

## Crew Training Part II

Crewing in college is almost like a different sport than skippering. It takes much less experience but is more physically demanding. Most teams have beginner crews mixed in with more experienced crews. Beginner crews can be excellent in time if they are athletic and work hard at their game. It takes about one year to become good and three years to be great at crewing in college. Although three years seems like a long time to an 18 year old, this learning curve is much steeper than it is for skippers. What is the difference between the good crews and great crews and how do they get there.

Good crews have trained their bodies to do the mechanics of sail trim, balance and even steering with weight. Great crews do all that and the following:

Work out hard.

Do the mechanics without instruction.

Understand fine points in sail trim.

Avoid collisions, such as mast collisions, with anticipation, communication, and last instant weight movement skills.

Use sports psychology techniques to calm the skipper.

Act as passive tactician, not deciding when to tack, but providing the timely input to help the skipper make the best decisions.

Avoid breakdowns via pre-race checking and perform the quick fix when things break.

Help the rest of the team with leadership, boat repair, fund raising; with whatever their skills and time they can offer.

Let's take the tactician roll. Crews can communicate what they see with practice. First there are the skipper blind spots; through the jib and behind the head. These areas of view; ahead and to leeward, and behind and to windward, are critical as this is where competitors you are even with lurk. These blind spots grow significantly when the skipper stands up and crews must be alert, looking to leeward. Second comes the ability to communicate what you see. Crews must describe a competitors relative position in distance and bearing. For example, if you are on port, the crew (or skipper) must see the starboard boats coming. If those incoming are still a couple of windshifts away, then the info becomes quickly obsolete. If the incoming are on collision course, the skipper must be alerted. Skilled observers use a technique called "making land." Either an incoming is making land, meaning they are crossing, you are making land, meaning you are crossing, or holding bearing, meaning you are on collision course. What you do not need is for both skipper and crew to stare at the same incoming; that slows you down and decreases the chances of crossing.

Here is how to practice some communication skills. Ask the crews to talk too much, to make any observation that may be important regarding time left to start, where the marks are, where the wind is and where the competitors are. After a few days of this practice, filter out the unnecessary observations while the crews gets better at describing the relative bearing of the competitors.

Let's take breakdowns. Too many skippers rig the boat at practice because they are more efficient than the inexperienced crew. Let the crew do at least an equal share of rigging. If the crew arrives well in advance of the skipper to practice, the crew can not only rig the boat but do

maintenance on the boat. There is always maintenance, even on young Vanguard Club FJs and Club 420s. Frayed lines can be seized, rubrail marks can be taken out, incorrect sized pins and bent rings can be replaced, rudder fasteners can be checked and tightened. There are always little things that could make the difference between holding that lane on the lift or breaking down. Crews should also carry an extra pin and ring ding and a small roll of electrical tape while racing.

When it comes to crewing, it is easier to teach an athlete how to be a sailor than it is to teach a sailor how to be an athlete.

Kenneth Legler  
Tufts University Sailing Team Coach  
[www.tufts.edu](http://www.tufts.edu)