

Season Scoring Strategies

As the racing season gets underway, this is an excellent time to review scoring strategies for your summer fleet racing. Providing fair and prompt standings throughout the season will keep your racers interested and involved. A weekend regatta is a straight forward affair: decide how many races make a regatta, and how many throwouts to allow. Seasonal scoring requires a little more thought and fine tuning in order to deal with a long season which includes vacations and mowing the lawn – activities which can get in the way of participating each and every weekend. A system is needed which will reward the winners, encourage participation, but also allow for an occasional absence from the starting line without a severe penalty.

At the Lake Bluff Yacht Club where we race Sunfish on Lake Michigan every Sunday from Memorial Day through mid-October, we have fine-tuned the Low Point scoring method to meet the above needs. With 40% throwouts you can take a few days off without jeopardizing your standing. We also require that a sailor participate in at least 30% of the races in order to be included in the final standings at the end of the year. This ensures that a few good wins and then a long absence will not walk away with the trophies. The participation percentage is not as important for the Low Point method as with other methods described below, however it provides an additional check and balance in establishing fair standings. We have also broken up the season into a Summer series and a Fall

series. This allows a sailor to start over from scratch in a new series without waiting until next season, and improves attendance during the Fall when the weather may otherwise discourage participation.

Following is a review of how these issues are affected by various scoring methods including the Low Point system which we use.

The Low Point scoring method is the most widely used. It awards the winner his place in points - first gets 1 (previous custom awarded $\frac{3}{4}$ pts), second gets 2, and so on. Non-participants receive a DNC (Did Not Compete) with a penalty based on 1 or 2 points added to the number of boats in the fleet (or the number of starters in a race). So participation is obviously encouraged in order to avoid penalty points. However without throwouts, taking a day off could quickly move you down in the fleet standings. One solution is to talk your nearest competitor into taking off the same day as you. A better approach is to establish ahead of time how many throwouts will be allowed throughout the season. In this way your worst scores, which will include those high scoring DNC's, will be thrown out. As I mentioned above we have found that 40% works well for our fleet. We have re-scored the fleet with percentages ranging from 25% to 50% and the standings did not change significantly.

The High Point method is my favorite scoring method because on the surface it appears to meet all the requirements mentioned above without much fine tuning required. However it is not as widely used as Low Point, or as well understood. The method is upside down

compared to Low Point. The winner receives the most points, not the least points. Points are based on how many boats you beat, on the theory that it is harder to win a 20 boat race than a 10 boat race. If 10 boats start, then the winner get 10 points, second place gets 9 and last place gets 0 points.

Adjustments can be made to ensure a starter gets more points than a non-starter by adding a Finish Bonus: the winner in the 10 boat race gets 11 and last place gets 1 point. A Finish Bonus of 2 would allow for penalties: a DNF gets 1, DSQ gets 0, DNC gets 0 and so forth. This method definitely rewards doing well and rewards participation. If you race, then you get points. If you don't race, you don't earn points.

Setting up a throwout percent won't improve your score by taking away the 0 score for your missed races. This still leads to the fact that if you don't show up you fall further behind the sailor who shows up for every race. Throwouts probably don't make sense for the High Point method since it would reduce, or worsen, the score of someone who showed up for every race by taking out some of his races. So in summary the High Point method is appropriate if you are looking for a pure participation and merit system.

The Low Point Average method is a variation of the Low Point method and is the second most widely used. This method calculates scores in the same manner as Low Point, a first gets 1, second gets 2 and so on. The final score is simply the average points earned divided by the number of races started for that sailor. The non-participant is not scored or included in the average. This takes care of the vacation issue since non-starters are not included in the average

score. One flaw in this method is that a good sailor can attend one race, win, and obtain an average score of 1. He can stay home the rest of the season confident that his score cannot be beaten. The solution to this problem is to require participation in a certain percentage of races in order to be included in the final standings. While throwouts are not necessary to help the vacation issue (non-participants are not counted), throwouts are still useful if you wish to eliminate a number of the worst finishes. In summary this method takes care of the vacation issue as long as you require a reasonable level of participation.

There are additional scoring methods which deserve mention, however they are variations on the methods described above and do not provide any additional benefit for the participation and vacation issues.

High Point Average: This is similar to the Low Point Average method except that the average is applied to the High Point score. An additional variation on the High Point method is the High Point Fixed method which allows you to establish a fixed number for winning points, and all other finishes count down from there. This number would typically be larger than your expected number of boats for the season. In this way a winner will always receive the same points no matter how big the fleet is on any given day, thereby eliminating the bias of receiving more points in a larger race. The Bonus Point method, formerly called the Olympic Method, is described in the Racing Rules book along with the Low Point System (Appendix A). This method is based on the Low Point method with the

following modification – points for the top six finishers are spread out providing a bonus on the theory that it is more difficult to finish in the top six. The winner receives 0 points, second 3 points, third 5.7 points, fourth 8 points, fifth 10 points, and sixth 11.7 points. The seventh place and above receive 13 points, 14 points and so on. The participation and vacation issue are exactly the same as with the Low Point since this is basically a modified Low Point system. The Bonus method does not make sense unless your fleet is large enough to make placing in the top six a real challenge.

All the above methods and more, such as the “Cox Sprig” method, are described in detail in a now out of print book – “Yacht Race Scoring”, by Gregg Bemis. If you run across a copy, grab it. I spent many hours studying this excellent source as I pieced together the Race Log scoring program in order to ensure it’s accuracy. This program and many other fine programs handle most of the issues discussed above.

More information on scoring programs is available at the US Sailing website – www.ussailing.org, and the Race Log website – www.racelog.com.

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