

CHAPTER 7

Strategy

Strategy is the way you would choose to sail around a course as quickly as possible if there were no other boats present (always with a clear wind, never having to keep clear of anyone, etc.) – just like doing a ‘time trial’. Good race strategy is the way you would sail when leading a handicap race where you were the fastest boat, as opposed to sailing in a tight one-design class where you were just in the lead. Having said this, you often need another boat out there to test your strategy against: for example before the race boat A goes left, boat B goes right and they meet at the top and decide which side of the course was favoured and why.

At some venues the race strategy may be very obvious: for example, if there is a large island affecting the wind, very high land on one side of the race course or strong currents. The strategy may, of course, change over the course of the day, for example if the wind increases or the current decreases or vice versa.

Remember it is very hard to determine strategy effectively with lots of boats around, or on a short course, as often tactics will be more important here.

Strategy varies a lot from class to class and also across the wind range. In marginal planing conditions, for example, finding areas of strong wind may be the priority, whereas on a shifty day, being on the correct tack (both up and downwind) for the wind direction is crucial. The effect of current is also relative to the speed of the boat. The slower the boat the greater the effect current has.

It is a very good habit to launch early and get familiar with the conditions of the day, even if you know the venue very well. This is one of the most beautiful aspects of sailing: every day is different. However, you should look at the tidal charts for an area before you launch, as you need to consider safety: you don’t want to find out the hard way!

Usually the best approach is to decide the key strategy for the day: whether that is to get into

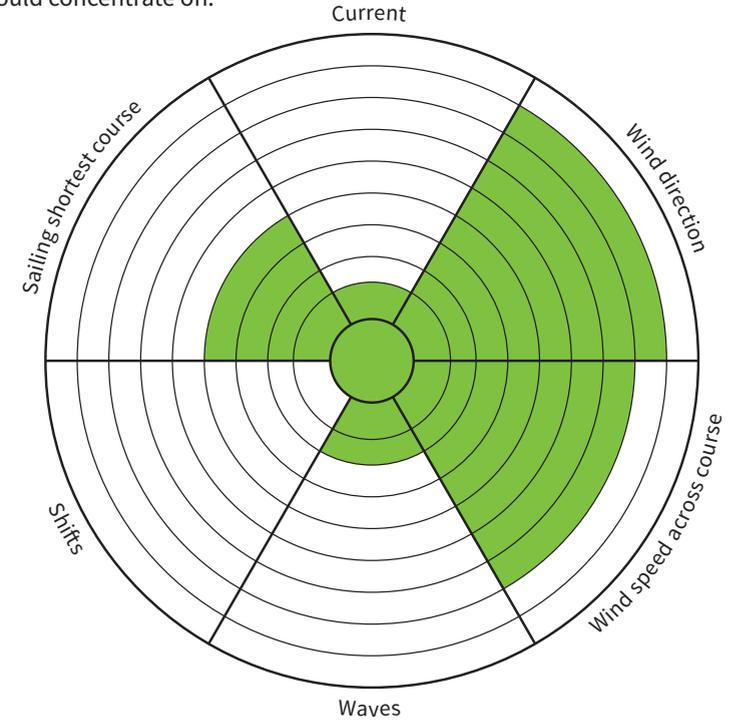
pressure, to get out of the strong adverse current or simply always to be tacking on the shifts. Sailing is a very dynamic sport: there are many variables, so you have to pay attention to the most important ones first... it probably really doesn’t matter if you are being given dirty air if you are on a huge lift which is already taking you above the layline to the mark.

The key to good decision making is to have as much information as possible: both that which can be obtained beforehand through weather forecasts, studying the venue’s topography and looking at tidal charts; and the information you can see by ‘getting your head out of the boat’, like a large black cloud coming down the course, the formation of ‘sea breeze clouds’ or simply by noting which side of the course seems to be paying.

You can also use the information that you have gathered early in the race to help you in the later stages, so, if the current made a big impact on the beat (either helping or hindering), then it is likely to make a big impact on the downwind legs too. This is WHY it is always so important to ask yourself WHY one side is gaining!

Ease of boat handling is also a factor as slow boats which tack fast are likely to tack much more frequently (on smaller shifts and pressure differences) than fast boats which lose a lot of ground when they tack.

The use of a dartboard can ensure that you make good strategic decisions, highlighting which elements you should concentrate on.



Strategic considerations dartboard

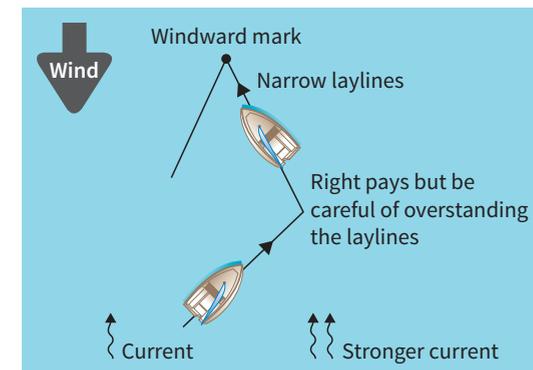
Upwind Strategy

Current

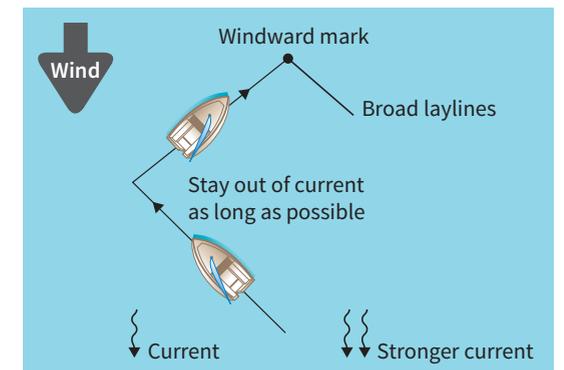
If the current is flowing in more or less the opposite direction to the wind, it obviously pays to sail towards the area of maximum flow when beating, although you need to be careful not to overstand

the layline (as it will be narrower than normal). You will also have to be careful not to get OCS at the start.

If the current is flowing in the same direction as the wind, the opposite is true. You want to stay out of the strong current for as long as possible.



Current flowing towards the windward mark



Current flowing towards the leeward mark