

Running Efficient Match Racing Events

by Donald Wilson
Founder, Chicago Match Race Center

With so many integral elements to consider, running a successful match race can be both challenging and extremely rewarding. When a well-run regatta is executed with great talent and a lot of racing, all the participants want to return, including competitors, umpires, and volunteers. Don Wilson, founder of the Chicago Match Race Center (CMRC), has provided some helpful tip on running match racing events.

- **BOATS / EQUIPMENT**

The whole point of a match-race is to reduce the variables of racing down to strategy and tactics. Therefore the use of identical boats, all maintained in the same impeccable fashion, is key to an efficient race. The CMRC uses eight identical Tom 28 boats, which minimizes the need to constantly switch boats and maximizes the time allowed for sailing. Additionally, having all the necessary support boats, including four umpire boats, one breakdown boat, and two additional support boats, allows flexibility throughout the event, while minimizing any wait time associated with the use of limited resources. At a recent event that included four Tom 28s and four Elliot 6ms, the CMRC anchored a support boat off the race course, where the teams could sail by and move on/off their respective boats as they switched onto the next boat in their rotation. This minimized the need to “corral” the sailors between events. Each team was given their schedule in advance, which kept the event running smoothly and maximized their racing time.

- **SCHEDULING / TEAMS**

There is an adage that a team/player only competes as well as their competition. A high-level of match-racing can be maintained by planning around major events on the sailing calendar and incorporating a high level of talent at each event. Working With other events can also create a unique opportunity for competitors to efficiently attend great races. For example, the CMRC has coordinated with the Bayview Yacht Club in Michigan and the Knickerbocker Yacht Club and Oakcliff Sailing Center in New York to run back-to-back-to-back Grade 2 regattas. In a span of less than four weeks, international teams could conceivably travel to the US and compete in four Grade 2 events.

Additionally, the CMRC has been able to run a two-regatta/four-day weekend by developing several efficiencies in the operations of match-racing events. In a standard eight hour window, the CMRC is able to run approximately nine flights. This allows for round robin, quarterfinals, semi-finals and finals to be run in a two-day format.

To mitigate the effect of changing wind conditions during these events, the CMRC uses a three windward mark system. The Race committee monitors the wind conditions and will signal a mark change during the races or between races to maximize the best the sailing conditions, thus saving valuable time between races.

- **UMPIRES / RACE COMMITTEE**

Attracting world-class umpires and well-respected race committee teams are extremely important to an efficient and successful event. The CMRC has partnered with several international umpires to create a team of world-class professionals who are willing to commit to several events each season. This consistency creates increased efficiency during the races, as well as a great training ground for upcoming umpires. These umpires and race committee members are encouraged to participate during additional training sessions to become comfortable with the equipment and to keep their skills sharp. Feedback and input from umpires and race committee members is also encouraged to maintain the highest level of adherence to the ISAF standards. At an eight-boat, 10-team regatta, the CMRC uses eight

umpires, any additional umpires in training, as well as a PRO, and two additional staff on the race committee boat. In addition, the dedicated mark boat, comprised of a driver and the “mark-mover” remain at-the-ready on the course for any adjustments throughout the day.

- **RACE MANAGEMENT / OA**

While many love the efficiency of match racing and the ability to sail several races in a single day, match racing has additional complexities behind-the-scenes. The OA and the race management team need to have an intimate understanding of the event format and the ability to react quickly to changing needs. The CMRC employs match racing event software, which they modified the basic program to accommodate creative event formats, such as two-boat format. This was employed in the 2010 June CMRC Chicago Open. When thunderstorms threatened a day of racing in an otherwise condensed format, the race management group worked quickly with the umpires and the race committee to create a modified format which ensured adherence to match racing guidelines.

- **STAFF / OPERATIONS TEAM**

Attitude is everything. Having a staff and an operations team who enjoy what they do, and who also want to ensure that the competitors are enjoying their day, will make almost any situation run smoothly. From the occasional boat breakdown to a unique dietary requirement, a happy staff will find a way to solve problems quickly and efficiently. The CMRC retains a small full-time staff, but has built a corps of sailing enthusiasts and volunteers eager to participate in regattas. At any given event, a group of 20 volunteers will divide up the various duties from shore side video, to packing lunches, to tearing down.

- **LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION**

Of course there are very specific requirements needed for match racing and sailing in general. However, the added benefit of the following can only enhance the match-racing experience for participants and spectators alike:

- **Destination City**

Ideally, a sailing venue should offer both work and play. After an exhilarating day of racing, it's great to have the opportunity to explore a city with rich cultural heritage, world-class restaurants, and exciting nightlife. The CMRC is uniquely situated near the Wrigleyville neighborhood in Chicago, where baseball fans, foodies and night-owls can all easily find evening plans to suit their preferences.

- **Convenience**

Many skippers and crew take time off of work to attend regattas - so ideally, they'd prefer to spend less time traveling and more time sailing. With a major international airport within 10 miles, and a hotel partner within 250 yards, the CMRC has been able to capitalize on the conveniences afforded by their North Chicago location.

- **Spectator Viewing**

Match Racing is growing in popularity and with it's easy-to-follow format, and short, exciting races, it's no wonder that spectators have been flocking to these events. Having a venue where spectators can swing by, camp out, and watch world-class racing, CMRC continues to fuel the popularity and growth of the sport. The CMRC regattas are run off the tiered, stadium-seating seawall of North Belmont Harbor, or off the end of Navy Pier, in Chicago. These public areas are used by tens of thousands of people, and the CMRC is making match-race viewing accessible to all of them.

In an effort to grow the sport of match-racing, the CMRC is happy to share their experiences and answer any additional questions surrounding their regatta schedule. For more information please contact info@chicagomatchrace.com.