

Chessie Jr. Racing Manual: GENERAL GUIDELINES

Welcome to the Chessie Junior Racing Program. Our goal is to introduce young sailors to big-boat handling and racing in a way that's safe, fun, informative and competitive. We believe the best way to learn about big boats is to sail them. That's why we started this program.

Sailing in Chesapeake Bay is generally safer than sailing offshore, but the same principles of prudent seamanship apply here as in the open sea. As anyone who sails the Chesapeake can attest, the Bay has dangers, particularly in spring and summer when line squalls race in with gusts of strong wind.

We expect all participants to keep a weather eye when racing, and pass along any observations to one of the two adults who will be aboard the race boats at all times. We also expect students to familiarize themselves with the vessels and their equipment and to follow simple, basic safety rules that apply to everyone aboard.

The idea is to have fun, learn and bring everyone back whole, in the same shape as when we left the dock. As for the competition, all sailors like to get to the destination first and we're no different, but that's the last consideration on our list. If we sail safely, have fun and learn a few things about big boats each time out, we'll achieve our goal. A good result in the standings is a bonus.

Here are the basic rules for participation in the program. Please familiarize yourself with them and keep them in mind when racing.

AGE: Participants must be at least 12 years old on the day they go racing. You may sign up prior to reaching that age, attend skull sessions and watch from the Chessie spectator boat, but no one under 12 goes racing.

CONSENT: Sailing is not a risk-free sport. Every junior sailor and his/her parent or guardian must sign the liability waiver provided by Chessie before participating. Your coach and safety officer are in charge of safety onboard. Their word is final.

PFD: Life jackets (personal flotation devices) must be worn at all times when on deck or in the cockpit. If you go below, don't remove your PFD until your feet hit the cockpit floor, and don't come up the companionway ladder until it's refastened.

CONDITIONS: It is the safety officer who will make the final decision regarding adverse conditions. If the conditions on the day are more than the days crew can handle comfortably then he/she should cancel the race and shore drills can be executed instead.

OTHER GEAR: Location of all safety gear and other pertinent equipment (through-hulls, first-aid kit, throwables, knife, etc.) is listed on a sheet prominently posted on the main bulkhead in the cabin. Read the list and make sure you know where everything is and how it works. You may be tested on this.

SHOES: You must wear shoes or sea-boots when sailing. No bare feet, no flip-flops.

MOB: We'll run a brief man-overboard drill each evening on the way to the race course, so everyone knows what to do in case someone falls off. Pay attention.

LOADS: Big boats have big loads. Be careful of the boom during jibes and downwind runs, and keep fingers and toes away from winches and blocks. Keep your hands and feet inboard when near other boats or approaching the dock.

ATTITUDE: We're here to have fun. If you see someone doing something that looks dangerous, speak up. If you see someone doing something not quite the way you might do it, save it for the skull session afterwards. A quiet, focused boat is a fast boat. Avoid yelling except in emergencies. No swearing.

CREW: Standard crew is six juniors. We'll assign two to the foredeck to handle headsails, work jibes and call the line; two to the mid-deck to handle halyards, trim, and call waves, shifts and puffs; two to the cockpit to steer, trim and call tactics. Two-person teams should focus full attention on their areas. Work together to get your job done right; don't be distracted by errors elsewhere on the boat.

ADULTS: One adult is the sailing coach, the other is safety officer. They will run some drills on the way out, offer suggestions and advice before and during racing and oversee the debrief afterwards. In emergencies they may issue an order. An order is not a suggestion. Be aware of the difference.

UPKEEP: One hallmark of big-boat sailing is when things break, you fix them yourself. There's no marinas offshore. Junior racers are expected to participate in maintenance and upkeep of the boats. We'll schedule days to work on winches, repair sails, polish the hull and smooth the bottom. If you want to sail, you have to be available work.

SPORTSMANSHIP: This is fleet racing, with up to 20 boats on the line on Wednesday nights. Things get hectic, particularly on the starting line and at mark roundings. Keep your cool; no yelling except in emergencies, no swearing.

You are racing mostly adults, some of whom may not appreciate getting passed by kids. If you beat anyone, don't say anything. If they beat you, smile and say, "Nice race!"

If mistakes happen, don't dwell on them. Move on, bounce back. The most important attribute in sailboat racing is a positive attitude. Remember our objectives:

SAIL SAFE
HAVE FUN
LEARN SOMETHING

Welcome again, and good luck!