

DeBrief: 2018 World Championship , Hong Kong

January 2-8, 2018

WHAT TO LEARN FROM INTERNATIONAL FLEET

Once back to shore after the first day of racing, I asked a few kiwis in the elevator how their day went? “I dunno, I think it went pretty good,” answered the crew. He then looked at his skipper and cracked a smile. I could tell he was either being modest or he thought my question was silly. He felt proud of his effort that day, and being asked to qualify and summarize the day’s racing was clearly something to snicker at.

I noticed last week that the Kiwi’s and Aussie don’t ask each other “How did you do?” after sailing. Instead they frame the question a little differently, “How’d you go?”

SHIFT THE FOCUS | What You Control

This phrase “How’d you go?” shifts the focus of the question from the final result to the entire experience. The importance of a day’s sail is not the score that’s posted on the notice board. The importance of the day is the step by step process each athlete endures. It’s the accumulation of all the small challenges and lessons along the way. Every decision made.

We **can’t** control the scores. We think we can but we can’t. We **can** control our actions, our thoughts, and our behavior. We **can** control how we go through the regatta day. This is *so* much harder than it sounds. For an athlete to shift the focus from the final result to the entire experience demands that you show up every single second; to live and act in the present, rather than focusing on the finish line (or the score sheet).

Every second counts, every start, every leg, every race. Every single grain of rice that fills the bowl must be perfect. When the emphasis is placed on each moment the results follow along. Only the most impactful and resounding lesson stick, the rest is fairy dust. Improvement sticks. Regret and failure stick. This is what we want: development propelled by experience.

Americans are obsessed with scores. Before we’re even out of wetsuits we’re on the phone checking the numbers. But the truth is that results only show a fraction of what happened on the race. What’s more important is to...

“**Trust the Process**” is something Leandro said on our skype call before the regatta. This became our breakfast meeting mantra. It was our team’s goal to be the country that learned the most during this event. I believe we accomplished that. I believe that our team is wiser after our trip. This regatta tested the way we think about what sailing a regatta requires. And after 9 days on the water, we know that simplicity wins the day. Simplicity is the ability to minimize distractions and focus on the important factors that make up a successful race.

ABOUT WEATHER PREP| Clouds & Rocks

Our legendary boat captain Howie is Hong Kongese. He lives in the New Territories and works on the waters of South Eastern Hong Kong. Howie teaches sailing, works as race committee, and teaches power boat courses. He's a local. The first day we raced, we were in Stanley Bay (race course C). On the way out Howie talked to me about racing in that area and how tricky the wind can be. After some basic observation and research about the forecast and trend, we had the race course dialed. These were my predictions:

Chum Hum Kok point on the left would create a line of convergence under the cliff. The wind would be stronger and more from left under the rocks.

In the center of the bay, at the windward mark, the breeze would center up to the course axis (farther right from the convergent breeze direction) so boats crossing from the left would be headed back to the mark.

At the top right there were "hand of God" puffs of up to 30 knots coming down from Stanley peninsula. If it was sunny, the warm air (rises) lifted the wind higher and it touched down farther down the course. Cloud cover (cold sinking air) over the peninsula brought down blasts of pressure. If you could gybe set under a cloud into one of these divine puffs and then gybe back into the line of convergence you would slingshot ahead of the fleet .

This was our track.

Howie said to me after race 2 on Stanley Bay, "This is your first trip to Hong Kong? How do you understand Stanley Bay so well? How can I learn what you know?"

I know what key characteristics impact and change the wind and weather. I need to know this because it's my job. And it's the job of every sailor to understand wind characteristics.

It sounds like I'm bragging on myself but I'm not. I'm a weather nerd. "I love the fucking weather," is something my wife (the poet) wrote in her first book. In this way our hearts are one. I know weather like some people know football stats, or can debate the law, or remember genus species names for flora.

We work in a volatile environment. If we understand the characteristics that impact the behavior of the wind then we can predict the high percentage pattern on the race track. Will we be right 100% of the time? No. But we'll get it right more than 75% of the time, and we'll sure as hell be on the lookout for changes ahead (if the sun comes out or clouds roll in).

We don't talk about weather enough in the states. Or at least in all the sailing programs I've been involved in since I was a guppy. Even though I have received outstanding coaching, my coaches didn't know shit about forecasting. I have devoted the past three years of my professional development to understanding weather. There are two books I strongly recommend you read if you want to be competitive in sailing: David Houghton & Fiona Campbell's "Wind Strategy" and Frank Bethwaite's "High Performance Sailing." As you prepare for future events remember, "Every cloud tells a story and every rock creates a wind shift."

The geographic features of the Chum Hum Kok and Stanley Peninsula as well as Beaufort and Po Toi Islands (not to mention tidal current) were the most significant factors of the regatta. And the entire fleet was switched on to it. Which means understanding convergence and divergence is something that is a

basic foundation around the world. But I would bet money that no-one is having these conversations in the green or red, white, and blue fleets in USODA. (Prove me wrong, boys and girls.)

ROUTINE | Trust the Process

Kevin Burnam is a devotee of a regatta routine. I trust Kevin because his method has yielded two Olympic medals. Every year at the November ODP camp in Miami Kevin tells the story from the Athens Games:

“I laid my clothes out the night before. I ate at the same restaurant every day. I sat in the same seat and ordered the same meal every day. I got to the boat park at the same time. And we were the first boat on the water every day, and we would sail the entire race course before our competitors even got to the race course. I didn’t have to think about anything else but going fast. My mind was clear.”

Our team did an excellent job at our routine. And I’m happy to say we improved on it throughout the week. Remember that, have the discipline at your next regatta to establish and stick to a routine.

ATTENTION TO DETAIL | Everything Breaks

I jumped in the water twice this regatta. Not for fun, but to help two teams re-thread a \$7.00 plastic spreader tip back into place. The wind was gusting above 30knots. The swell was pushing us into the most active shipping channel in the world. This was not fun, but had to be done.

The boats had capsized for two reasons: 1) massive puffs and 2) to stop the sails from luffing between races. Sailors took a break by sitting; one on the daggerboard, the other on the mast. 2 meter swells caused the masts to flex under the water’s surface tension and pulled the spreaders clean out.

This was not a manufacturing issue. We failed to check our spreader tips when we got the boats. We trusted that someone else took care of it. The \$7.00 plastic tips on the new masts are skinnier than the older ones. They fit better into the slot. This means that the pins don’t secure them as well. They pulled right out. Two of our US boats almost broke masts because of shitty piece of plastic.

When we got back to shore, the entire team flipped and replaced the tips with the older, sturdier spares. When we flipped Charlie and Nick’s boat we discovered their tip was a few millimeters away from pulling out.

Here’s the lesson: Rule number one – Trust No One. Survey and prepare all of your equipment. Every inch of the boat or you might end up getting run over by a barge.

THE IMPORTANT STUFF

The 29er class, internationally, is a very friendly fleet. This being smaller World Championship regatta than our most previous one in Long Beach meant that sailors made friends quicker and easier. With the entire regatta staying at the same hotel, we shared taxi, bus, and ferry rides with competitors, parents and coaches. And we all had breakfast and often lunch with each other. Our English speaking friends from

NZL, CAN, GBR, AUS, HKG, ISV brought our 29er class closer together and I'm sure many longstanding friendships were forged.

FINAL THOUGHTS| Have a World Class Standard

The key is to hold yourself to a World Class standard. It's not how high we push ourselves that levels our achievement. It's the not-so-good behaviors we tolerate in ourselves. If you have the discipline to keep yourself on a winning routine for the next season (and ultimately the qualifiers), you'll set yourself up to reach your potential.

On the flip side, if you allow yourself to sleep in, forget to drink water, stay up to late watching Netflix, or forget your speed loop on a leg then you are letting yourself slip. In that way we get hung up on the bullshit, rather than focusing on the right details and sharpening our game.

Be as sharp as an architect's pencil.