Last month we looked at what expert skippers think about while racing. We saw great athletes use key questions to prompt action. For sailboat racing, we start as the gun goes off, cross the starting line, and continue with our first and most important question: Are we fast?

If you are not fast and are stumped on what to do, look at your competitors, the ones going fast. Which headsails have they selected? How far in or out is their boom? How hard is their mainsail leach? How flat are they trimming the genoa? How do you compare with the leaders on each detail?

If you can’t make the boat go fast, don’t worry too much about anything else. Stay working on boat speed. If you are hopelessly slow week after week, invite a sailmaker onboard. How long will it take to improve? It could take a few years, but don’t give up. You can win a few races by getting lucky, but boat speed is the foundation for regular victories.

One of the best sailors we ever sailed with, Rollie Kahn, tells the story of racing with John Bertrand, the Australian who won the America’s Cup in 1983. Rollie and two friends owned a Wylie 28, which would go on to win Chicago Boat of the Year. One day with Bertrand onboard, he was most interested in watching progress against other boats. At one point, John started pacing around the boat saying “We aren’t fast. What’s going on? We need to do something now.” He’d start pulling on strings or changing sails. He knew the importance of this first question, as measured in real time, during the race.

In one race early last season, we were dog slow to weather with a brand new, beautiful, All Purpose #1. At first, we didn’t even catch it; we blew it off as something strange. Then we got our heads on straight and said, “Hey, we used to be fast in these conditions. What the heck is going on here?” Switching back to the old number one made us fast again. Only then did we realize the new sail had a slightly higher clew and needed to be trimmed differently. We wasted those first few races because we were slow and didn’t stick to solving boat speed problems.

In another early season race, we were slow and went back to basics changing our settings for everything. We discovered that we had both sails in far too tight for the light air that day. We were in full power beat mode and needed to ease off for speed. If we hadn’t changed right away, we would have been dog meat in that race.

The first question never changes: “Are we fast?” But the second question is also important.

**Question #2: “Are we sailing in the right direction?”**

This second script actually ties in with the first on the initial leg of most races, given that leg is usually a beat. You can always go “faster” through the water by heading down off a full beat, but of course, that may not make you first to the upwind mark. You can also head up slightly...
above a full beat but you will go slower through the water.

Let’s say full beat mode is just what’s needed, and we are going fast. The helmsman is watching the sails, tell-tails are flying, and all is good with the world. Then question number two comes into play.

This question asks when we need to tack or gybe to find the next mark. It requires a crew member very good at judging speed and distance. For us, it’s our tactician, Max. We have him looking at boats ahead of us and not just for a moment, for many minutes and making calls on where the best boats are tacking and how far we should go before a tack.

The helmsman shouldn’t do this. The person driving will generally have his or her hands full steering the boat. Years ago when I was junior crew, some offshore boats had a sign that read: “Don’t talk to the helmsman.” I wondered how that made sense—and today’s approach has everyone talking to everyone. But when I became a skipper, I realized that it can often take huge amounts of concentration to steer the boat well, and the extra mental load of talking can actually slow you down.

Your tactician needs to think about what your course will be on the next tack or gybe, and how you will meet up with competitors and boats from other sections after your change of course.

It’s like a chess game, with a moving chessboard and many different players at once. And we haven’t even talked about the wind yet, but that’s where we’re headed next month.

About the Author: Jim Schrager has raced for more than 20 years in Southern Lake Michigan, winning BotY twice, many port-to-port races, and crewing on a section winning boat in the Mac. He now races with his two sons and friends out of St. Joseph, MI. In his day job, he teaches a popular course in strategy at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business.

### Is your boat in good hands?

**“A comprehensive policy, professional, knowledgeable and friendly service. What more could you ask for? All at a great rate.”**

- Keith Mayes

Call today for a FREE quote!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boat Type</th>
<th>Valued</th>
<th>Rate/Year (estimated)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>J/22</td>
<td>$12,000</td>
<td>$161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J/24</td>
<td>$18,000</td>
<td>$181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J/30</td>
<td>$30,000</td>
<td>$235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J/35</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$349</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalina 27</td>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18’ Whaler</td>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melges 24</td>
<td>$38,000</td>
<td>$303</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farr 30</td>
<td>$50,000</td>
<td>$325</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beneteau 36.7</td>
<td>$160,000</td>
<td>$460</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Capital Insurance**

Annapolis, MD

Shelley Driscoll

sdriscoll@allstate.com

410.956.5700

---

**SAIL WITH INTENSITY**

Best prices on Dinghy sails, parts and gear!

Back to basics on price without compromising performance!

- Laser
- Optimist
- Bic O’Pen
- Sunfish
- C420
- CFJ
- JY15
- Flying Scott
- Vanguard
- Rhodes 19
- Pico Zuma
- and more

IntensitySails.com

401-738-8000

---

84 June 2014 SpinSheet