



Mendota Yacht Club

Madison, Wisconsin USA

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Tips for spectator boats watching Mendota Yacht Club races and regattas

c. Don Sanford, 2006

The Mendota Yacht Club welcomes spectators to come on out and watch the most exciting sailboat racing you will find anywhere. This fact sheet offers some tips for spectator boats who want to watch our races.

General

- ⇒ **The racecourse:** Sailboats race on a windward-leeward or triangular course marked with orange buoys. The first leg of the racecourse is always upwind. The race begins on an imaginary line between the race committee boat and another orange mark, the leeward mark.
- ⇒ **How to maneuver around the racecourse.** Sailors generally love to have spectators around the racecourse. Please keep in mind that scows are extremely sensitive to motorboat waves. In light air, you can actually change the outcome of a race by passing too close. If the wind is light, say under 10 mph, try to keep to speeds that cause little or no wake when on or near the racecourse. At starts, keep well away from the starting line. Allow plenty of room for a sailboat that may have to circle around the mark or the committee boat to restart. It is fine to view mark roundings, but always keep away from the course side of the marks. If you want to take pictures, trail or parallel the boat you are photographing rather than lead or cross in front of it, and be mindful that your wake can cause problems for sailboats behind you.
- ⇒ **Who's in charge?** Races start according to an announced warning time and a sequence of signals. The race committee is responsible for running the races and setting the course. The person in charge of the race is called the Principal Race Officer (PRO) or in sailor's parlance, "Judge" or "RC." He or she runs the race from the judges' boat, usually anchored at the starting line. Usually, there will be more than one race committee boat on the course. You can always find one by looking for the yellow or blue "RC" flag. If you have questions, ask a member of the race committee.
- ⇒ **When does the race start?** Signals are made to the sailors from the judges' boat with flags and audible signals, usually we use a 12 gauge shotgun but sometimes we use an air horn. To get the starting sequence moving, the race committee will give the sailors a 5-minute warning signal. Five minutes later, the starting signal for that class is made. If more than one class is racing, the process repeats itself until all classes have started. Sometimes as many as four classes start.

Watching the race

- ⇒ **Can I watch without getting in the way?** Sailors generally love to have spectators around the racecourse. There is plenty to see if you know what to look for. Though it seems a bit chaotic, there's a definite system to sailboat races and along with that places where you can watch the action without getting in the way. Sailboats are more maneuverable than you might think, they're used to going close to each other, without touching, that's part of the thrill of our sport. Generally in a sailboat race, boats tend to spread out. We often describe races as chess games on a moveable board. There's plenty of strategy and tactics involved in our sport that we spend years learning and mastering. But the wind is always shifting on the racecourse, so nothing stays exactly the same. When sailboats race, the most action happens at the start and at mark roundings.
- ⇒ **Watching the start.** At the start of a race, your best vantage point is on an extension of the starting line, at the opposite end from the race committee boat. Try to stay about 50 yards away from the starting buoy. In this position, you can watch the boats line up for the start. You'll see other powerboats in this area too.
- ⇒ **Watching mark roundings.** When boats round marks of the course, you'll see plenty of action as they jibe around a mark, raise and lower sails and jockey for a favorable position. Just like the start, you'll have a great vantage point to watch all this fun if you station yourself about 50 yards away from the buoy on the outside of the course. Again, you'll see other powerboats around the marks, so just stay in their general vicinity.
- ⇒ **Communications.** If you want to monitor happenings by radio, ask the Race Committee prior to the race which VHF radio channel they will be using. Many competitors will also carry radios on their boats. However, do not communicate with a competitor by radio unless they have requested assistance because they will be disqualified from the race.

Other Helpful Things To Do

- ⇒ **Tow boats to and from the racecourse.** Some crews will have an extremely long sail home after racing. If the wind is light (less than 5 mph) they will likely be delighted with the offer of a tow home. At the beginning of the day you can also offer to tow boats out to the racecourse, especially if they appear to be getting a late start.
- ⇒ **Assist capsized boats.** You'll find more information about how you can help sailors who have capsized at mendotayc.org

Thanks again for your interest and support of our sport. We're always happy to see you out on the lake.