

Semaine de l'armistice optimist, Maubuisson (France)

The event

Maubuisson is situated on a large lake in the south west of France (about 30 miles west of Bordeaux). I rented a RIB from Ander Nautic in Andernos (about 30 miles from sailing venue). Accommodation was about a mile from the club in some rustic little chalets (handy but not over comfortable!). We rented bikes and could easily circulate around (unlike cars).

201 optimist senior entered (+ 66 juniors).
5 nations (FRA, NED, BEL, SPA, IRL)
10-20 kts of breeze from the North-East (cold!)
9 races were sailed out of the 10 programmed (2 discards)

The club suits very well this kind of large event as there are loads of space available on the launching beach. Shore performance was fine. We can just regret the long delays in producing the results which had a few implication in redress requests. Furthermore, the results were not accurate until the very last moment which made the sailors wondering about final position objectives (we thought we had 3 top 10 until the prizes giving where we realised 2 sailors just about missed it for a couple of points only).

On the water performance started fairly well with long courses in tough conditions. However, courses became shorter leading to messy busy mark rounding. The course shape allowed more downwind than usual (outer-inner loop system). Start line were usually pin end biased and short and added to the high number of potential discard, led to numerous general recall and BFDs. And we had tough judging on rule 42 making the event very fair overall.

The team

The world team saw the addition of 7 others Irish. I then had to deal with 10 sailors with various hopes and needs. The world team however remained accommodated with me which allowed "world team time".

Results

1	FRA	Sacha Pelisson	1	1	DSQ	4	4	1	1	3	2
2	FRA	Clement Ikhlef	13	RAF	1	1	1	2	2	3	5
3	FRA	Yvann Thelier	1	4	4	1	4	7	1	4	4
...											
8	IRL	Cian O Regan	9	3	5	2	9	8	BFD	8	4
12	IRL	Tim O Laoire	9	7	4	BFD	3	12	19	7	6
13	IRL	Ross Vaughan	6	6	9	6	8	10	7	24	13
34	IRL	Scott Flanigan	8	11	18	20	7	28	18	33	DNF
39	IRL	Killian O Keeffe	31	31	14	23	6	18	OCS	16	21
62	IRL	Aisling Judge	41	26	35	50	36	12	17	26	44
65	IRL	Katie Gambier-Ross	22	36	31	40	33	26	22	29	34
70	IRL	Emma Geary	40	45	46	70	BFD	25	29	5	29
75	IRL	Eoghan Cudmore	38	56	37	29	13	47	30	BFD	40
90	IRL	Colm O Regan	37	55	47	29	31	37	47	BFD	45

201 competitors / 2 discards

Wind condition and key elements of success

Race 1 : North north east, 10-14 kts. Oscillating wind (short shifts) varying in strength. Pin end start. Gusts coming down the lake within corridor: more wind on the right of the inner loop and a line of gust distributed on the left of the outer loop. After a good start followed by a conservative first beat in control with the fleet, the two runs were key legs to secure a top 5 for the world team and a race in the 20s for the rest of the group. Work hard and sail in the pressure!

Race 2 : North north East, 12-15 kts. Very similar to race 1. Pin end start. Downwind legs again the key for success. Placement, hard work and anticipation of gusts were sealing a good position.

Race 3 : North north East 15-20 kts with a tendency to veer right. Start line was still very much at the pin, but it was important to go right as soon as feasible. The line of gust on the outer was less obvious but the wind remained stronger on far right of the course.

Race 4 and 5 : very similar tactics than race 3 with and increasing breeze to 16-20 kts.

Race 6 and 7 : the wind remained North north East 15-20 kts. The course was biased with a longer starboard tack facing the waves. Power and bailing upwind was a key elements after a good start. A quick jibe at the start of each run was crucial to optimise route downwind.

Race 8 and 9: the wind went right during the night in a East north East direction with 10-12 kts. The wind remained stronger on the right side with the distribution of right lifts. It was easy to go to far on laylines and coming from a centred right position was usually paying off nicely.

On every races, sailors tend to go very high on reaches allowing opportunities to sail low in clear air and make places.

Topics covered (*world team*)

- Start line decision making. With about 25 starts over the 4 days, we had plenty to work on, especially on placement in a pin end start situation. As the first beat pressures were usually on the right side of the course, it was crucial to be in a position to tack on port right after the start. I was very pleased to see that on most start, Ross, Cian and Timmy were able to do this without taking too many transom of starboard boats.
Note for the rest of the group : I saw a couple of excellent starts but also some shocking ones. Often you let yourselves go with the flow of boats and are not active enough in your decision making. You have to decide where you intend to start, fight to be on the front row within the last 20-30 seconds (don't show your number too early; Scott, Colm, Killian!!!) and make sure you allow yourself a good 4-5 seconds to accelerate (a boat length or two) before the gun. Timing and be on a permanent lookout for boats around you is really important to avoid being covered or BFD.
- First beat tactics and placement. This was recognised as the main weakness after Vigo. Progress are obvious, probably helped by the stronger breeze and a better speed upwind. After a good start at the pin end, it was really important to be in a position to tack back towards the right side of the course to be able to take advantage of the stronger breeze and the right lifts (which started to be distributed towards the end of the event). Another factor to consider was to stay in control of the fleet without being pushed too far on the right lay line. Control leeward of the right group and on top of the left group was often paying in the right lifts. Using the short lefts to keep the right side under control was a key element to remain in the front. I liked a lot the conservative approach you made at the beginning of the event leading to consistency at the top. Towards the end, I found Ross made more extreme choices which added a risk factor you did not need to take (you had the speed upwind!)
Note for the rest of the group. If you had a good start, the previous paragraph is for you as well! If you had to deal with a poor start, you really had to go and find some clean air on the right side of the course. The danger however was to be pushed too far on the right and do some extra route above the layline. So a centred right work on the lookout for clear air and a finish (last quarter of the beat) in clean air on the right layline was definitely an option. Another one was to play a centre right on clean air and hit the port layline (less busy) in the last sixth of the beat. It was however a risky choice as the lane of starboard boats was very dense, but I found that with anticipation of gaps within that lane, you could get a good mark rounding. Some margin (at least half a boat length) had to be taken as the wind moving the mark all over the place. Tim and Aisling can surely describe the effect better than I do!
- Downwind placement and speed. Very quickly we recognised two difficulties downwind which became really important to sort out since the shape of the course gave two runs and two reaches instead of the usual one and one. Speed and placement! This is the case for everyone, world team and the others!!! Regarding the speed issue, I noticed the French don't push as much water with their bow than we do. Their boats are flatter than ours and the sail probably sheeted in slightly more. But more importantly they use their body to steer the boat through the short waves. Some waves

were more interesting by the lee, some on a broad reach or straight down. Waves reading is then the first step. When the decision is taken, to bear away, you heel the boat to windward and move the weight forward to induce the surf (and pump the sail once). As soon as the boat accelerate, move the weight back to get the bow off the water and try to maintain the surf. You may (and will) change direction to keep the boat on the surf. This will allow you to move towards zones of pressure, towards your direct opposition for control. This lead me to placement and control. It is important to keep a tight control on your direct opposition in order to maintain a position or putting pressure on the boat in the front. Never break away from a group of boats unless you have a very good reason (more pressure, top class wave). Always maintain your boat between the next mark and your opposition (don't be covered though). A common mistake from almost everyone would be to sail on the inside, chase for clean air on the side, maybe anticipate the mark by being on the inside... don't necessarily do it as it usually push you very far from a direct route. There are clear lanes more centred. I intend to work on the topic at next national squad training and we will try to validate progress in Palma.

The reach can be a leg to catch a few places. Always have a quick look at the target (jibe mark) and see if you have room to go low without being too affected by cover when down the fleet. When at the top, protect your position by placing yourself in clear air between the boat behind you and the next mark unless that boat goes way too high. Ross was getting good at that the last two days and made places almost every time.

- The "pro attitude". The world team remained very autonomous throughout the event in their boat prep, always asking the right question and being on the lookout for the optimum boat setting. Time keeping was better even though sometimes I had to push the sailors to launch. House keeping, despite some progress, remains very average... I want a team mum...lol! And Ross know how to cook pasta now...
If ashore the world team is more and more behaving as a team, afloat, they need to work together more naturally (speed test and exchange of information)
The rest of the group really needed more autonomy in their boat prep not relying on the coach (or parents) to remind them everything or spotting problems. They also need to be on the lookout for information afloat to induce an exchange with the others and the coach. Regarding the use of waiting times before the first race or each races, they need to be more active (speed test with team mates, looking for information, looking at previous start...)
One thing that went backward since Vigo is the use of the "event analysis form". I did not push on its use, so it was not used (or it was left half done under the bed...)
- Sail setting and mast rake. We did not focus much on these aspects. We raked a little further back than usual because of the wind strength (Colm need to look at mast step as we could not move it at all). Scott, Ross and Tim were looking at rakes close to 282-284. Cian was more working around 283-285. The rest of the group was looking at 280-282 with the objective of de-powering the sail and opening the leech a little.

World team summary

With over 25 starts, starting was largely covered and it seems the group is very much controlled on the start line. We got two BFDs, so we will have to be a little more careful in future events.

First beat tactics were the obvious progress from Vigo with a better placement and a more conservative approach leading to better position at the first windward. I guess the stronger winds were helping as it gave you more confidence.

Some placement mistake at the windward mark approach mainly from Tim and Ross (too close / too wide).

Downwind in heavy medium main weakness recognised. This will be the main focus for the next month (Howth national squad training and Palma): placement and speed! But in fairness you already improved greatly throughout the event.

Finish line approach can still be improved. We may look at a session in Howth tackle different finish situations.

Ashore, we can still make a better use of the time available for race analysis and rest.

Group Ireland summary

If all the above points are probably applying to you, I would like to add a few.

You need to be more active and make your own analysis in boat prep, in race prep... The coach will help you but you need to have an idea of what you are looking at (boat setting, wind patterns...). Of course you can be wrong (as I can!), but we are all learning from experience. We just need to induce the situation to get the experience. Best example was after the first day, everyone realised they did not have enough gear on and corrected it rightly the second day.

Drink and food! Crucial if you want to last such tough days! I did not check closely your intake, but it seemed your liquid intake was too low. 2L average for a day on the water.

Be more in charge of your decision on the start line. Don't go with the flock!

Always be on the lookout for clear air on the beat and the run, especially after a bad start, but don't forget the course and your pre-race plan: don't go left for clear air if the wind is right!!!

Overall, I am pleased with the attitude and the obtained results of team Ireland and the group Ireland. I think the event was a great experience for everyone.

We can now move forward into the world team programme and it also gave me great information on winter focus for the national squad training programme.

We did not do the sail shaping I had planned, but I am hoping to cover this at National squad training as an extra session (Sat evening) for the world team

Team racing

Almost forgot... a few words about the team racing! 2 Irish team entered a friendly team racing competition designed to help the French world team in their prep to Uruguay. It was very entertaining and team Ireland (Tim (cap), Ross, Cian and Julien –French “mercenary”

from Antibes, lol-) gave Equipe France a good run for their money with two very tight races winning on the water the final before eventually losing following an close called OCS. Team Kinsale, after a great start against team Belgium, lost a couple of tight races.

FINAL

Equipe France beat team Ireland

Qualifying league

1st Equipe France : 5W, 0L

2nd Team Ireland : 4W, 1L

3rd La Rochelle : 3W, 2L

4th Team Belgium : 1W, 4L

... Team Kinsale : 1W, 4L

... Region Rhone Alpes: 1W, 4L

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