

## **3X3 Team Racing – Strategy; Skill and Teamwork,**

### **1. Starts: breaking it down**

The fundamental aim is to have all three boats in your team hit the line on the gun and sailing quickly which is to ensure you have balance across the starting line and going up the first beat to mitigate any significant shifts and to prevent your teammates getting in your way and vice versa. To help make that happen it is common that one of the following positions on the start line is allocated to each team member – which is not where they must start - but where they will aim to start - boat, middle and pin.

In the pre-start data collection process, you should as a team establish where the starboard lay lines to the boat and pin ends of the start line are and where the reverse lay lines are on port. It is important you don't get pushed outside them and that you know when you have an opponent outside them. The headsail trimmer is the person in the best position to see and manage the lay lines during the pre-start so they should be asked to manage them. They should be keeping a look out all the time and informing the mainsheet and helm if they are approaching either lay line and on our boat they also tell us what is happening with the other boats – on our team and the opponents as the helm doesn't have much time to look and is often looking backwards anyway in the pre-start managing overlaps.

Accurate judgment of the time and distance to the start line is also important. The person most forward in the boat normally calls time on our boat and their estimate is of the time it will take to a full speed to sail to the nearest point on the start which you can lay on the tack you are on. Please also time the line – they will be short but you need to know how much time it takes to sail from the boat to the pin at near full speed so you can judge your approach.

Decide early whether your objective is to follow or lead your opposition into the start line and position yourself accordingly. In light airs, most of the time you should lead in, but in stronger breezes it is appropriate to consider pushing the opposition in early by tailing them.

The more pin bias there is on the line, the harder it is to tail someone in and get a safe overlap to allow you push them over the line early and it is easy to get caught behind them or outside the pin layline – so consider leading your opposition into the start zone when the pin is favoured. That makes the start box narrower than an even start line.

When the line has a boat end or starboard bias, consider tailing your opposition (as long as you aren't late!) as you have a greater chance to hook them from underneath and potentially push them over the line because the start box is wider and it is easier to lay the start boat from anywhere - with a windward boat stuck above you.

And if you are in a really bad place with a minute plus to go – get the pain over with – take a penalty and start on time going fast in the right direction – in team racing pre-start and indeed all penalties need to be taken as soon as possible and cannot be delayed or stacked up – so take your medicine immediately – it is much better than delaying it till the gun goes and you are still spinning as they head off up the course. And pre-start and upwind the penalty is a gybe – and on all other courses the penalty is a tack – so practise them so you lose as little as possible.

## 2. Cracking the combinations

Knowing the winning and losing combinations in 3X3 TR is fundamental. To win your points must add up to 10 or less – and some people use the aides to memory that cover most of the winning combos which include 'two in the top three' or 'first not last'.

There are 10 winning combinations, and 8 of these have first in them, so getting and keeping first place is important. 1,2 anything, 2,3,4 and 1,4,5 are considered **'stable' winning combinations**. If you are not in one of those combinations, you are not in a good position – so you should attempt to get into them. Consider which of these combinations you are closest to – and which is the easiest to convert what you have to - for example, if you are in a 1,3,6 and you want to convert to a 1,2,6 - boat needs to perform a pass-back on the opponent boat 2.

**A “pass-back”** is a team racing move not to be tried at home or when fleet racing - in which the boat in front slows the opponent immediately behind down so the next boat behind that opponent (hopefully your teammate) can pass both of you – e.g. 1<sup>st</sup> takes luffs 2 to slow them and 3 dives below them both to take the lead. So 1 takes themselves back to 2 and pushes the opponent immediately behind them back to 3 and promotes their previously 3<sup>rd</sup> placed teammate to 1<sup>st</sup>.

Giving up the lead to win – such a simple concept – but one which is counterintuitive to most fleet racers.

**When your team is winning you want to minimise risks, sail a clean race and get the race finished as quickly as you can.**

**When your team is losing you need to slow the race down and make it take longer - compress (bunch up) the fleet and mix things up to maximise place-changing opportunities and make it harder for the winning team.** Give the leading team opportunities to get in each other’s way and slow down each other etc – and basically get them out of their comfort zone and allow them time to panic, make an error and lose. You will be surprised what can happen when boats that were hoping they had a race won realise they might lose it!

The team that controls their boats best when sailing slowly will win this sort of down speed confrontation and it is harder than one would think to sail slowly and control the boat and keep clear etc with 5 other boats crawling all over you.

Remember champions make mistakes just like ordinary sailors do.

### **3. Showdowns - 1,4,5 versus 2,3,6.**

This is one of the most common scenarios that occurs in 3X3 TR in which some of the most common manoeuvres come in to play with some of the tightest and most exciting racing.

Each boat should keep in mind what their role in the team is at all times during a team’s race as the roles can change in a very short time. The person sailing in

the middle of the fleet for your team is often the most important cog in the wheel. Other teams will allow you to finish first if they have the rest of your team under control - so fastest time is not the Holy Grail it is in fleet racing. If you get too far in front of yourselves – or just too far in front you will not be able to easily support your teammates and if you are not with them – then there will be 3 opponents working over 2 of your teammates.

In this Showdown scenario **boat 1** will seek to keep first while boats 4 and 5 will seek to widen the gap between them - so boat 4 can push boats 1 to 3 and the race along, and boat 5 will play back on boat 6 to hold them firmly in last place because **'first not last' wins all the time. And you are winning so you want the first 4 to finish before you and quickly and your boat to then finish 5<sup>th</sup> with an opponent behind them.** So hurry the front up and slow down the back.

If, however, the first-place boat gets into a vulnerable position it may decide to call its teammates to go a "Play 2" format. That involves attempting a conversion to a 2,3,4 scenario (Called Play 2 because the first of your boats will be boat 2 and Play 1 is when the first of your boats will be 1).

That is normally achieved by boat one slowing up the opponent boat 2 as boat 1's teammates in boats 4 and 5 switch to fast mode and sail past both their boat one teammate and the opponents in boats two and three - as quickly as possible – a double pass-back if you will. Now if boat 5 is way back holding off boat 6 this manouvre probably will not work as the opponents in 2,3 will not be passed back that easily.

But be aware that whilst you are scheming the opponents with boats 2 and 3 will be working together to attack boat 1. Trailing boats will double-cover leading boats downwind or split tacks upwind and induce tacking duels with the boat in front to seek to work the leader into a tacking duel so that boat 3 can get clear on the std side of boat 1 and so when the boats come back together the former boat 3 will have a piece of boat 1 as they come back on port.

**Boats two and three** have the option of letting boat one go and attacking backwards, aiming to take boat 4 or boat 5 back to sixth. Boat four needs to be

wary of this as they are particularly vulnerable on the last leg to getting locked out by boats two or three and pushed back to 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> – so boats 1 and 4 need to get boats 2 and 3 to finish as quickly as possible - whilst their teammate in boat 5 needs to hold boat 6 back as far as possible - so the 2 opponents in boats 2 and 3 cannot let boat 1 finish and then go back and pull boat 6 through into 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>.

**Boat 4's** position is crucial and they need to keep their moves low risk and avoid getting a penalty. They will often be in the dirty air of the 3 leading boats and be attacked the whole way round the course.

If it is light and shifty, they need to keep a close watch on boat 5 and make sure that boat 5 remains in control of boat 6. If the wind suddenly shifts and boat 6 gets through into 5<sup>th</sup>, boat 4 needs to be able to disengage from boats 2 and 3 and attack the opponent now in position 5 and push them promptly back to where they belong - 6<sup>th</sup>.

**Boat 5** needs to create as large a gap between themselves and their teammate in boat 4, slowing and blocking boat 6 at all times, which makes it harder for boats two and three to convert boat 6 forwards.

**Boat 6** wants the opposite – to push Boat 5 forwards and close up the gap. When the gap is small, a good trick as boat 6 is to go the same way as boat 4 at all times, because boat five will stay with you to try and cover you, forcing boats four and five to sail in the same direction, keeping them together and if possible get boat 5 into boat 4's dirty air upwind or boat 4 into boat 5s dirty wind downwind. This makes boats 4 and 5 easier targets for your teammates in 2 and 3 to work on to help pull you past them.

### **Defending a winning combo**

If all goes well and you find yourself in a strong position off the start line, sail fast up the first beat. Remember 1 plus 2 plus anything wins! Split up if you can so your team can control the left, middle and right at all times.

Try to have one boat coming in on the starboard layline for mark one, a very strong position with the traditional starboard-hand S-course. If you find yourself almost but not quite there in 1,3, the top reach is a great place to convert, with the first boat slowing second enough to allow the third through, usually with a luff.

**Remember, attack them before they attack you!**

#### **4. Defending the run**

If you are 1,2 on the run, stick together and defend the favoured left-hand side (looking down the run), if the wind is reasonably even across the course which will give you both starboard gybe as you come back into the course and a good course to mark 3. But beware if you approach mark 3 from too far left you will have opened up the angle of your stern a lot and boats coming in on port at mark 3 will very likely have overlaps when you enter the zone.

Defending downwind is about being comfortable sailing wider angles or goose-winging the headsail, and being able to switch between those options quickly and keeping crew weight forward and rolling the boat in the gybes is very important.

At mark 3, set up a mark trap well outside the zone, and only go into the zone when forced to. Keep up communication between teammates and work together to pre-empt any attacking moves but watch the overlaps as the std rounding can make that difficult.

We must minimise risks and manage every situation without collisions. It is only a team race and lots of money and upset follows collisions. Down the final leg, defend the left, but never neglect your opposition, especially in light shifty winds!

**As you round mark 3**, if you are 1-2 then boats 1 and 2 should continue on std and sail fast with boat 1 slightly lower and faster and boat 2 slightly higher and slower - to keep boat 2 in mostly clear air and high on the air of boat 3 (if it is not your teammate). When the first opponent – perhaps boat 3 tacks, your first boat goes with them and your second boat goes with theirs etc.

If covering at close quarters, use your wind shadow, and position yourself to hurt your opponent **and not your team-mate** and prevent the opponent from tacking.

I have often been frustrated by my teammates slowing me down – it is an easy mistake to make and is often critical to the outcome.

As a leading windward boat don't take too much risk and do not let them get close enough to potentially milk a penalty from you.

## 5. **Attacking boats in front of you.**

If you find yourself on the losing side of a 1,2 pairing, look for opportunities to attack. The best time to attack is downwind as the trailing boats can line up together – in a double cover – with one directly behind and perhaps slightly to leeward and one further to windward and perhaps slightly forward to place their main sails near and next to each other such that their collective wind-shadows significantly slow the closest opposition boat in front of them or force the boat in front to heat up their downwind angle giving the following boat to leeward at least a good chance to break through.

So, it is important to work hard to stay close to opponents ahead of you on the windward legs and the short reach from mark 1 to mark 2 and don't risk everything on a move with little chance of success that might lead to a penalty upwind or you missing marks 1 or 2 and having to go back – you must not lose touch with the race. Of course, if an opponent makes an error or you are much quicker or smarter with the wind shifts and so a good opportunity to convert presents itself - then by all means take it but sail fast and stay close upwind as there is plenty of time to attack on the run if you are close enough at mark 1 and attacking downwind often comes with a better chance of success – as long as you are close enough.

On the run, boats 3 and 4 should both cover (double-cover) boat 2 and keep away from each-others wind-shadow. Try to slow boat 2 enough to allow one of you to establish an overlap inside by mark three or the finish.

The final conversion at the finish is obviously the most important one and if you can get control of the left looking downwind that is very powerful but do not forget there are 2 boat length zones at both ends of the finish line so don't leave the luff too late and have them call water on the mark to prevent you luffing them away from the line. Team Racing can appear complex, but the best teams strive to simplify strategies whenever possible. Raw boat speed and boat handling is very important and must not be overlooked. If your team can get away from the start quickly and be 1,2 and 3 all the way, why would one stop at a marks to do a mark block and let the others catch up. Leading all the way is allowed in Team Racing and is a great feeling!

## 6. **Winning simply and easily.**

Keeping your team in the race and not risking a penalty early in the race helps to set you up for a positive outcome. Riskier moves should be left for the last run as a final ditch attempt if you are losing. Taking less risk is even more important if you are in boat 1.

**Communication between teammates** is critical so each boat knows what its role is at any time and please don't end up throwing dirty air on your teammate so the opponents can catch and pass them.

**Marks** are the best place to hold back opponents and convert your team-mates into a winning position. That is called placing a mark trap. Set up your mark trap with your bow at the edge of the zone (**noting that the zone is two and not three boat lengths in team racing**) not next to the mark, to give yourself space to play with and don't get too close to the mark too early if there is breeze or current to contend with – make it easy for yourself.

Always come out of the mark trap with at least the combo you went into it with, don't get greedy and **make sure your teammate knows which side of the trap the opposition boat is going, so they can go to the opposite**, so they don't follow them into the trap and make it easy for the opponent to hold them behind them.

If it looks like the mark trap is not going to work bail out early and go around and try to convert somewhere else.

**And just enjoy it – 3X3 TR is great fun.**

**Chris Pye 11<sup>th</sup> Jan 2024.**