

Florida Districts at Davis Island Yacht Club

By David Ames



The Flying Scot district regatta at Davis Island Yacht Club turned out to be one of the most challenging regattas that I have sailed in a long time. Saturday's forecast for the event had a cold front scheduled to come through right after the first start with winds predicted to be out of the WNW at 15-20 kts+ which is the top end of what the FS can race in. In contrast, Sunday's forecast showed the wind to be less than 5 kts out of the east shifting to the south by 2 p.m. and becoming variable. The forecast extremes meant that none of the Flying Scot team would have an advantage due to crew weight and that everyone would have to sail in sub-optimal conditions.

I originally planned to sail the event with my regular crew PJ but he was unable to make it, and I invited a new crew to sail with me who had never raced a Flying Scot. Our combined crew weight was on the heavy side of the Flying Scot range so I was looking forward to the big breeze on Saturday and would adjust my tactical strategies on Sunday.

Saturday, I increased my headstay tension all the way up to 150 lbs. to reduce any head stay sag and my mast rake was set at 28' 5" to be ready for the heavier conditions. I raced the regatta with a new set of Mad Sails that have been very fast in practice especially on the down wind legs. Jeff and I left the dock early to practice some boat handling and get an understanding of what the wind shifts and breeze patterns would look like on the water. Jeff had experience racing keel boats so he was able to quickly pick up on all the boat handling concepts and control lines in the Flying Scot. We performed 10-15 roll tacks and about five sets, jibes, and takedowns to get our team work down to where we were comfortable with being able to execute in close quarters during the race. Clear communication is often an overlooked skill that is essential to smooth execution during a race. Jeff and I talked about how we were going to adjust our weight placement for boat speed and pointing, and I described to him how the boat should feel and when to adjust sail trim through the different "gears". For starting strategy, I am

usually aggressive with my positioning and will set up early and protect my hole and rely on acceleration to get a good start, but with the regatta being Jeff's first day on the boat, I decided to completely adjust my strategy and approach the starting line late and take advantage of someone else's hole and not rely on boat handling.

Before the start, the wind was only between 10-15 kts with sizeable left shifts coming in where the race course was going to be set. The race committee set up the starting line with the pin end slightly favored so we decided to start middle-pin and go to the left side. After a general recall, the second start was a clean start with the boats at the pin leading early. We started about a two-thirds of the way down the line on starboard and headed left on a slight header. We thought about tacking to port right after the start, but the boat to weather of us was in a position where we could not cross and ducking would have been an extreme maneuver so we headed further out left with the leaders from the pin end. On the left side, we got a slight header and four of the boats from the pin crossed us before we had an opportunity to tack to port in a good lane and head toward the weather mark. The boats on the right side were in different wind and got a nice right winding shift and ended up in the lead as the left shift that we were in faded by the time our group came back to the weather mark. We rounded the weather mark in 8th and sailed fast between the weather mark and the offset mark. The boats in front of us all had their crews go for the spinnaker poles and either did a jibe set or went low on the starboard set which allowed us to use our speed to gain a controlling position for the run. Down wind we sailed fast and by the leeward gate, we caught up to 3rd heading out on port tack to the right side for the second weather leg. Right after the leeward mark, the wind really started to pick up with the puffs increasing to 20+ kts and most teams were starting to go into survival mode. By the second half of the weather leg, we were easing the jib in the big puffs to maintain control of the boat with winds consistently above 20 kts. We rounded the final weather mark in 3rd and set on starboard. We probably should have jibed before setting to eliminate jibing with the spinnaker in 20+ kts. Our jibe into the finish was dicey and we almost flipped the boat but saved it at the last moment and finished 5th for the race with Jim Signor, Charlie Clifton, and Jeff Linton in 1st, 2nd, and 3rd. With the wind consistently over 20 kts, the fleet decided to head for shore and call it a day.

Sunday the weather predictions were spot on with the winds out of the East at 5 kts or less with very shifty conditions. Jeff and I left early again to work on some boat handling and team work before the start of the races. We noticed that the conditions were extremely spotty and the holes on the race course could ruin your race very quickly. The wind was predicted to shift to the south so we decided to play the pressure on the right side of the first leg and avoid a risky left side strategy. We started near the boat end and tacked to port at the first opportunity and were looking pretty good on our way out to the right side. On the first header, we tacked port to come back to the fleet and were somewhere in the top five when we lost our lane and tacked back out right to hopefully get a larger right shift and some pressure. To our dismay, the boats in the middle of the course started to get lifted inside of us indicating that we were out of phase with the shifts and had to come back to the weather mark on a header with less pressure. Ouch! We rounded the weather mark around 11th or 12th and did a starboard spinnaker set because we were headed and it looked like there was more pressure on the left side of the course. Our observation at the mark paid off and we caught back up and rounded the bottom gate in 5th or 6th and headed back out to the right side for the second weather leg. The top three boats had a nice gap between the rest of the fleet so we focused on beating the boats that were in our vicinity. On the second weather leg, the wind shifted more to the ESE and the pressure looked right as well so we

committed to the right and took the header out to the right side until we thought that we had the best wind line before tacking to starboard on the lift. On starboard, we got a nice winding lift and caught up to within ten boat lengths of the leaders by the weather mark and rounded in fourth. The obvious strategy for the downwind was to jibe set and head for the finish. First, second, and third for the second race were Jeff Linton, Dave Moring, and David Martin.

The last race of the regatta saw the wind drop to less than 5 kts with the shifts, and holes on the course made trying to use traditional race tactics useless. It was all about finding the last of the dying wind and praying to the wind gods to help you out if you fell into one of the large holes with no wind. After a decent start, we fell into one of the holes on the right side of the first weather leg and prayed for wind but our prayers went unanswered and we rounded mid-teens at the first mark. The good thing is that Jeff Linton who was winning the regatta rounded one boat in front of us so the overall result of the regatta was still to be determined. The entire fleet did a jibe set at the offset mark due to the wind shifting more to the SE, and we thought that more pressure would build on the right side so we took a high angle on the port jibe while Jeff sailed low and found some clear air. By the time we made it to the leeward gate, Jeff gained and made it around the pack of boats we were in on the run. The last windward leg the course had become skewed to the right and there weren't many passing lanes so everyone followed each other out to the right side and then sailed the long tack on starboard to the weather mark. By the finish, we passed a few boats and finished in seventh and Jeff finished fourth for the race placing first overall for the regatta. Dave Martin sailed an excellent race in tricky conditions and finished second in the race and second overall.

I had a lot of fun at Davis Island sailing with Jeff, and he performed really well given his time in the boat. Jeff had a blast getting out on the water and learned a ton of nuances about how to make the Flying Scot sail fast. Jeff enjoyed the competitiveness of the Flying Scot class so much that he is going to buy a boat and join the growing new fleet up in St. Augustine. Despite the challenging conditions, the RC and DIYC ran an excellent regatta, and I am looking forward to the next event up at Lake Eustis.

Regatta Results - <https://www.fssa.com/content/2020-21-florida-districts-davis-island-yacht-club-tampa-fl-0>