

## **IODA African Championships 2017 – Alexandria, Egypt**

### **Coaches Report**

Team RSA: Bryan Carstens, Tristan Tomlinson, Ross Mckinnon, Chiara Fruet, Helen Jansen van Vuuren, Alex Wiederhold

Team Leader: Cal Tomlinson

Coach: Claire Walker

### **Practice Days**

The whole team arrived with two practice days in hand and a third for the practice race. The focus on the first day was to get to the yacht club, receive the boats and get through measurement as quickly as possible. The boats which had been allocated to RSA were not all new, so with the help of some locals and parents they were washed, water-papered and polished. Being one of the first teams to arrive, we were measured first thing in the morning on the following day. This took more time than expected, with the scale giving some problems and causing a substantial delay. There was only one problem with a sail not measuring as it did not have the reinforcing on the battens. I was grateful for Cal who very quickly sorted this out.

The following day, were able to get onto the water to train for the first time. There was some very light wind, mixed with a big rolling swell and small chop. Some very difficult conditions. RSA teamed up with Tanzania for the morning session and ran speed tests for the most part. The focus to find the groove in the difficult sea state and light wind. The sailors were generally happy with their boats and sail set up. For the afternoon session, we teamed up with Angola (who I shared the RIB with during the regatta). I fortunately know the coach, having met him during the Africans in 2016, and although he didn't speak much English we were able to communicate enough. The RSA sailors struggled to maintain pace with the Angolans, who were clearly working their boats through the chop much more effectively.

The practice race the following day was difficult, the sailors struggled to get off the line cleanly and thus managed to get themselves buried in the fleet. After which it was almost impossible to find clear air fast enough. Their speed was not on par with the previous day, however they were spending some time working out whether they should be crouching in the boat vs sitting on the side. A difficult position to be in as the wind was light favouring being inside, while the chop was short and steep favouring sitting on the side. It came down to preference and boat handling.

## **Race Day 1**

The fleet consisted of 49 boats, meaning only one start for the duration of the regatta. On race day 1, three races were scheduled with the first warning signal at 12pm. The briefing focused on pushing for a front row start and ensuring you have clear air off the start and throughout the first beat. As usual being the first day of a regatta, there were a lot of nerves flying around, this mixed with some very tough conditions (again light wind combined with a short choppy swell) to deal with made it an incredibly tough day for the South Africans. Our best finish was a 13<sup>th</sup> across the line. The Angolan and Egyptian sailors settled in very quickly and showed the fleet how it was done.

The wind was very switchy, starting at 300degrees and moving all over the place. After the first two races a pattern emerged with the left paying for the most part during the first upwind of each race, with the second beat becoming a 50/50 decision on which side to go. This pattern held true for the duration of the regatta. There wasn't more than 7 knots of wind speed; however what made it even more difficult was the short swell with sharp chop. One or two small losses in concentration meant a loss of boat lengths of distance. A total of three races for the day and 5 hours on the water, proved to be a long day for all the sailors. The third race took longer than anticipated, as once the first few boats rounded the gate mark, the small amount of breeze there was started to drop even further. It became obvious very soon after the start which sailors managed to find clear air and which didn't; with those who struggled finding themselves fighting for a position at the back of the fleet within the first 200m of the beat.

Bryan – 20<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>

Tristan – 16<sup>th</sup>, 24<sup>th</sup>, 32<sup>nd</sup>

Ross – 29<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>

Chiara – 31<sup>st</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup>, 39<sup>th</sup>

Helen – 44<sup>th</sup>, 46<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>

Alex – 41<sup>st</sup>, 44<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>

## **Race Day 2**

Waking up to almost no wind is never easy when you have been training in such different conditions, however the racing must go on. A further three races were scheduled for the day. The morning briefing touched on the importance of finding an early front row gap on the start line and maintaining this position for as long as possible, with more work on line awareness and accelerating earlier prior to the start gun. This proved to be vital for having any chance of being in a position to find clear air. Once again the sailors going left were coming out ahead at the first cross. After some discussion with a sailor from the yacht club, this was a local effect to be expected in the light wind we were experiencing.

Some tough lessons were learnt by the sailors, with the most critical being the importance of the start in order to give yourself the best possible chance at following your strategy.

We noticed some vast differences in sail set-up and sailing technique, with some countries (ANG in particular) setting up with a very tight leach and vang compared to others (EGY and ALG) loosening all the settings much more than I've seen before. Both settings seemed to be working, however it was linked to the technique of the sailors. With the Angolans being very aggressive in the boat, compared to the Egyptians who moved much slower and smoother.

Bryan – 22<sup>nd</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>

Tristan – 43<sup>rd</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>

Ross – 34<sup>th</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>

Chiara – 29<sup>th</sup>, 42<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>

Helen – 46<sup>th</sup>, 45<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>

Alex – 48<sup>th</sup>, 47<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>

### **Team Racing**

Team racing proved to be far more difficult than expected, with a few of the other teams having trained specifically for this event. RSA were first matched against the second Algerian team, we had a good strategy going into the match and started with some great sailing. Rounding the first mark in a winning combination, however a small mistake by RSA saw this change during leg three and we were not able to recover. For our second match we were up against TUN, who with the help of an unfortunate penalty against one of the RSA sailors coupled with a breakdown in communication proved too strong for us in the end. Unfortunately the nature of the knockout system in the grid format of team racing meant that after two losses our chances are up, so we very disappointingly sailed in. Angola raced very well as a team and come home with the win over UAE, successfully defending their title.

### **Race Day 3**

Race day three started with a more favourable wind prediction for the RSA sailors, who had all been itching to spend some time in the hiking straps. This turned out to not be the case, as although the wind initially looked good (11-13knots) it slowly dropped throughout the day; finally, ending the day off with a miserable 6knots. Two races were scheduled for the day, meaning a shorter day in the heat for all sailors.

With the previous few days of racing in the back of our minds the sailors and I were all a bit down when we arrived at the yacht club and it took a lot to try to motivate the team for the days racing. The morning briefing was focused on a discussion around the favouring left side during the first beat and to be expecting this when we get to the race area, again touching on the importance of accelerating earlier than anyone else at the start. With so much space on the line, this was

certainly possible. There was some excitement with a bigger sea rolling in overnight, and launching proved a bit more difficult for some sailors. Fortunately the RSA sailors have all launched in waves; I was also grateful for Cal and Richard who tirelessly helped them get safely through the waves and onto the water all intact.

The results today, although still not great, were the best we've seen. I still felt the sailors were not sailing to their potential and were making too many basic mistakes; such as sailing in dirty air for any length of time. They all know the effect of this and they know how to identify when they are being affected by dirty air so I couldn't understand it. It was very frustrating from my position on the RIB. A similar pattern, with the left being favoured on the first upwind finally made it through to the sailors. With Chiara and Ross both going left and rounding the top mark in the top 15.

Bryan – 29<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>

Tristan – 24<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>

Ross – 40<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>

Chiara – OCS, 10<sup>th</sup>

Helen – 46<sup>th</sup>, 43<sup>rd</sup>

Alex – 41<sup>st</sup>, 38<sup>th</sup>

#### **Race Day 4**

The final day brought some more big seas and hope of more wind, something the RSA sailors were looking forward to finishing the regatta off with. We finally saw some of the conditions we were expecting and had been training for. This showed in that today proved to be a much better day for our sailors, with some of them producing their best results of the event.

The final two races were scheduled and with the warning signal scheduled for 11am coupled with 13-17knots this would be possible. The first start proved to be a difficult one, with no less than five postponements since the swell was dragging all the boats over the line during the final minute.

Bryan – 25<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>

Tristan – OCS, 29<sup>th</sup>

Ross – 20<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>

Chiara – 11<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>

Helen – 36<sup>th</sup>, 36<sup>th</sup>

Alex – 27<sup>th</sup>, 40<sup>th</sup>

Overall it was a very tough event, with many lessons learnt from both the sailors and myself. I was disappointed with the results as they did not reflect the training and work that was put in in the build up to the regatta. This being said, the African countries at the top of the leader board have certainly been investing a lot into their sailors and coaches and are spending a lot more time in a structured training environment compared the RSA sailors.

### **Some general notes from the regatta:**

**a)** The sailors need to identify when and where they are on the start line, the few photos Cal took looking down the line showed a very different picture to the one I was seeing from the waiting area behind the line. They very clearly show that the RSA sailors are about 3-4 boat lengths behind the line and are allowing other boats to accelerate ahead of them. This can be changed by using their transits when on the line and also accelerating earlier than the boat to windward. The sailors were all shown these photos, and I was told that they used this information for the final few starts on the last day of racing.

The sailors are also not using the space on the line, there are a lot of gaps towards the pin side and they do not take advantage of the front row starting option. Opting for the favoured end of the line within the chaos. I know that all the sailors have the skills to protect their space on the line but they are not being aggressive enough with people they don't know. It's far easier to protect your gap when you can talk to the people around you.

**b)** Immediately after the start they are being affected by the boats who were able to accelerate earlier and get buried amongst the fleet very soon after the gun. With the wind being so light and a couple of lapses in concentration it takes a while for them to get to clear air and have any chance of sailing a tactical beat.

**c)** One of the biggest challenge has been that the kids are not maintaining position in the fleet. This links to boat speed but they are also missing the consistent pattern of the left side paying. This has not been easy for them to see since when they do their split tacks the right side has come out ahead more times than the left. Also struggling to stay in phase with the wind and fleet. I have told them to look at the closest 20 boats and use them as markers if they are struggling to identify the wind phase. If the majority of those 20 boats are on starboard then they should aim to be on starboard in clean air as soon as possible.

**d)** During the reaches, the sailors are maintaining their positions quite well. Although sometimes not sailing high enough to protect the small amount of wind they do have. On the runs the biggest mistake is that the sails aren't going to 90degrees, again something they know but aren't checking.

**e)** The last point is that the sailors are not hungry enough, they are merely sailing around the course and are missing the point in fighting for their position and not only wanting to do well but also working for it and using a plan. The sailors arrived at the regatta with the wrong attitude, it seemed like they saw this as a holiday more than a competitive sailing regatta. I don't know how to change this attitude, but I feel that it needs to be discussed with them before leaving SA. There were too many occasions where they had written themselves off as having lost already; the team racing being the most obvious example. They arrived at the yacht club already talking about what they were going to do after the sailing, with no focus on the reason for being there.

**f)** I felt it was easy enough to communicate with Cal as the team leader. I could do my job and to voice my opinion when I felt something needed to be done. I knew that I could ask for anything and it would get sorted. I know that I am not very good at speaking up, so this was great for me.