

2020 MCSA Masters Championship

By; Matt Fisher

The 2020 MC Masters at Clear Lake Yacht Club was a well organized and successful regatta. Clear Lake is a neat little town that some of the locals refer to as the “Hamptons” of the metropolis Mason City. With the crazy times we are experiencing, my wife Lisa and I appreciated the steps that the organizers took in running the regatta. We are more cautious than not these days and we rented a small cottage near the Club. A week before the regatta the forecast was ominous, predicting big breeze for all three days. As we got closer Friday became lighter and Saturday became 10-15mph and Sunday was forecasted to be 20-30mph and seemed like we would not sail .

On Thursday afternoon we were greeted by multiple Clear Lake Yacht Club folks. Everyone was genuinely friendly and offering to help with whatever we needed. At the skippers meeting on Friday morning— conducted over the RC radio channel — co-chairs Mark Tesar and Stu Oltrogge set a great tone regarding COVID. They encouraged competitors to respect people's perspective on how we each deal with COVID but to err on the side of understanding caution. This skippers meeting displayed the leadership Mark and Stu demonstrated for this regatta and I believe that tone registered throughout the volunteer group and made for a very comfortable 3 days. At the risk of either stating the obvious or honking people off, I feel like we all need to learn how to conduct and participate in regattas with COVID around. I hope I am wrong, but the summer of 2021 might be very similar to September of 2020. Not a political statement just a prediction that we need to get this right so we can sail next summer. The organizers and the participants worked together to make the Masters regatta a success.

By Thursday evening most of the models were showing 8-10mph for Friday at the starting time of 10:00am dropping to 5mph by the middle of the afternoon. Friday morning dawned with a little more breeze than what was forecast; it was likely 10-12mph out of the North when I left the dock at 9:00. One of the many advantages of being married to Lisa is that she is a very active participant in whether she sails on a day or not sail, or better yet, whether she gets on the “crew boat” for a full day of watching her loving husband. With 39 degrees at 8:00, COVID concerns, a definite plan to sail the following 2 days and a forecast for that day to drop to 5mph, Lisa and I decided (mainly Lisa) she would not go out on the crew boat. At 9:45 had she been on the crew boat, I likely would have picked her up. But it seemed once the 5 minute sequence started, the breeze dropped to barely 8. A couple boats had 2 people and that didn't work out so well. Lisa and I enjoy sailing together, and I recommend sailing with a crew to skippers who are under 190 or 200 lbs. It is important to make sure that the technology of the clothing is high since the only time Lisa sails is when it is windy and likely cold. She has the best gear available. It has made Christmas much easier. I got her a dry suit one time and she tried it on and really looked good in it. But then she realized the conditions that she would be wearing it in and sent it back because she didn't want to sail in weather that needed a dry suit.

The line for the first race was well set with maybe 5 degree favor to leeward, but not enough to be at the pin. I started near the middle and had good speed after the start. I tacked to port in a good lane and was ahead of the boats on the right. Pat Flood from Clear Lake sailed a beautiful 1st weather leg and rounded the weather mark first. A group of 4-5 boats, led by Mark Schneider and Scott Harestad came from the left with a great puff and lift at the end of the leg, and rounded behind Pat. I was about 6th or 7th. For some reason everyone jibed port at the offset and I kept going on starboard based on what just happened at the end of the weather leg. Mark Schneider (good friend from New Jersey who I know from Lightning sailing) also came back onto starboard. I rounded the leeward mark behind Mark and we stayed that way until the last leg where I was able to get around Mark and win the race. I was followed by Mark, then Scott Harestad, Bruce Rosenheimer and Byron Beasley.

The next race was kind of crazy. Keep in mind that we are looking at a forecast for the following 2 days that looks very windy, possibly over the class limits. After the first race, we drifted around for about an hour and when a puff came in and looked somewhat settled, the RC put the fleet in sequence. We had either a postponement or a recall for the first start, and on the radio I now could tell that the RC really wanted to get this race off. It seemed like a lot of the fleet relaxed somewhat after the recall and sailed too far past the line. I recommend watching a Bill Hardesty video on starting and he says to get into an oval track where you are centering in on basically where you want to start. It seemed like people got out of a pattern and at 2:00 mins to go, one could tell that only 1/2 of the fleet going to be within 3-4 boat lengths from the line since it was now heavily favored to leeward and people couldn't get to the line. The other 1/2 of the fleet was within 3 boat lengths of the leeward end. I am kind of

kidding but look at the video. It was the second race and it was quite a poop show down at the pin as there were 10 boats going for what seemed to be one spot. As they say, only one boat is going to come out of it and that one boat was Mark Schneider. 6 or 8 boats truly got tangled at the pin and ended up not so good at the first mark. I was about 6-8 boat lengths from the pin and was able to tack to port at the gun and went on and won the race. Ted Mortonson and Mark Tesar were close behind in 2nd and 3rd and then there was a big gap that resulted in big position changes that left a big mark on the regatta. Some of the pre-regatta favorites experienced some bad luck in some of the slow going downwind.

So if you are still reading this, don't worry, I am not going to get into this leg by leg detail for the next 3 races. But I was as surprised as anyone that I had 2 firsts in the first two races in light air conditions. But, with COVID causing the postponement of many regattas, I will say that I was able to sail more this summer than any year since college sailing. All sailing at Hoover Sailing Club but we have a very competitive fleet and races are tough. As I am writing this I am likely in 4th place. And my fleet mates continuously remind me of that. I have raced in probably 35 fleet races and as or more importantly, I was able to get out and tune and practice boat handling with Ted Keller more than 20 times since April. It was an enormous boost for me to get that much tiller time in the boat. Ted is a great coach and he has really brought me along with speed and boat handling. Most of the breeze that Ted and I practiced in was under 12mph, so I felt much better in boat balance, trim and tune in those conditions than anytime prior to this regatta. I got lucky off the starting line in both races but I think you need some breaks. These breaks are in the form of the first tack after the start being clear in a lane and no one trying to interrupt your lane. But I admit I also was going well. Also, some of the competition had some bad races that they were going to have to count due to the inevitable fact that we were not going to get 7 races in to get a throw out.

Also, usually at this point in an article Eric Hood starts saying what worked and what the leaders were doing. I will say that sailing the shifts and the puffs up the middle is what worked. I don't recall anyone hitting a corner hard and making it work. The wind was too up and down and too shifty. It seems in my recent sailing we are all trying to "win a side" but I don't think that is what worked on Friday in the light air. Halfway through the first race I went from playing the shifts to only looking for breeze and not worrying as much about angle.

Saturday was forecast to be 12-15mph in the morning and building in the afternoon. The forecast was spot on and we had two beautiful races. Lisa got on the boat with me and I actually think that 70-80% of the boats seemed to take crew, which I like because everybody's line or lane angle is the same. The boats with crew will point 3-5 degrees lower than someone 80 lbs lighter and sometimes it is difficult to maintain a lane when sailing with 2 even if you are going well. But Saturday in the 3rd and 4th races, we had good starts but someone seemed to come up in front of us after 1 or 2 minutes after the start. We were not slow but we were not the fastest boat and I will explain more later but I think I was choking the main and steering too high because we got back and couldn't get clear lanes and drive the boat bow down. In the first race of the day, Scott Slocum sailed beautifully and won the race over Bill Draheim and Andy McDonald. These 3 had a good lead on those of us from 4-12 place. In the second race, we were a little closer to the front even though we got the same finish. It was a little windier and we were a little better but still not one of the top couple boats upwind. Bill Draheim won the race with Mark Tesar close behind and Mark Schneider in 3rd.

We had two 8th place finishes and were in good shape for the regatta with a 1-1-8-8. Scott Harestad and Scott Slocum both had good races and were 6 points behind. The talk was that we wouldn't have a race on Sunday because it was forecast to have puffs to 30mph by 8 am. We truly approached the evening like we were going to sail even though several well wishers texted we wouldn't sail, and SAILFLOW experts said we were not going to sail. I think the models seem to consistently over estimate the puffs

With COVID social distancing and no TV, on Saturday evening I started looking at the videos that were being taken of the day's racing and put on the MC class web site and Instagram. Not exciting to everyone, but educational. I looked at one of the videos, and there was a drone shot of boats going upwind and I was wondering why they would post a video of boats practicing 20 minutes before the start. 12-15 boats were going upwind on starboard spread out by 3-5 boat lengths each. Then I rewound the video and the drone shot was 2:00 minutes after the start of the 3rd race. When I coach juniors I will say or try to show video of how quickly the 2nd row falls back. In this drone video the second row had fallen way back and/or had already bailed out to the right and if they did tack to starboard they were way back. It seemed to me that the boats in the video were driving bow down

and pulling away from the next 30 boats. I have a tendency to exaggerate, but the video obviously made a big impression on me. It made me think that we needed a bigger hole below us so that the 2 minutes after the start we could drive the boat through the waves and move away from the fleet and over the boats below us.

When we woke up Sunday I walked to the club to see if it was blowing 30 yet, and it was blowing 8 with puffs to maybe 8 1/2 mph. We went out early and got good readings. Our plan was to approach the line late on port and create a much larger hole than we had on Saturday. The start was at 9:00 am and it was likely blowing 15mph. We did come in on port late and held the boats up above us until 8 seconds. until the start We actually had folks above us yelling to get going which was a new sound. But we had literally 4 boat lengths below us when the gun went off and had good speed on starboard after the start. We tacked over to port 4 or 5 minutes after the start at the right time and stayed in phase and maybe made 2 more tacks the rest of the beat. We were going much much faster in the slightly bigger breeze with looser main trim and steering a little more bow down. We rounded the first mark first ahead of Devon Howe and Bill Draheim/Mary Hopper. Bill caught us downwind and I messed up on the first tack on the second beat. But it was a fun race between us, Devon, Stu Oltrogge, Mark Tesar, Scott Harestad, Mark Schneider and Scott Slocum. I am not kidding it was great sailing and on the last beat the breeze started getting closer to 18mph and maybe a puffs to 20+ish. We got second in the race behind Draheim, and Mark Tesar was close behind us in 3rd. 4th through 10th were within 4 boat lengths.

The race committee quickly got on the radio and said we would race another race and to sail down the starting area. Honestly within 10 seconds of that message the previously forecasted nearly 25+ puff came across the lake. The race committee said we are done for the day and I will admit Lisa and I were very happy. It is actually the first MC regatta we have ever won, including local stuff.

Scott Harestad - who we seemed to be within 2-3 boat lengths each of the races, without doubt he always says "Hello Fishers how are you guys doing today". He is fun to sail against and a good competitor on the course. Scott Slocum sailed outstanding on Saturday, but I don't think we ever were within 10 boat lengths of him because he did so well Saturday. Pat Flood sailed a great, consistent regatta. Our good friend Mark Schneider finished 5th and also sailed outstanding and had to eat a 27 with a race where he port tacked the fleet at the start. He loves his new boat. Then the regatta chairmen, Stuart and Mark, were next at 6th and 7th. It seemed like we were within 1- 2 boat lengths of Stu each leg of the last 3 races. OK, then Bill Draheim. Very classy, good friend and I have learned quite a bit from him over the years. Sailing with Mary Hopper on Saturday and Sunday he booked an incredibly impressive 2-1-1. With his orange striped sail he is easy to pick out and unfortunately for Bill he had some tough going in the light stuff but was very impressive when the breeze was on.

It was a great regatta and we again want to thank all of the volunteers for taking time out of their week to make this a success. Lunches were available in the morning, races were run perfectly by Charlie MacNider and his team, and as I said in the beginning, the hospitality was incredible. Thank you to everyone at Clear Lake. Again, great to host a regatta in these times with the precautions that will encourage people to come back. We are looking forward to the Nationals at Clear Lake in 8 months!

The MC class is strong. On that weekend of the Masters - Sept 18,19 & 20, 86 MCs were racing in regattas across the country. That is obviously not counting the impressive fleet numbers that the class enjoys every weekend. Between the 46 at the MCSA Masters, 25 at the my home club Hoover Cowtown and 15 of the youngsters at Rush Creek, it was an impressive weekend for the class. Tough year for many with the pandemic, but it is great to see the class continue to grow and people enjoy the sport and a great boat.