



Mendota Yacht Club

Madison, Wisconsin USA

Est: 1903

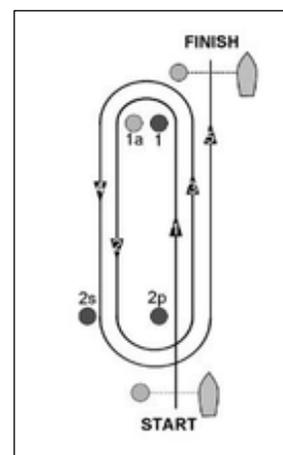
Tips for spectator boats watching Mendota Yacht Club races and regattas

c. Don Sanford, 2021

The Mendota Yacht Club welcomes spectators to come on out and watch the most exciting sailboat racing you will find anywhere. Sailboat races can be fun to watch, but like everything else you need to know where to be. Considering the recent incident involving an overanxious spectator at the Tour de France, we've prepared this fact sheet will help you position your boat to watch the fun without getting too close to the action.

⇒ **The racecourse:**

Sailboats race around a windward-leeward course marked with orange buoys placed about one mile apart and in line with the wind direction. The first leg of the racecourse is always upwind. The starting line is an imaginary line between the race committee boat and another orange mark, the leeward mark.



⇒ **It looks chaotic out there. Is anyone in charge?**

Races start according to an announced warning time and a sequence of signals. The person in charge of the race is called the Principal Race Officer (PRO) or "RC." He or she manages the race from the judges' boat, usually anchored at the starting line. The PRO is usually assisted by other boats. You can always find one by looking for the yellow or blue "RC" flag. If you have questions, ask a member of the race committee.

⇒ **When does the race start?**

Signals are made to the sailors from the judges' boat with flags and audible signals, usually a 12-gauge shotgun but sometimes an air horn. The race committee will give the sailors a 5-minute warning signal. Five minutes later, the starting signal for that class is made. If more than one class is racing, the process repeats itself until all classes have started. Sometimes as many as four classes start. The race committee uses VHF Channel 78A to make announcements to competitors before and during the race.

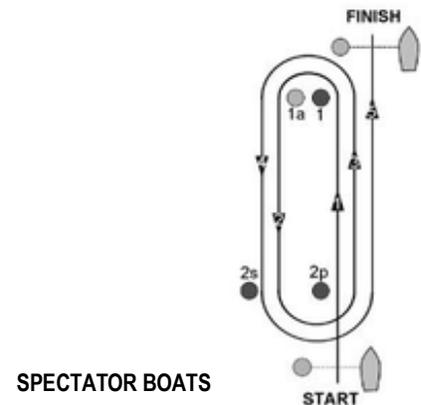
⇒ **How to maneuver around the racecourse.**

If the wind is light, say under 10 mph, try to keep to speeds that cause little or no wake when on or near the racecourse. At starts, keep well away from the starting line. Allow plenty of room for a sailboat that may have to circle around the mark or the committee boat to restart.

⇒ **Can I watch without getting in the way?**

Yes! Sailors generally love to have spectators around the racecourse. There is plenty to see if you know what to look for. Though it seems a bit chaotic, there's a definite system to sailboat races and along with that place where you can watch the action without getting in the way. Sailboats are more maneuverable than you might think, they're used to going close to each other, without touching, that's part of the thrill of our sport. Sailors often describe races as chess games on a moveable board. There's plenty of strategy and tactics involved in our sport that we spend years learning (and occasionally mastering).

SPECTATOR BOATS



⇒ **Watching the start.**

At the start of a race, your best vantage point is on an extension of the starting line, opposite from the race committee boat. Try to stay about 100 yards away from the starting buoy. In this position, you can watch the boats line up for the start. You'll see other powerboats in this area too.

⇒ **Watching mark roundings.**

When boats round marks of the course, you'll see plenty of action as they turn, raise and lower sails and jockey for a favorable position. Just like the start, you'll have a great vantage point to watch all this fun if you station yourself about 50 yards to windward of the buoy on the outside of the course. Again, you'll see other powerboats around the marks, so just stay in their general vicinity.

⇒ **Communications.** Most competitors carry VHF radios on their boats. However, do not communicate with a competitor by radio unless they have requested assistance because they will be disqualified from the race.

⇒ **Tow boats from the racecourse.**

Some crews have an extremely long sail home after racing. If the wind is light (less than 5 mph) they will likely be delighted with the offer of a tow home.

⇒ **Assist capsized boats.**

If you see a sailboat capsize, don't panic. Most boats can be righted and will get back in the race. But if sailors begin waving or calling for help, it's never a bad idea to approach *slowly* to see if you can help. **Do not help unless asked.** Once a sailor asks for outside assistance, they are out of the race. You'll find more information about how you can help sailors who have capsized at mendotayc.org