

## **Coaching Principles – part 1.**

How would you like to make a jump to the front of your fleet? Or, if you are already a front-runner, how would you like to ensure you are constantly at the front of the fleet?

How would you like to raise your game to a new level of skill and give yourself a whole new depth of confidence in your abilities and performance?

Sound good, well, how would you feel if I was to say that there was a cast iron guarantee that you could do this, that there is a secret that is shared by every single champion? That there is one simple and fundamental difference between all the champions you could name and the average club sailor.

Would you want to know the secret? Would you want to know how to use this secret to considerably improve your performance?

What if I then told you that this secret would cost less than a new set of sails and potentially give you a much bigger performance gain? In fact I am sure you would be happy if I said this secret would cost less than adding just one new sail to your wardrobe and that there would be no limit to the benefits you would gain. Now, what would you say if I told you that this secret, this fundamental difference that separates the elite from the norm would not cost you anything, that it could be yours for free?

What is the secret that the majority of sailors are oblivious to, and what are the potential rewards it would bring?

Very simply it is a commitment to training.

Let's face it, we are competitive sailors, we all want to get better or to be the best that we can be, but how many of us actually put in the time and effort to attain this goal?

How many of us actually invest our energy in achieving our sporting goals?

The reality is that it is only professional athletes and a few high-level club sailors who fully commit to their training programmes and therefore fully commit to their development towards being the best they can be.

“Yes, but they sail full time” I hear you say, “they can afford to train and compete full time, they are professionals.”

Exactly. Committing to a training programme works, they are as good as they are because they have followed a definite process that works. They are good enough to be paid to sail and turn professional because they apply a professional approach to their training and racing, they commit to a structured and planned training programme that allows them to make specific and measurable gains in their performance.

Yes, they are full time but they are committing to a training programme that works; it is not by accident that they become so talented! Committing to a planned and structured training programme will improve your performance. How much time you invest in your training will be reflected in the gains you make.

Now, consider how much time you invest in your training at the moment? Not warming up before a race, not doing a delivery or sailing out to the start area, but actually going out practicing with a clear focus of what you are going to achieve and how you are going to achieve it? How many days per season do you spend training?

Long Term Athlete Development (LTAD) research has shown that there are definite stages to work through before creating a 'winning' culture, in fact Herbert Simon the Nobel Laureate stated, *"It takes 10 years of extensive training to excel in anything"*.

The simple form of the accepted LTAD process is:

- FUNdamentals
- Train to Train
- Train to Compete
- Train to Win

This model is mainly used to help shape junior programmes, and without going into it in any great detail the important feature for us are the recommended 'training to competition' ratios. These ratios state the recommended balance between time spent training and time spent competing. They are:

- Train to Train - 70% Training to 30% Competing
- Train to Compete - 60% Training to 40% Competing (some cite 50: 50)
- Train to Win - 25% Training to 75% Competing

Read that again. Only once the athlete or team can tick the following boxes do they spend more time competing than training:

- *All of the athlete's physical, technical, tactical, mental, personal and lifestyle capacities are now fully established and the focus of training has shifted to the maximization of performance*
- *Athletes train to peak for major competitions*
- *Training is characterized by high intensity and relatively high volume with appropriate breaks to prevent over training*

Even at this stage of an athlete's development the 75% competition time includes competition-specific training activities. Penny Clarke estimated that her training to competition ratio in her Olympic Laser campaign was way above 65:35 with the emphasis on training. If this is what elite athletes are doing to be the best they can be, does it not make sense for us to take on board a little bit of this structure to support us in being the best that we can be?

To get the best out of our performance the aim should be to train and practice for at least 1 or 2 days for every day that we compete, otherwise we are simply not giving ourselves a chance to develop and hit anything like our true potential.

I do appreciate that this may be too much of a leap in culture for some sailors and crews to start with but there are many benefits of building up to this target and structure over a couple of seasons. It is worth pointing out that this training should be fun and enjoyable, when structured well it will provide enthusiasm and energises the crew.

### **How do we fit this time in?**

There are many pressures and constraints on our time and it is simply not realistic to think we can commit anything as like as much time to our sailing as the professionals can. We have to balance our sailing commitments along with devoting quality time to work, family and social aspects of our lives. Plus coordinating these personal factors against the pulls on another 2, 4, 6, 8 or 10 crew members makes it much easier just to turn up and go racing. This is no excuse for restricting your ambitions and certainly not a valid hurdle to achieving your potential but having the desire to commit to, and by applying the core principles of, an elite, professional training programme, you would un-doubtably gain a great proportional increase in performance.

Even if we can't invest any more time to our sailing campaign, we can restructure the time we have to more effectively achieve our goals, unless of course, you and your crew are happy with a performance that is stagnating whilst the rest of your fleet progress ahead of you.

In the next article I will highlight the differences in our mind set when competing and when training and provide some structure to your training sessions.

#### References:

Long Term Athletic Development – Brian MacKenzie – [www.brianmac.co.uk/ltad.htm](http://www.brianmac.co.uk/ltad.htm)  
Windows of Opportunity, Optimal Trainability - Istvan Balyi