



2023-24 ECSA INCREASE PARTICIPATION COMMITTEE

FINAL REPORT

4/10/2024

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Late in 2023 the ECSA board created a committee to develop recommendations about how ECSA could increase participation in ECSA offshore racing events. Harlan Fredericksen and Paul Grady volunteered to co-chair the committee.

Formation of the committee was communicated to the entire membership and twelve members volunteered to participate. The committee members were a diverse group of skippers and crew.

The Increase Participation Committee met in early 2024, identified obstacles to participation, prioritized them, and developed recommendations for the board's consideration. This report reflects the committee's findings and recommendations.

The committee believes that the key to stabilizing and growing participation in our sport is to attract more people to it! While we see this primarily being the responsibility of ECSA yacht club members, ECSA should proactively provide support to the clubs. This will require a sustained, multi-year effort.

The full committee report follows.

COMMITTEE REPORT

The ECSA Increase Participation Committee met this winter to develop recommendations for increasing participation in ECSA offshore racing. Formation of the committee was communicated to the entire membership and the following members volunteered to join.

<u>Participant</u>	<u>ECSA Affiliation</u>	<u>Email</u>
Paul Grady, Co-chair	ECSA Board	paulgrady@me.com
Harlan Fredericksen, Co-chair	ECSA Board	harlanfred@gmail.com
Peter Van Schaack	Niantic	pvenschaack1@gmail.com
Steve Purdy	Duck	steve_purdy@comcast.net
Paul von Maffei	Duck	pvm461@yahoo.com
Liz Sistare	Mudhead	esistare@gmail.com
John Bourget	Niantic	witan@aol.com
Dave Knecht	Thames	davidaknecht@gmail.com
Bob Austin-LaFrance	Ram / Mudhead	rjaustinlafrance@gmail.com
Dave Nauber	Duck	dnauber@yahoo.com
Sarah Brousseau	Niantic	brousseau1@gmail.com
Nachiketa "Ketu" Tiwari	Mudhead	ntwari@umich.edu
Greg Gilmartin	Various	gregprorc@gmail.com
Tom Carnow	Thames	tcarnow25@gmail.com

Over the years the ECSA board has heard numerous ideas for how to increase participation in ECSA races. To help the committee determine where we should focus our efforts, we conducted a poll of the committee. The poll considered the magnitude of identified problems/opportunities and how high a priority it should be for ECSA. The results of the poll were then combined to consider magnitude and priority, and are summarized in the table below.

TOPIC	MAGNITUDE OF PROBLEM				PRIORITY				TOTAL SCORE
	not	might	big	SCORE	high	med	low	SCORE	
It is too hard to get Crew	0%	20%	80%	2.80	80%	20%	0%	2.80	5.60
Potential Participants Don't Know How to Get Involved	0%	23%	77%	2.77	64%	36%	0%	2.64	5.41
People aren't aware of the opportunities to crew	0%	45%	55%	2.55	73%	27%	0%	2.73	5.28
Potential Participants Don't Know the Rules	0%	45%	55%	2.55	55%	27%	18%	2.37	4.92
Inadequate transitions from junior racing to Adult racing	9%	36%	55%	2.46	64%	18%	18%	2.46	4.92
Need to Re-engage ORC participants with ECSA	11%	44%	44%	2.31	44%	33%	22%	2.20	4.51
Promotion of Adult Racing is Inadequate	22%	56%	22%	2.00	56%	33%	11%	2.45	4.45
Perceived Unfair Competition - no rating adjustment for wind strength	20%	40%	40%	2.20	40%	20%	40%	2.00	4.20
It is expensive to be competitive (sails, equipment, race fees)	20%	30%	50%	2.30	30%	30%	40%	1.90	4.20
Perceived Unfair Competition - no rating differential for W/L, Random courses	9%	73%	18%	2.09	18%	36%	45%	1.71	3.80
Weekend races are poorly managed	45%	36%	18%	1.71	27%	45%	27%	1.98	3.69
Events are too small - too many competing races on the same weekend. Results in small fleets and misaligned classes	36%	55%	9%	1.73	9%	55%	36%	1.73	3.46
Perceived Unfair Competition - Clubs don't follow ECSA race guidelines regarding classes	27%	55%	18%	1.91	9%	36%	55%	1.54	3.45
Perceived Unfair Competition - Rating Council is Biased	27%	64%	9%	1.82	18%	27%	55%	1.63	3.45

Based upon the poll results, the committee formed two sub-committees, one focused on Improving Competition, and the other focused on Recruiting Crew and New Boats. The committees had the following focus:

Improve Competition Sub-committee

Harlan & Paul
 Steve Purdy
 Dave Nauber
 Paul von Maffei
 Ketu Tiwari
 Greg Gilmartin
 Tom Carnow

Improve Competition Sub-committee

- Issues to be considered:
- Need to Re-engage ORC participants with ECSA, 4.51
 - Perceived Unfair Competition - no rating adjustment for wind strength, 4.20
 - Perceived Unfair Competition - no rating differential for W/L, Random courses, 3.80
 - Weekend races are poorly managed, 3.69
 - Events are too small - too many competing races on the same weekend. Results in small fleets and misaligned classes, 3.46
 - Perceived Unfair Competition - Clubs don't follow ECSA race guidelines regarding classes, 3.45
 - Perceived Unfair Competition - Rating Council is Biased, 3.45

Recruiting Crew and New Boats Subcommittee

Harlan and Paul
 John Bourget
 Dave Knecht
 Bob Austin-LaFrance
 Greg Gilmartin
 Tom Carnow
 Peter Van Schaack
 Sarah Brousseau
 Liz Sistare

Recruiting Crew and New Boats Sub-committee

- Issues to be considered:
- Potential Participants Don't Know How to Get Involved, 5.41
 - Potential Participants Don't Know the Rules, 4.92
 - Promotion of Adult Racing is Inadequate, 4.45
 - Promotion of Adult Races is Inadequate, 4.00
 - Inadequate transitions from junior racing to Adult racing, 4.92
 - It is too expensive to be competitive (sails, equipment), 4.20

RECRUITING CREW AND NEW BOATS – Observations and Recommendations

Both subcommittees agreed that the key to stabilizing and growing participation in our sport is to attract more people to it! While we see this primarily being the responsibility of ECSA yacht club members, ECSA should proactively provide support to the clubs. We envision sharing a playbook that provides sample content and programs that clubs can use to encourage sailing and racing.

Potential Participants Don't Know How to Get Involved

- Yacht clubs will be presented with a playbook developed by ECSA that provides sample communications and programs for club use. We recommend a multi-year approach to our efforts. The list below identifies 2024 and 2025 activities, and is aspirational!

- **Playbook Content**

2024

- Create multiple stories about racers (how they got started, what they have learned, why they keep racing).
- Create multiple stories about racing (fun, exciting short “stories” about racing).
- Model what Annie does for junior sailing – instructor of the month, sailor of the month, etc.)
- Commit to posting brief newsy / fun stories / pictures on social media
- Yacht Clubs post pictures of boats that have registered for their regattas
- Mudhead’s Facebook page is a place where people talk about crew. Consider allowing that to occur on the ECSA Facebook page.
- Add an ECSA Instagram account
- Create an elevator pitch for ECSA. What it is, why should people participate.
- Promote learn to sail programs – NBYC / Seaport adult programs. Encourage other clubs to duplicate. Then connect graduates to ECSA’s website / crew finder.
- Create a crew / skipper matching site. Buy or build. Interim solution for 2024 (Yachtscoring, ECSA website), permanent solution for 2025.
- The subcommittee recommends that ECSA develop and maintain a contact person at each yacht club who will be a point person for ECSA. (Potential Yacht Club contacts – whoever is responsible for the YC’s ECSA race. And/or people responsible for Wednesday night races.)
- The ECSA board should consider identifying a particular ECSA board person as the yacht club point person? That board member would be responsible for maintaining the contact list and be responsible for nurturing yacht club participation in ECSA offshore races.
- There are people interested in racing who are based at marinas who currently aren’t members of yacht clubs. ECSA should develop communications targeting these people, and work with yacht clubs to encourage them to race or crew. Specific recommendations for promotion include the Baldwin Yacht Club members who have a Memorial Day commissioning at Mystic Seaport. We should host an information zoom meeting for Baldwin Yacht Club members.
- The committee suggests that all members be challenged to compete in one more race than they did in 2024
- Encourage special recognition for new racers – Off Soundings, Annual ECSA Award Dinner, individual Club events. Rookie of the year, etc.
- Create a “How To” guide for joining ECSA, being assigned a handicap, registering for a race, potentially being paired with a mentor
- Encourage club mixers to recruit crew / skippers to compete in ECSA races

2025

- Encourage clubs to host mixers to just talk about racing, and encourage people to attend who haven’t raced before

- The subcommittee discussed finding ways to hold yacht clubs accountable (incentives) for using the ECSA playbook, but did not come up with a specific idea
- Part of the playbook will recommend that ECSA or local clubs assign Mentors to people new to racing or new to racing with ECSA. Potential mentors would be recruited and asked to reach out to new racers for an initial period of time (two years). Develop a model of how to do this and share it with YCs. (Newport/Bermuda requires mentors for new boats.)

Other Ideas

- Create a crew / skipper matching site. Buy or build. Interim solution for 2024 (Yachtscoring, ECSA website), permanent solution for 2025.
- We discussed the possibility of identifying one or two volunteers in each class who would promote race participation in their class. The leaders would create distribution lists for each class and communicate regularly with the class.
- Potential end of season race(s) for summer best performers.
- Monthly ECSA blog in WindCheck
- ECSA membership level for crew?
- Get racing results posted in The Day again

Potential Participants Don't Know the Rules

2024

- Promote recorded Dave Perry webinars
- Encourage local training rules and race management by YC members – (NBYC and others offer one every spring).
- Conduct a local 2 – 4-hour basic race management training session
- Include sample content/language in the playbook that encourages people to volunteer for race committee, or to at least get on a race committee boat to see what is happening
- Make sure that people are aware of the Dave Perry's books and guides (some of the summaries are really good).

2025

- Make mentors available to answer questions, take captains on board
- Offer a Dave Perry webinar focused on new racers
- Post a rule of the week on ECSA social media sites (Dave Perry 100 quizzes, US Sailing quizzes)
- Make sure that people are aware of the Dave Perry's books and guides (some of the summaries are really good)

Promotion of Adult Racing is Inadequate

- If people know how to get involved (previous topic), this will take care of itself

Inadequate transitions from junior racing to adult racing

2024

- Develop targeted communications to 20–30-year-olds who learned to sail but aren't participating now
 - ECSA social media platforms
 - Individual yacht clubs
- Invite Cole Brauer to be the keynote speaker at the annual dinner

2025

- Designate big boat races that juniors participate in
 - Each club promote Youth nights for particular Wednesday nights (Niantic, Ram, others do this now)
 - Identify a weekend ECSA race where the kids have important / primary responsibility. Or as a series. (Might include a secondary award for boats with kid participants.)
 - Identify a weekend ECSA Race that has an emphasis on families / friends as crew
 - Ask Annie! (Annie has been very creative promoting junior racing)
- Discussed potentially purchasing ECSA or club boats and making it available to this age group

It is too expensive to be competitive (sails, equipment)

- If people are concerned about the expense they can race Ensigns, J-24s, etc.
- People can initially learn a lot without having new sails, etc. Ensign and J-24 fleets share insights into where used sails are available.
- There isn't much that we can do about race entry fees – they are generally as affordable as possible

IMPROVE COMPETITION SUBCOMMITTEE – Observations and Recommendations

Our committee believes that ECSA can take specific actions that will address common complaints we hear from ECSA participants. Complaints that today sometimes lead to non-participation.

Need to re-engage ORC participants with ECSA

- The ECSA board has regularly discussed the pros / cons of PHRF and ORC. ECSA Board and Handicap Council members attended the 3/23/2024 US Sailing ORC presentation at Ram Island Yacht Club. The following charts summarize the features of the PHRF and ORC rating systems.

Features of each system - PHRF

- Local control
- Inexpensive certificates
- Rates any boat
- Simple ratings in ToD or maybe ToT
- Ratings adjust with observed performance and appeals
- Inconsistent ratings across fleets
- New or unusual designs have no data
- Often single number rating for all races
- Volunteer staff support



SAILING LEADERSHIP
FORUM 2018 

Features of each system - ORC

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- International system, rates any boat, continually developed
- Measurement-based, certs processed by US Sailing, no appeals
- Objective, VPP-based so multiple rating options ToT or ToD
- Published transparent rule, all certificates public
- Unlimited test certificates, only \$12/each
- Software provided for VPP and scoring
- Professional staff support
- Certificates expensive (ORCi)...or not (Club)
- Need for offset files, so <5% measurements might be costly



SAILING LEADERSHIP
FORUM 2018 

- The ECSA board recognizes the desire of some racers to utilize the ORC system. However, at this time the board believes that all things considered, ECSA will continue using the PHRF rating rule. Considerations include:
 - The PHRF system that is the most common system in the country
 - Improving competition for many current racers means having more boats in their class and having the boats in their class be of more similar type and rating. Adding ORC classes to local races may reduce the number of PHRF boats making classes smaller yet, further reducing the appeal of PHRF racing and resulting in a net loss of overall participation.
 - The inflexibility of the ORC rating rule – once a rating is established there is no changing it

- The concern that if ORC club and ORC international certificates were allowed, racers willing to pay for international certificates would have an advantage (potentially 3 – 5 or more seconds a mile).
- The multiple variables of ratings and wind speed might be overwhelming to many ECSA race committees.

We believe that the other recommendations developed by this subcommittee will address many of the complaints of the ECSA members who now prefer to race under the ORC rule.

- The subcommittee discussed, and the ECSA board considered, the idea of potentially incorporating an ORC class into ECSA. The ORC class would pay dues to ECSA, and winners of the class would receive annual recognition.
 - Regarding the issue of further PHRF class dilution, there was a sentiment that most of the boats interested in ORC were already racing ORC, and that there would be minimal additional class dilution
 - It was noted that Yacht Scoring can accommodate ORC scoring. The NYYC is hosting the ORC worlds this summer. The ORC East fleet has attracted more of the younger skippers/crews.
 - We understand that YRALIS is considering only permitting boats to race ORC if they have an ORCi certificate. If ECSA chose to have an ORC class it will have to take a position on this issue.
- **At the April 2024 meeting the board considered the subcommittee recommendation that the board consider adding ORC as an ECSA class. The board remains concerned that a further fragmentation of the fleet would occur if ECSA allowed a separate ORC class. The board voted unanimously to keep ECSA's exclusive commitment to PHRF.**

Perceived Unfair Competition – No Rating Differential for W/L, Random Courses

- This approach has been successfully implemented in Annapolis and California
- With the ECSA board's support and encouragement, the ECSA Handicap Council has spent more than 150 hours studying the pros/cons of adopting this approach for ECSA.
- The subcommittee unanimously felt that this adjustment would be a welcome one and encourage the ECSA board to implement this change. We recognize that the change would involve a lot of work (assigning fair rating adjustments for each boat, defining W/L vs point-to-point, educating those running races about applying the rule, educating the membership, etc.) but believe that doing so will address one of the frustrations that many have felt with PHRF.

Perceived Unfair Competition – No Rating Adjustment for Wind Strength

- While this is an interesting idea, we understand the complexity that it brings to race management. (This becomes particularly challenging for races that are more than 60 minutes.)
- The subcommittee recommends that ECSA focus first on making the windward / leeward, random leg course adjustment. Development of a wind strength adjustment can be monitored and potentially implemented in the mid / long-term.

Weekend Races Are Poorly Managed

- The subcommittee felt that this seldom happens
- In the event that it does occur, the ECSA offshore chair should coach the club. Multiple offenses may require additional action.
- This could become more of an issue if we are unable to train up / staff PROs
 - ECSA should pay for training and encourage people to participate (improve communication to membership – post on ECSA website, social media sites)
 - ECSA should consider training for clubs to help them determine good courses
 - ECSA should work to conduct educational sessions to help people understand race management

Events are Too Small – Too Many Competing Races on the Same Weekend

- Current ECSA rules try to control this. At this time, this is not a high priority.
- The subcommittee discussed whether ECSA should consider not scoring low participation races but did not pursue it because the group felt that it was more important to address other issues.

Perceived Unfair Competition – Clubs don't follow ECSA Race Guidelines Regarding Classes

- This doesn't happen that often
- ECSA has defined how classes should be organized. This may require additional education.
- The best solution is to get more boats out racing!

Perceived Unfair Competition – Rating Council is Biased

- While this was the lowest rated priority of the issues that the subcommittee considered, we believe that it is important to address this perception problem
- Subcommittee recommendations include:

2024

- Improve written communication about how each rating decision is made (YRALIS handicap council minutes are a good model). In as many ways as possible, increase transparency. Need to specifically identify in the minutes when someone recuses themselves from a discussion / vote.
- Educate the membership about the boats who score well year after year – boat preparation, sail age, crew tenure. (It is important to have people on the council who sail a lot of races.)
- Schedule another session for the membership on PHRF rating considerations

2025

- Consider PHRF Council governance – on paper, they are not accountable to the ECSA board (although the ECSA board approves the chief handicapper).

NEXT STEPS

The subcommittee's final report was presented by the co-chairs at the April 2024 ECSA board meeting. The board enthusiastically welcomed the report and will work closely with the subcommittee chairs to execute the recommendations.