculated with respect to your regular competitors, not according to a standard of perfection. Periodically a new handicap will be calculated for each boat to create a total division-wide tie. This is all done mathematically – there can be no favoritism or reputation effects. If you're sailing to your handicap, you'll do well: if the Level Division has six boats in it, if you sail your average race you'll have about a 50/50 chance of finishing in the top three.

Since the handicaps are calculated on **past** performance, you're always at least a race ahead of your handicap, which gives you temporary "credit" for improving your game. But just like in golf and bowling, if you're getting better your handicap *will* catch up with you so you can't simply rest on your laurels.

In this system, any boat can win any race, but over the course of a series the competition is all about consistency, and especially about consistent improvement. There remains a big element of head-to-head competition – nothing changes at starting lines and mark roundings, for example. You still need to have a decent grasp of the rules. If the other teams step up their games, you gotta step up your own or fall behind. Its not like this turns into a "gimme" or a simple crapshoot. But you can "bring what you got" to the racecourse, and it gives everyone a shot at honors at the end of

the series. This idea is gaining popularity in Australia, and CYC will try it too. Based on some of what I heard this past Fall, this kind of game fits the goals of some CYC members, and we may attract a few new ones with this unique program.

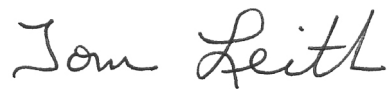
One last thing about this: it cannot work for regattas because the handicaps are calculated among boats that race against each other all the time and regattas are open to anyone. Don't look for this Division at the Commodore's Cup or the Great Race.

Spin Fleet

Last season, we had boats with SA/D of about 16 racing in the same Division with boats of SA/D of 34. For 2008, the fleet has been split to improve this situation. It isn't perfect: if we had more boats, it might make sense to have another split at 22 or 23, but for the Buoy Program we don't. For regattas, we may.

This represents a lot of changes, and I understand that some of it may look a little confusing. If you want to talk about it, or if you have questions or an idea, e-mail me or call any time between 9 a.m. & 9 p.m. I hope everyone who wants to play the sailboat racing game can find a Division in the Buoy Program to have fun and compete in. It will take a couple or three years for everyone to understand the new features and experience will tell us all which of these ideas are helpful and which are not, so we ought not jump too soon to a conclusion. Let's try it out for awhile. And remember to have fun.

See you on the water,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Tom Leith".

Tom Leith