

Junior Sailing Association of Long Island Sound

Guidelines for Green Fleet Regattas

Introduction:

The JSA Green Fleet regatta experience is greatly benefited by the delivering of a similar high standard for fun and learning enjoyment. To run a successful JSA Green Fleet regatta a few key ingredients are required:

- A friendly, talkative, encouraging and collaborative PRO
- Engaged and collaborative coaches and parents
- A separate on shore base of Green Fleet Operations
- A separate schedule that compliments the overall event agenda
- Simple sailing instructions
- A variety of learning opportunities

A Friendly, Talkative, Encouraging and Collaborative Green Fleet PRO:

Picking the correct PRO is arguable the most important factor in creating a positive Green Fleet experience. It is far less about being a seasoned race officer and much more knowing how to engage with younger sailors. The right Green Fleet PRO loves young kids, loves being around them and loves interacting with them.

First and foremost the PRO should be extremely communicative. Talking a lot makes all the difference for these young sailors. Parents, coaches and kids often have little experience with or knowledge of how large regattas operate and need to be cheerfully told what is going on, where to be at what times, and what to expect both on and off the water. Bottom line: An informed audience is a happy audience.

The PRO needs to talk to the kids, parents and coaches a lot – both during scheduled activities and at all other times (during rigging, launch, retrieval on the water, just hanging out, etc.).

The environment should be very “talkative” one which the entire crowd (PRO, kids, parents and coaches) are constantly chatting, informing, encouraging and getting to know each other very well. At the end of the event everyone should be good friends!

On the water the Green Fleet PRO should use a bullhorn and use it a lot to encourage, coach and inform the sailors.

In the process the kids, parents and coaches need to find the PRO to be very approachable and a great listener. The PRO should be genuinely interested in and attentive to the concerns, interests and needs of the entire Green Fleet audience. As the event unfolds, the PRO should be responsive to and cheerfully flexible to appropriately refine and adapt “the plan” and what takes place to best match the skills and personality of the audience, and the weather conditions.

Engaged and Collaborative Coaches and Parents:

Parents and coaches need to play a major role in the Green Fleet experience. Both on and off the water, these people play a key role in the kids’ experiences. A collective team effort where everyone cheerfully helps, coaches and encourages everyone is absolutely critical and mandatory. The PRO safety boats and coach boats should all be a collective source of friendly and cheerful encouragement and assistance for each and every sailor!

The PRO should lead this team effort with a very positive demeanor and engage the coaches to help conduct instructional and informative skippers meetings and post-race talks. The coaches often know best where their kids need help or instruction, especially as they witness kids’ skills on the water. The PRO and coaches should watch for behaviors on the water that can become instructional opportunities in post-race chalk talks.

On the water, the PRO safety boats, coaches and parents should use VHF channel that is separate from the RWB course – and they should use it constantly to share things they are observing or behaviors where instruction and encouragement may help the sailors improve or learn. Intensity, pressure, preferential coaching and militant race officiating have absolutely **no** place in any Green Feet event.

A Separate On-Shore Base of Green Fleet Operations:

If you are running an Opti green fleet event in conjunction with an Opti Red, Blue and White fleets it is best practice to have a geographically separate area for the Green Fleeters. This where they will launch and retrieve boats, where coach boats dock, where PRO and safety boats dock, and where the skippers meeting and post-race debriefs should take place. The reason for this is to give the Green Fleet Sailor the feeling of being in their own “world” that was scaled down to them, as well as their skills and needs. They need to be comfortable and in control of their own experience. This will keep the Green Fleeters from being overwhelmed by the masses of Red, Blue and White fleets. This also enables the Green Fleet sailor to develop a strong sense of camaraderie and friendships within their own group of similarly skilled sailors.

A Separate Schedule that Compliments the Overall Event Agenda:

Green Fleeters should have a slightly different schedule than the Red, White and Blue Fleeters. Their meeting and launches should happen after the Red, White and Blue Fleeters launch and they should return to shore from racing before the Red, White and Blue Fleeters return. This will allow parents, as well as, coaches who have sailors in both fleets the opportunity to easily engage their children in both fleets. This will also help Green Fleeters from getting lost in the chaos of the much larger and more complex Red, White and Blue process.

Both on and off the water the Green Fleeters should easily see the Red, White and Blue process and races, but should never be placed in the midst of it. This will allow them to get an idea of what is next for them – without letting it overwhelm them.

Simple Sailing Instructions & Courses:

Create a separate set of sailing instructions designed specifically for the Green Fleet. They should be a simplified set of sailing instructions that eliminates the complex procedures and protest instructions. Whenever possible, change wording to terms the kids will understand. Simplify the course layout and starting sequences. Edit it down to something that fits on two sides of one sheet of paper. (see other attachment that contains a template set of Green Fleet Sailing Instructions).

Use the sailing instructions at the competitor's meeting to teach each kid (and their parents). Give each sailor, as well as, their parents a copy of your simplified sailing instructions. A thorough review for these simplified SIs with the parents and coaches in attendance is extremely valuable. This should not require much time and can actually be very fun if presented a kid-friendly manner. This should also train the kids to read the sailing instructions at future events.

Review some of the simplest RRS Racing Rules. Ask them to repeat back you how the start works. Have them explain why safety is important. Have them draw the course on the whiteboard. You will see an obvious understanding and appreciation on the faces of the parents – and the sailors will display a much better understanding of what to do when out on the water.

As for a starting sequence the 3 minute sound signal (Appendix S) is the best one to use. They allow for a shorter starting sequence time and the PRO should, with use of a bullhorn, use verbal cues to count down to the start signal. This will help these Green Fleet sailors time their start more properly.

The approach to a JSA Green Fleet regatta should create multiple opportunities for the sailors to learn and improve their knowledge and skills. Triangle or trapezoid courses are common and they also do a nice job of separating the upwind sailors from the downwind sailors. The course should be no more than 1 lap around with the start and finish line in the middle and open to downwind sailors. Keeping the triangle course short in nature as this will allow for more races and keep the stragglers from falling too far behind. This will also keep the more skilled racers from waiting around too long between races. Most importantly this will give the sailors lots of opportunities to “try again” with a fresh start.

Scoring: The USODA policy of not rewarding places in the Green Fleet is absolutely appropriate and should be followed explicitly. Post scores quietly and discretely in the Green Fleet area as it gives those sailors an opportunity to see how they are doing and gives them something to strive for. However, this should be done very informally and without fanfare and the sailors should be constantly reminded that every Green Fleeter will receive the same award at the end of the regatta. Places should not be announced at the end of the regatta.

A Variety of Learning Opportunities:

The approach to the JSA Green Fleet should be to create multiple opportunities for these sailors to learn and improve their knowledge and skills.

A learning opportunity could be to focus on specific skill for that day. There could also be an “informal pre-race inspection.” Unlike the detailed measurement process that White, Blue & Red Fleeters must go through, this can be used a quick review of all the boat’s rigging and safety equipment. This can be conducted by the PRO and coaches, but must be a cheerful experience whereby kids can receive last minute rigging and safety tips.

At the very least coaches and the PRO should be watching what the sailors do on the water—and collaboratively use those observations as the basis for post-race and pre-race chalk talks. The bottom line here is that Green Fleet coaching should be appropriate and relevant to the skills (or lack thereof) that the kids are actually displaying on the water.

Green Fleeters should feel good about themselves at all times and should be eager to go sailing again when the event is over. The PRO, RC personnel, and coaches should be giving out an almost never-ending supply of high-fives, thumbs up, fist bumps, pats on the head and pats on the back throughout the regatta.

Kids should be encouraged to talk as much as the PRO. Skippers meetings should be very interactive with lots of banter back and forth between the PRO, coaches and the sailors.

Good manners are as important as sailing skills! The PRO should constantly remind sailors that it is very important to always thank the Race Committee, their coaches, their parents and the people who are hosting the event. They should also keep the grounds neat and free of trash.

It is also important to congratulate other sailors and help other sailors who may need help. JSA Green Fleeters should be encouraged to cheer when stragglers finish, when others improve in a race, or when kids successfully right a turtled Opti.

Teaching the importance of goodwill and good manners throughout these green fleet events, which apply to both on and off the water, will help Green Fleet sailors grow up into outstanding adults and adult sailors.

Some other fun tips for the Green Fleet PRO:

- Set a mid line start and finish line to keep the kids within view as well as hailing distance if possible.
- Do single lap races to keep the stragglers from falling too far behind and becoming discouraged.
- Unconventional marks can add some fun to the event (i.e., large inflatable pool toys)
- It seem that kids always want to know “How many more races are we gonna do?” A great way to answer this is to say (with a big smile): “A million!”
- Try to teach the sailors a little something each day. (Example: fly the postponement flag and ask them what it looks like. The answer is almost always “A candy cane.” Then explain the flag to them and have them repeat it back to you and then move on. A good way to repeat this lesson is fly this flag when you do a water or snack break.
- Chat with coaches, parents and spectators on the water whenever possible, especially when the sailors do something well. This will give the coaches good material to teach from and helps the parents feel that this experience was worth their time, effort and perhaps even some parental anxiety. Establishing a friendly dialoge is also very useful when you need their help for any reason.