



A Return to Racing After a Pandemic

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No one said racing in the midst of a global pandemic would be easy, but sailors across the country still did their best

In the spring of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was just beginning to surge across the country, many municipalities and health departments banned all competitive sailing. This left yacht clubs, sailing schools, non-profits and other sailing organizations nationwide facing the prospect of a long season of strict limitations. At the same time, they couldn't help but see golfers beginning to return to the links.

Reluctant to see more time pass without either any youth or adult competition, regional sailing communities began searching for ways to get back out on the water and race safely in at least some capacity. Fast forward a year, and scores of regattas put on hold in 2020 are back on for 2021, with fingers crossed and (hopeful) plans underway for a full season of racing. None of this comes by accident. In fact, it has required hard work and plenty of quick thinking on the part of countless sailors across the country—to the benefit of the sport as a whole.

A New Way to Sail

Rhode Island's maritime industry helps fuel the state's economy, and when the pandemic struck, those involved with sailing and boating quickly started talking to each other.

“We made a distinction early on between the state of Rhode Island's rules and their recommendations,” said David Schwartz, president of the Narragansett Bay Yachting Association. “Some of the state's rules did not make a lot of sense to us. So, being rational adults and knowing more about what it is like being on a boat, we tried to make a clear distinction between what the rule said and what the suggestions were.

“As the regional authority, we started a dialogue with the commodores and race committee chairs of all our clubs and sailing organizations. We were asking them what their ideas were and what made sense, and we came to some conclusion of how we could carry on and do racing in a safe manner. It soon became very clear that we could have senior and junior events if they were conducted with thought and care.”

For many, this meant more singlehanded and doublehanded racing, and more families racing together on Wednesday nights. With no grand prix or national events to attend, local weekend racing was soon full of competitive sailors taking advantage of various coastal, shorthanded events. There was no socializing afterward. But there was still plenty of racing to be had.