

Event Preparation

You have just finished the worlds and decided that you really want to do better next time, but when do you start preparing? The answer is now!

There is no magic bullet to pre-event preparation and most of this is common-sense, but in order to consistently improve and succeed, you need to ensure that you are as well-prepared as possible. This article can't cover everything but gives a high-level summary of the sailing specific parts of preparation. It is taken as a given that you also take care of yourself during events and drinking heavily until 4am and skipping breakfast is not likely to be a recipe for success during a long championship.



Bruce Keen sailing in after last race in Medemblik, already formulating his strategy for next year. Femke de Vries

Immediately after the Worlds (12 months out)

- Make an honest assessment of your weak and strong points from the regatta, prioritising what had the biggest impact on your results.
- Write down what you have learnt or at least the mistakes you made that you can avoid in future.
- Note where you suffered physically. Do you need to work on strengthening certain muscles? Do you need to try a different trapeze harness to reduce back pain?

At least 6 months out

- Create a strategy for addressing your weak points. This could be as simple as choosing to sail more often in light winds, if that is your weaker area.
- High-level research into the sailing area for the next event. Light/strong winds, shifty or a boat speed race. Prioritise what you practice based on these (but still be prepared for any condition).
- Trying any new techniques, equipment or major rig setting changes. Examples:
 - o developing a survival gybe technique,
 - o sailing with daggerboard or rudder up,
 - o using Australian-style tacking sticks.



Bruce Keen and 2 other cheesy-grin Worlds race-winners honing their technique 3 months before the Musto Skiff Worlds – Tim Olin

At least 3 months out

- Decide on priorities for honing your racing skills before the event. Starting and race tactics should become more of a priority now, so attending some open meetings with other boats will help to refine these skills. Practice starting techniques such as holding position and accelerating quickly. Think about what you will need to do on a race course. e.g. Riva often rewards a gybeset, so these are worth practising.
- Sail as much as you can, this is where the 'hard yards' are done to ensure you are in form for the big event.
- Decide on the which equipment you will use (can you afford new sails?).
- Check boat, rigging, mast track, trapeze harness and replace if necessary.

- If you don't already have a fitness regime in place then now would be the time to start working on this, especially if aren't able to sail regularly. Think about what parts of the body suffered previously and try to improve strength there.

At least 1 month out

- Find any information that you can on sailing at the event, such as venue guides or speaking to sailors that have done well at the venue before (Tides, wind, sea-state, restaurants, shops).
- Decide on nutrition during races and try everything that you will use beforehand. Those fancy energy bars may not work well for you as you thought they would.
- Replace any ropes or shockcord that is likely to need replacing before or during the event.
- Repair any scratches or dents in foils.
- Make sure any new equipment has been used at least once (sails, trapeze harness, boots, kite sheets, etc.)

Week before

- Clean the hull and foils and polish if you choose to (not the daggerboard, unless you are sure you won't be capsizing).
- Plan ahead to reduce stress while away (Work, home, travel, insurance).
- It is too late to get fit now, so only light to moderate exercise.
- If you can get to the event early then, getting out on the water will help you to familiarise yourself with venue (note the point above and don't start the event tired).
- Do you need to take any spares with you on the water (dyneema, tiller extension, shackle, tape, knife)?
- Check your boat to make sure nothing is going to break during the event

Day before

- No sailing. You need to rest.
- Re-read any venue guides.
- Read notes you have made at previous events (venue specific, if you have sailed there before and general sailing mistakes).

Daily pre-race

- Check the weather forecast and tide times.
- Prepare food and drink for on the water and pre/post-race.
- Do NOT change anything on your boat, settings or sailing kit that you haven't tested already.
*See below for exceptions

During the race

- This is the best opportunity to learn from your mistakes and from others. Watch what people ahead of you are doing. Make a note. It is most likely that it won't make sense to try that new gybe technique now but note it down to try during the winter.
- Ensure you drink and eat enough. You may get away with leaving those energy bars ashore on day 1, but you will pay for it the rest of the week.

Daily post-race

- Ensure you eat and drink (healthily) as quickly as possible after the racing. You need to recover quickly to be prepared for the next day.
- Check your boat to make sure nothing has worn out or is about to break (main halyard at the crane, mast track).
- Go onto Facebook and explain to everyone why you were robbed of the race victory.

End of the event – Go back to the first step, “Immediately after the Worlds” and repeat until death (or you swap to a Solo, whichever comes sooner).

**When do you change things during an event?*

My default position is not to change anything during an event. The smallest changes nearly always have unexpected consequences. Those new boots aren't quite as grippy as the advert said and now get caught on things, which can lead to capsize. That said, technique and boat setup towards the back of the fleet may not be optimal especially if you are new to the class, so taking advice from established sailors at the front of the fleet may improve your performance and your enjoyment of the regatta. Just be aware that any change you make has just a higher chance of making your performance worse in the short-term than it does of making it better.

Article written by Bruce Keen and Dan Vincent, inspired by a bar conversation in Medemblik with Jamie Hilton.