

July 22: How to watch a sail boat race: One of the main complaints I hear from sailors is their annoyance with motor boat waves. Sometimes that wake comes from a speeding powerboat heading towards the harbor with no clue about the race course that they just ran through, but more often the anger these sailors feel is directed at the coaches and spectators. So here are some guidelines that we all should follow if we truly want to enhance the sailor's race experience.

First of all, if your boat is over 20', you are a **spectator boat**. Boats over that size are either too big, creating a lot of windage, or too powerful, triple 250-hps engines cause a lot of wake even at slow speeds, to be close to the course. If you own a boat like that, your "job" is to find a place outside the race area, drop an anchor, and enjoy the day with sandwiches, a cold drink, and a pair of binoculars. Boats of this size even on the edge of the race course often interfere with the sailors in one way or another and clog up the area that should be reserved for the coaches to do their job.

**Coach boats**, which tend to be less than 20', need access to their sailors, but with that close quarters access comes responsibility. There is seldom a good reason for a coach boat to be on or above the line as the first gun starts. Good coaches train their sailors to find them in spots outside of the race area, so there is no need for you to go into the race area to tell them something.

Furthermore, there is seldom a need for a coach boat to go fast. I chuckle to myself when I see a coach boat parked at the start line, then drive like a bat out of hell to the windward mark, then tear down to the leeward mark with the same speed. I wonder, what exactly are they watching and how are they helping their sailors? Good coaches spent the time while the race is in progress looking at the big picture, so they can help their sailors plan strategy for the next race on the ever changing three-dimensional playing field that is a race course. You don't have to drive a 17' inflatable really fast to do that; in fact, you can't do it moving at that speed. The good coaches I watch pick a location and chart that part of the race. Now, I will admit, there are times when you do get yourself out of position and you need to move to another location quickly. The proper way to accomplish that goal is to move perpendicularly away from the course and drive further outside of everyone than you would normally think is practical.

There are a bunch of big regattas coming up – Falmouth, Vineyard Haven Jr, Wianno Opti, Opti New England's, and Hyannis to name a few. If we can all remember that as coaches and spectators, we are not the game. While we each serve a valuable role at a sail boat race, the game is played by the sailors. We should make sure that we enhance their experience and don't detract from it. Most of us would never consider running onto a football field during a contest; why do we think that we are any more welcome on a race course. Just my thoughts!