

July 12: No Spinnakers, no Traps for C420s. One of the things that bothers me as a coach is when kids jump into the C420 too early. I have seen too many regattas where inexperienced kids are fine in the morning when the breeze is light, but then the standard Buzzards Bay/Vineyard Sound/Nantucket Sound sea breezes fills in and those C420s end up floundering for the rest of the day. Not fun for the sailors; not fun for their coaches; not fun for the Race Committee who must balance the safety issue of multiple capsizes with the decision to keep racing; and not fun for the better C420 crews when the RC decides to call off racing early during the best conditions of the day. So what to do? A few years back, Edgartown experiments with a new cut of sails for their C420s – the RAD. With less sail area and not rigged up for traps and chutes, it was a good transition boat. The sailors new to the C420 could now learn to double-handed race without the additional concerns of the traps and chutes. And, when the breeze came up, that fleet can be sent in while the experienced sailors could enjoy the thrill of planning in 18 kts of breeze with the kite up.

The RAD sail design has not caught on other places, but Vineyard Haven YC plans to offer a No spinnaker, No Trapeze division at their C420 regatta later this month. It is a bold move for a SMSA club, but this is something that other areas have tried successfully around New England. If I were going to run such a division at my regatta, I would set it up like high school and college sailing – short courses with lots of races. This manner allows the sailors to experience lots of starts, mark roundings, and finishes. In short, it works on developing and honing their boat handling skills which are needed to compete in the C420 class. I might even expend it further, breaking the fleet up into manageable sizes of 20 to 25 boats on a line and run an A Division, a B Division, and more divisions, if necessary. Boats could even be artificially paired up beforehand and scores from each division combined at the end to determine a “winning team.”

I think that format would be fun for the sailors, easier for the RC to run, and great spectating for the parents and coaches. Let’s see how the events on Martha’s Vineyard unfold in the next 10 days. Maybe someone else will want to expand on the concept going forward for their regatta?