

Every Club Needs a Judge

The Whys and Hows of Improving Your Club's Racing Experience



By Clark Chapin, US Sailing

National Judge.

Why does every club need a judge? Here are some examples:

Scenario 1

It happens to certified judges all the time. The phone rings on a Wednesday evening. The caller says something like, "Hi, this is John Doe and I'm the chair for the Widget 20 Championship Regatta being held this weekend at Whatsamatta Yacht Club. We need a protest committee for the regatta and I wondered if you are available."

The rest of the particulars run something like this:

- They have no Certified Judge or even JIT (Judge-in-Training) at the Club;
- The Notice of Race has been posted for several months;
- The Sailing Instructions have already been posted on line and were copied from last year with the dates changed, no matter that this is a rule book year;
- There are a couple of members who are regarded as "know the rules pretty well", but they're working on the race committee.
- John is really sorry that he didn't call sooner. Appointing a protest committee "slipped through the cracks."
- Whatsamatta Yacht Club is either 40-60 miles away (just long enough to be a 1+ hour commute each way) or 150 miles away (just short of being a "non-local venue").

Scenario 2

Whatsamatta Yacht Club has been running its Wednesday Night Series since forever. It is the centerpiece of the Club's racing activities and the focus is on the friendly atmosphere and camaraderie among the racers. Protests, everyone agrees, would seriously cut into the after-race festivities, so there is an unwritten rule that protests are frowned upon.

Then one balmy July evening, somebody gets cut off at the last leeward mark and loses several places as a result, which might be enough to affect the outcome of the Series. The protestor

hails "Protest!" and, once ashore, digs up a ten-year-old protest form and fills it out. The protestor has to search a bit to find someone to give it to, since nobody seems to know the procedure.



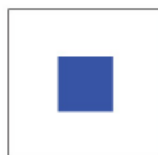
A protest committee is scraped together composed of three sailors from another class. One of them has a six-year-old rule

book. After the hearing, which takes almost two hours, the protest committee is exhausted and everyone missed dinner. The protestor still isn't satisfied and over the weekend figures out how to appeal and requests a written copy of the decision. There is some delay as the protest committee writes up what they decided. Time goes by and the Appeals Committee, after requesting several additional documents, directs that the hearing be reopened. The whole process takes months and results in some awards being reshuffled. Everyone is disgusted with the entire affair and they all vow to never protest again.

Scenario 3

The Whatsamatta Yacht Club Annual Widget 20 Regatta brings in several entrants from three different states. The Race Committee Chair generates the Notice of Race and Sailing Instructions mostly by changing the dates from the previous year's event.

In the last race with a dying breeze, the Race Committee decides to shorten the course from two laps and a short beat to one lap plus a short beat. To signal the change, they position the mark boat at the leeward rounding mark just before the finish and have them display flag "S".



An out-of-town boat, leading the race and seeing this, finishes between the mark boat and the nearby mark, congratulates his crew on a job well done, drops

his sails and motors to the launching area. Looking over his shoulder, he sees the boat behind him, a local, sail to the RC boat and receive a sound signal, which might mean the

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first boat to finish. Ashore, the out-of-towner discovers that he was scored DNF. He files for redress, but the hastily assembled protest committee tells him that Whatsamatta Yacht Club has always signaled a shortened course at the mark before the new finish. They deny his request and, having lost a trophy due to the difference in his score, he vows never to return.

What Went Wrong?

If, instead, a Certified Judge (whom we'll call Obiwan Kenobi) was a member of the Whatsamatta Yacht Club things might have turned out differently.

In all three scenarios, the involvement of a Kenobi at an early stage would have prevented the problem:

Scenario 1: If John would have consulted with Obiwan as part of the early event planning, he would have found out where he could look for a judge for the event, including the US

Sailing "Find a Race Official" web page: <https://www.ussailing.org/competition/rules-officiating/resources/find-a-race-official/>

Scenario 2: An annual review (or, at the very least, at the beginning of a rule book year) of the Notice of Race and Sailing Instructions by one of the Club's certified judges against the requirements of Appendix J would have highlighted the lack of a protest process and allowed the Club to think about how to handle a protest if one is submitted. Judges are trained regarding both Appendix J as well as the World Sailing templates for Notices of Race and Sailing Instructions.

Scenario 3: Even sailors who have a good grasp of the rules of Part 2 often have limited knowledge of the rules numbered 27 and higher. The US Sailing Basic and Advanced Judge Courses deal with redress when a race committee errs.

In this case, anyone who has a current rule book knows that signaling flag "S" at a rounding mark means that boats finish between the mark and the staff displaying flag "S". Moreover, signaling at the mark before the finish hasn't been in the rule book in living memory. Even if Kenobi wasn't available to sit on the protest committee, he might have been able to counsel the protest committee on the proper hearing procedure and the requirements for redress.

Other Benefits of Having a Judge

Nearby Venues: A certified judge may well be

called to another nearby venue to sit on their protest committee. This will allow them to learn about the differences between the clubs practices and lead to some cross-pollination of ideas.

Continuing

Education:

A certified judge must re-certify every four years. If nothing else,

it requires opening the new rule book and understanding how the rules evolve – and why.

De-mystifying Protests and Appeals: A good judge will seek to take some of the dread out of protest hearings and be a resource for rules questions outside of the protest room. Someone with recent formal training is generally better suited to imparting current knowledge and rules than someone who hasn't read a current rule book in several years.

Certified Judges are regularly informed by the US Sailing Judges Committee regarding the latest tools and forms.

Better Race Documents: It is often helpful to have a judge review the NoR and Sailing Instructions to look for items missing or potential issues that may cause a request for redress to be filed. Different eyes can often see how a sentence can be read in a several way and improve on it to the intended meaning.



Judges at Work

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SafeSport: Judges and Race Officers are required to complete training to identify and prevent incidents of hazing, harassment, or abuse, particularly regarding youths. They form an extra layer of protection for our youngest sailors, who are the future of our sport.

What Does It Take?



To become a US Sailing Certified Judge, first you need a good grasp of the rules of

Part 2
When
Boats

Meet, Part 3 Conduct of a Race, and Part 5 Protests, Redress, Hearings, Misconduct, and Appeals.

The best way to brush up on all that is NOT to read the rule book itself, but to buy Dave Perry's "Understanding the Racing Rules of Sailing Through 2028."

Then, the steps are:

- Be a member of US Sailing.
- Take the Club Judge Seminar. Find a seminar at:
<https://www.ussailing.org/competition/rules-officiating/resources/find-a-seminar/judge-seminar-calendar/>

Even if you decide not to pursue certification, the lessons will be valuable and you will learn about proper procedures and resources.

- Set up an account on SOARS (Sailing Official Automated Reporting System) to record your judging training and experiences.
<https://www1.ussailing.org/SOARS/MainMenu.aspx>

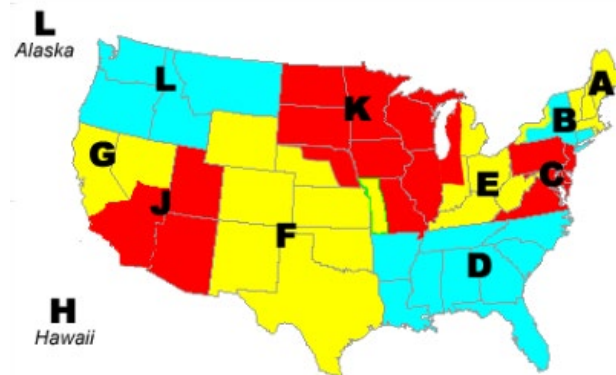
- Take SafeSport Training. Both SafeSport and the background check link are here:
<https://www.ussailing.org/competition/rules-officiating/resources/safesport-race-officials/>
- Contact your Regional Administrative Judge and let them know of your interest. They can help line up judging opportunities.

At this point, the Regional Administrative Judge can approve you as a Judge-in-Training and you will be listed on the Find a Race Official list.

- Judge at four events
- Participate in 3 hearings, one of which may be part of Protest Day training.
- Obtain two references from a Regional or higher judge in the hearings you participate in.

- Take the test and score 80% or better.
- Apply to US Sailing for a background check
- Fill out the application form.

It is a good idea to know who the Regional Administrative Judge (RAJ) in your Area is. In Area E (lower Great Lakes) the RAJ is:



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