

Racing Basics:

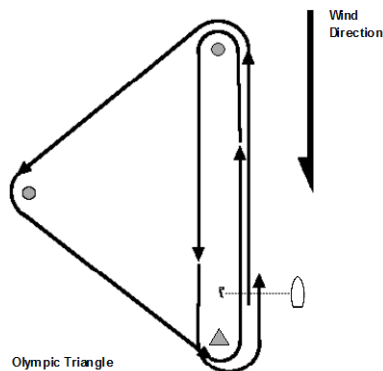
Welcome you to the Lac Deschenes Sailing Club and to our Racing program. Participating in the racing program is a great way to improve your sailing skills as well as being an excellent way to get to know other members of the Club. The program is geared to people of all levels, it is not just for experts. Here are the basics to get you started:

What you need:

- a sailboat; your own or sign out one of the Club Boats if you are a Club Boat Member
- a waterproof watch with a count-down timer
- a sense of humour

Racing takes place on Sunday afternoons and Wednesday evenings. The Race Committee will generally try to run 3 races on Sundays and 2 on Wednesday evening. Check the sailing calendar for start times.

A volunteer Race Committee will write pertinent information regarding the race (wind speed, weather forecast, description of racecourse) on a big blackboard. You will find this on the deck in front of the clubhouse. They will set up the buoys that mark the racecourse and run the start sequence for the races. They will also arbitrate over any squabbles that take place on the water about the Racing Rules.



The course used for races at LDSC is referred to as the "Olympic Triangle". It is a right-angle triangle, its orientation based on the direction the wind is coming from.

The windward mark is the mark closest to the wind, the leeward mark is the one furthest from the wind (to the lee of), and is directly downwind from the windward mark. The other mark is known as the "gybe" mark, and that is because you must gybe to round it.

The start/finish line is perpendicular to the line between the windward and leeward marks and is located about 1/3 of the way up from the leeward mark. The race committee boat marks one end of the start line, and a smaller buoy or flag (which is sometimes referred to as the "pin") marks the other end.

When describing the race course you will hear phrases like "a triangle and a sausage" (sounds bizarre, doesn't it?). What this means is that you go around the triangle once, and then you go back up to the windward mark, and then instead of heading for the gybe mark again, you beetle right back down to the leeward mark, go around it, and then back up and across the finish line. Or you might hear "two triangles" which would mean that you go around the full triangle twice. The details of the course will be noted on the blackboard (look for triangle shapes and ovals), but generally we default to a "triangle, and a sausage".

The start sequence for races follows a "Get ready", "Get set", "Go" format, at five minute intervals. This is why you need a countdown timer on your watch. The start sequence is Yellow flag , Blue flag, and Red Flag.

The race course for Catamarans is generally just the windward mark and the gybe mark, and they will have their own windward mark placed further away. The Catamarans will sail "two sausages", instead of the "triangle, and a sausage".

Catamarans start separately from the monohulls. The catamarans start is typically done first, followed by the monohulls 5 minutes later. The Hobie Waves start with the other Catamarans but tend to race the same course as the monohulls

Race Sequence:

Yellow Flag Up (0 minutes, 00 seconds)
Warning Signal – yellow shape raised, marks the start of the sequence. There will be one toot on the horn

Blue Flag Up (1 minute, 00 seconds) (Get Ready).
Preparatory Signal – blue shape raised. There will be one toot on the horn

Blue Flag Down (4 minutes, 00 seconds) (Get Set)
Warning Signal – blue shape lowered. There will one toot on the horn

Yellow Flag Down & Red Flag Up (5 minutes, 00 seconds) (Go!)
Start Signal - The yellow shape is lowered, and the red shape is raised. There will be one toot on the horn. The raising of the red shape signals the start of the race for the catamarans and a warning for the monohulls.

Blue Flag Up (6 minutes, 00 seconds) (Get Ready).
Preparatory Signal – blue shape raised. There will be one toot on the horn

Blue Flag Down (9 minutes, 00 seconds) (Get Set)
Warning Signal – blue shape lowered. There will one toot on the horn

Red Flag Down (10 minutes, 00 seconds) (Go!)
Start Signal - The blue shape is lowered, and the red shape is raised. There will be one toot on the horn. The raising of the red shape signals the start of the race for the monohulls.

(Hint: I keep my watch set on a 5-minute count down reset cycle, so if I miss starting it when they raise the yellow flag, I still have a chance to start it when the blue flag is raised.)

The idea is that you want to be as close to the start line as possible when they raise the red flag, but you don't want to be over it. The sail numbers of anyone over the line early will be called and they will have to come back and start the race again after everybody else has started. If there are a bunch of boats over the line early, the committee will signal a "general recall" and the race sequence will start again for all boats.

General racing rules:

- A boat on starboard tack (wind blowing over the right hand side of the boat first) has right of way over a boat on port tack.
- A windward boat must get out of the way of a boat to leeward.
- Within two boat lengths of a mark, the boat on the outside of the turn has to give the inside boat room to get around the mark.

The Racing Rules are quite complex and I would advise you to buy a copy if the racing bug bites you.

Racing Hints:

These hints are intended for beginning racers but most are just as valid for Olympic level yachtsmen. Sailboat racing is a complex and varied game that many people have studied for a lifetime and have not mastered. The joy is in the journey.

Practice starts by trying to sail past a mooring or buoy exactly at five minute intervals.

Get out to the race course area half an hour before the scheduled start time and get comfortable with sailing your boat in the conditions.

Invite another boat to sail upwind with you and have the slower boat copy the settings of the faster boat. Ideally you want to "brush" against a faster boat to copy their jib lead position, cunningham tension, and traveler position.

Check and see if one end of the start line is further upwind than the other. If so many boats will try and start there. Plan on avoiding this jam up.

Plan on starting on starboard tack and sailing upwind to cross the start line. Starboard tack has right of way and windward boats must keep clear.

Time yourself sailing the length of the start line, and then set yourself up with about one minutes sailing distance to your planned start position on the start line with two minutes to go. This gives you opportunity to speed up or slow down and make a good start.

Sail close to other boats like yours and copy their boat trim (position in the boat), and their sail trim (lead settings and tension). You almost certainly should move forward in the boat and ease the sails slightly. It's faster. Try it.

Look over your shoulder behind you when you tack from starboard to port tack. Keep a good lookout when you are on port tack (The other boats have right of way, you have to keep clear!)

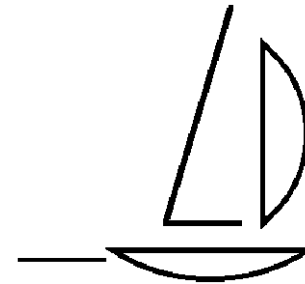
Say thank you to the race committee when you finish.

When you're on the beach ask the skipper of the faster boats of your class or the winner of the race what you did wrong. Try and separate "Slow" (inefficient sail or boat trim) from "Stupid" (sailing in disturbed wind from another boat or not taking advantage of favourable wind variations).

Check the race results. Compare your corrected time (after the handicaps are assigned) with the race winners corrected time. This gives you an idea of your progress as you improve.

Don't blame your (sails, rudder, centreboard, crew, compass, whatever). The race leaders of today started at the back of the pack too.

Have fun!



Lac Deschenes Sailing Club

A Beginners Guide to Racing