

SAILING FIT

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Wit Vs Weight

As you walk around the boat park you seem to hear one reoccurring question "How much do you weigh now?" Whether your sailing a full or a radial everyone wants to know what the next guy weighs in at. My question is how much of your result is really due to your weight and how much is due to your skill level. Take for example John Mydral US Olympic representative for the Sydney Games in 2000 and Mark Mendalblatt, US Olympic representative for the Athens games in 2004. John and Mark are both exceptional sailors who have been sailing for most of their lives. The only difference is that they have different body types and their home sailing waters are Hawaii vs. St. Petersburg, FL.

The reason I am venturing into this topic is because it was suggested to me that maybe we could do a little experiment. So for the 2006 Mid-Winters East there will be a section added to the registration form that asks for your height, weight, home sailing club and years sailing. We are going to see what the average weight of the top sailors are, what type of training they do and where they do it.

Everyone knows that sailor skill is a large part of your performance, but I see to many sailors say "If I was lighter/heavier I would have done better". While what you weigh does play a role I feel that sailors get that stuck in their head and lose site of the balance between skill and weight. While there is an average weight for the radial and the full rig there is also a weight that is obviously too light or too heavy for both. Some full rig sailors like to remain on the light side of the average because they feel that they will make greater gains downwind than what they would loose upwind. This is especially true if that sailor works hard on his fitness and has a good power to weight ratio. Then he can hike hard for longer periods going upwind. While this makes good sense I feel to many sailors get so stuck on either gaining weight for a heavy air venue or loosing for a light air venue that if the conditions don't turn out as they thought they can't adapt. They spent all of their training time and energy on what the scale says instead of fine- tuning their skills on the water. I think one of the keys is a good power to weight ratio.

I my opinion sailor skill comes from a wide range of areas. Most of your skill comes from time spent in the boat if you work consistently on your overall fitness your body will grow along with your skill level. The amount of power you are able to put out will be balanced with your weight. In other words you won't have too much muscle and be underweight or too little muscle and be overweight. You learn how your body feels in the boat and how it feels sailing in

different conditions. You become agile and are able to make your body work to your advantage. Along with this you will learn how far you can push yourself. Now if you are constantly changing your weight to fit the conditions or just simply focusing on your weight as a predictor of your performance you will never be able to find the balance between the maximum effort you can put out, your weight and your skill. You also need to keep in mind that while one person may seem to be the perfect weight, how tall are they and what is their body type? Are they tall and lean or short and stocky? Does their weight come from muscle or an overage/shortage of body fat? While one person may have a lot of strength in their legs to hike another may have more in their shoulders to throw out. Each person's body is different so a number on the scale may not be the best indicator of what is going to make you the fastest in the boat.

You have to find a balance in your body as well. By this I mean that you need to find what weight works best for you. At what weight are you most comfortable? As you work on your fitness level and you build more muscle and endurance you will find a weight and body structure that your body will naturally fall to. Yes, you can always push harder to become stronger and fitter and this is something I would encourage. However, if you are constantly battling with yourself to add on weight or lose weight you may want to consider working with what you've got. All the energy you spend trying to lose or gain could be spent making what you already have stronger and fitter. Then you will feel comfortable with your body and can focus on sailing the boat. You can go to a regatta and be confident that you know how to make your body work for you. You will know what your strengths and weaknesses are. If you feel that you are not as good in certain conditions you can focus on the balance between your skill and your body to improve. In my opinion these two will grow together and make you a well-rounded sailor who is able to adapt to whatever conditions are present.

So after Mid-Winters East we will take a look at all of the information and see what we come up with. This should be pretty interesting!!

On another note, I would like to take a moment to thank all of you who read these articles and the Laser class for giving me the opportunity to write about fitness. This article marks 5 years of me writing for The Laser Sailor. It has gone by so fast and I have learned so much from everyone. I hope we can keep learning from each other for another 5 years.

As always, if you want to hear about a certain topic or have any questions feel free to contact me. It's hard to come up with five years of topics you know! You can always find me at www.sailfit.com or email directly to meka@sailfit.com. I look forward to hearing from you.