

IODA World Championships 2017 – Pattaya, Thailand

Coaches Report

Team RSA: Matt Ashwell, Alex Falcon, Jared Tyler, Chiara Fruet, Karl Hofmyer

Team Leader: Fabrizio Fruet

Coach: Claire Walker

Practice Days

By Sunday, 9th July, the whole team had arrived in Thailand and we met up together at the hotel for breakfast. The most part of Sunday morning was spent collecting and rigging boats for training. RSA were allocated two Winners and three Far East boats. We would be sharing a RIB with the Danish team, and as I knew both the coach and team leader from my time working in Denmark in 2016 it was easy. They were incredibly friendly and helpful and were always happy to answer my questions.

We launched after a quick lunch and headed to the race area. The sailors opted to spend the time working on their own boat speed, set up and body position before training with others. So we set up a number of speed tests and spent a lot of time on getting everyone up to pace. This was difficult as the wind was very light and the current was already proving to be a big factor. However, we came off the water feeling better and more relaxed knowing that we are comfortable on the boats.

Our measurement the following day was booked for 13:00. This process was quick and efficient and we were able to be out on the water by 14:30. Again the focus was on boat speed and getting used to the conditions (light wind, small waves and lots of current). Some of the sailors were settling in much quicker than others. The sailing area was a long way out from the yacht club, so we towed the sailors for about 30 minutes every day.

Tuesday 11th July, we had another slow start to the day as the wind only picked up towards afternoon. It was the first day we spent training with the Danish sailors and a group of about 40 boats. A windward/leeward course had been laid, which we joined and sailed 4 races. This was immensely beneficial for the RSA sailors as it highlighted how tough the starts would be, the importance of having clear air and the huge effect of the current; with many sailors really struggling to get round the top mark. At the end of the day, I met a few of the other coaches spent some time asking questions about sail set up and beating angles in the current.

The following day was the final day of practice, other than the sailors getting an idea of the length of the course, and what committee boats and marks to look out for; I felt it was a very unproductive session on the water.

Race Day 1

The regatta consisted of 281 boats; these were split into four fleets of roughly 70 boats (yellow, blue, red and green). The initial split was done using country codes and sail numbers, thereafter your fleet depended on your overall position prior to the first race of the day.

The coaches meeting was scheduled for 9:30 every morning with the warning signal at 12:00. Two races were scheduled for the day, this was only completed by all four fleets towards 16:00 as it took the yellow fleet up to eight starting attempts to start with a clear line. The first start was finally off just after 13:00. The morning briefing focused on the work and effort that we had all put in up to this point and to go onto the race course holding nothing back. The sailors were nervous, which is to be expected but they were also excited at the prospect of the first two races and seeing how they match up to the rest of the world. With at least one sailor in each fleet, we waited for everyone to launch (the boats were released from the beach in fleet order) before starting to pick up our sailors. At the race area the team did very well to work together; checking their speed, height, split tacks and beating angles. And then coming to find us and share the information; which we had from both teams and discussed the possibilities.

The light wind favoured the lighter sailors; however the starts and going out to the sides proved to be a major factor in the positions at the top mark. Anyone who started with speed in the front row had a good chance of rounding the top mark in the top 15. The starts proved to be very difficult, with the current playing a major role and resulting in many general recalls and postponements.

The pattern from a strategical point of view, started showing that either of the sides were working. With the right paying more if the wind dropped slightly, while the left being more advantageous as it picked up. The second race of the green fleet was very frustrating as the wind died while most of the fleet had the last half of the second beat to finish. With such a strong current dragging them away from the finish, a large portion scored DNF as they missed the 20minute cut off time.

Matt – 52nd, 48th

Jared – 54th, 53rd

Alex – 61st, 62nd

Karl – 68th, DNF

Chiara – 68th, 68th

Race Day 2

Day two started more promising with some windier conditions and bigger sea, making launching quite tricky. I was very glad that the RSA sailors had all launched into a shore

break before. Once again two races were scheduled. The morning briefing touched on having a front row start on the general end of the line (pin or committee boat) that took them to their chosen side of the course sooner; taking the fact that they may lose the favoured end but that the bigger picture was more important i.e. speed and getting to the sides in clear air. Being anchored in the waiting area is a new experience for me, fortunately the Danish coach had done this before; so we were able to follow the trackers on his ipad and give the sailors some feedback between races. We noticed the same pattern as the previous day, however the left shift as the wind picked up was far more pronounced. There were a few errors just after the start, some of the RSA sailors struggled to maintain pace with those starting around them after the gun and got caught in dirty air for far too long before making an attempt to get out.

A 30knot squall came through as the last few boats in the green fleet finished. The sailors had a great downwind sail in and surfed onto the beach, with the rain stinging as it was I can't blame them!

Matt – 56th, UFD

Jared –53rd, DNC (retired)

Alex – 57th, 41st

Karl – 60th, 56th

Chiara – 62nd, UFD

Race Day 3

The third day started with what seemed like more wind on the shore compared to the race area. It turned into another day of light and frustrating conditions, with the current playing a major role at the top and gate marks. With the racing so tight, some of the sailors lost or gained a lot of positions at these points.

The overall positions after the first six races showed that consistency counts and even with a discard, many sailors discarding a UFD or BFD, there were some sailors who had played the conservative game and come out ahead.

Matt – 23rd, 54th

Jared –58th, 50th

Alex – 56th, 45th

Karl – BFD, 67th

Chiara – BFD, 65th

Team Racing

Unfortunately only 48 teams could qualify to compete in the team racing event, the points of the four top sailors from each country were added and ranked in order to determine the

qualification. Unfortunately RSA did not qualify, which was quite disappointing as I would have liked the sailors to experience the team racing event.

Race Day 4

At this stage six races were sailed, completing the qualifying series of the regatta. There were a few upsets, with some very experienced sailors (podium potential) not having qualified in the gold fleet. At the start of the day, the race committee were monitoring a tropical storm approaching the racing area and thus postponed the launching of all sailors and coaches. After a delay of up to an hour, we were all released and there was a rush to get to the race area. During the standard 30 minute tow the wind started to drop and by the time we got to the committee boat there was next to nothing and we were greeted by the postponement. We anchored and spent the better part of the next few hours chatting on the RIB, finally being signalled to head home with no races after 15:00. A very long day in the sun.

Race Day 5

After having two rest days and no racing yesterday, the RSA sailors were itching to get back on the race course. They were determined to prove that they could get some top results and try to win the fleet. It was definitely the best day, with some well-deserved top ten finishes. Matt's BFD in the last race could have been a 5th, while Jared's UFD in the first could have been an 11th. Jared sailed extremely well in the second race, helped by a fantastic front row start and having clear air to keep his options open. Unfortunately he was called over to the measurement boat after the finish and his bands were out, resulting in a 20point penalty. I was kicking myself, but definitely learnt something about attention to detail.

Matt – 42nd, 13th, BFD

Jared – UFD, 23rd (SP20), 18th

Alex – 28th, 56th, 23rd

Karl – 56th, 67th, BFD

Chiara – 61st, 49th, 46th

Race Day 6

It proved to be yet another frustrating day on the water for everyone. The day was brought forward by the race committee, with the aim to have the first start at 10:00. Being the final day of racing, no races were to start after 15:00. However, after a long day of 'hurry up and wait' the signal to go home finally come through just before 14:00.

The Far East boats were handed back very quickly; while the Winner boats took the better part of the rest of the afternoon. The regatta came to a close with the prize giving ceremony at the hotel, a lot of food and a huge pool party for the sailors.

Lessons learnt:

The sailors' confidence on the water and aggression on the line has vastly improved. This may have resulted in one or two BFD and UFD's too many, however these do show that the sailors were on the line and trying to fight for the front row position. Having said that, although the BFDs or UFDs show that our sailors were close to the line they resulted in the overall positions taking a serious knock. I was a bit disappointed in the results, hoping to have seen at least three of the sailors in the red fleet. But I think experience played a huge part in this; both from my side and the sailors.

I had an incredible opportunity to meet top class coaches, although I would have liked to spend more time with them. I definitely felt like I came home from the event having learnt a lot. Such as it's not only me who has a tough time setting the J-black, it is incredibly difficult. Some very heavy sailors (55kgs!) were sailing with a J-blue since it is so much easier to get the settings right.

It is paramount that the coach and team leader have a good working relationship. In order for this to be effective, I think the coach needs to be more involved in the process of appointing the team leader and vice versa. The team leader also needs to be someone who can lay down boundaries and be the 'bad cop' in order to ensure the sailors listen and cooperate. The sailors mentioned one evening at dinner that they felt I was acting different and they didn't feel like they could approach me since I would shout at them. I don't think this is fair; the coach needs to be someone they completely trust and can talk to about anything, even if they have crossed one of the boundaries. It is the relationship that helps them perform or not.

I don't think that the team leader should be a parent, as much as anyone can say they try not to favour their child. There is always some level of favouritism, in this case it meant that Chiara was sometimes left out of conversations. Finally, the team leader needs to understand their role in the team and not interfere with the sailing or racing. I try to maintain a relaxed atmosphere since there is already a lot of pressure and it doesn't help if there is no consistency.

I was very grateful that I did not have to handle any of the funds and Fabrizio sorted the admin, so thank you.

A huge thank you to everyone involved, it was an honour to accompany the sailors as coach and I am grateful for the experience.