

Charleston Local Knowledge

By Ward Cromwell

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COLLEGE of CHARLESTON SAILING

First off, I would like to welcome everyone to Charleston. I know many people have come from great distances to compete on our waters and I hope they treat you well! While I have spent the majority of my time coaching and sailing with the team on the waters of the Cooper River and Crab Bank, we truly enjoy getting out on the west side of the shipping channel and sailing in the Harbor and the mouth of the Ashley River.

Circle 0 will be the closest to the Ashley River. You can expect this course to be the most dynamic in terms of current due to Shute's Folly, which is the small island located just east of the Charleston peninsula and north of the Ashley River. On this course, the ebb tide will run to the south between the Peninsula and the Island as well as to the east out of the Ashley River on the south part of the course. If the course is set to the north of the south west side of the island, look for current relief on the east side of the island, when the tide begins to flood. With the southerly and an ebb tide, don't be over early, lead right before the South Channel, and get on port tack quick downwind. When it starts to flood in the afternoon, you should see increasing adverse current at the starting area and cross current (left to right) towards the windward part of the beat. Think about leading to the starting line, short tacking the starboard lay line, and protecting course side left on the downwind. You will not find much current relief on the right side of the course (next to the peninsula), but if you look hard enough you may find some rocks.

Circle 1 may be less dynamic, but will see some strong cross currents in the southerly winds especially near the windward mark. The south east side of Shute's Folly could

come into play with the low tide, forcing the race committee to push the windward part of the course into the South Channel. You may not be able to find much current relief on this course. While the tide is ebbing in the southerly, look to get a lane on port early before the water deepens in the South Channel. Also, be aware of the starboard tack current lift/advantage you may get in a southerly as the water deepens and the tide begins to flood in the afternoon. Same as Course 0, when the tide is ebbing (over 2 knots at Noon on Sat.) look to get on port tack around the windward mark and as it begins to flood, look for the longer starboard tack on the downwind.

Circle 2 will have the most current effect with the water flowing out and up the Cooper River (Charleston's primary shipping channel) as well as through the South Channel. The current will flow hardest near the starting area in the southerly. Look for strong ebb tides in the morning pushing the fleet towards the pin end of the starting area, then away from the line and towards the boat in the flood. The Fort Sumter Flat, off James Island, can certainly come into play in the low tide. Most likely on the Starboard tack layline near the windward mark, especially if the wind veers east. It can get deceptively shallow on the south side of the South Channel near this course—and quickly—so if the wind is up and they stretch the course out at a low tide, be careful of looking for relief past the starboard tack lay line, you may find more than you bargained for.

You should see some average five foot tides during your racing in Charleston. The greatest altering effect to the tide predictions, as far as I know, is the amount of rain to the northwest causing the ebb tide to run longer up river and in deeper water. The ebb tide can also inhibit the sea breeze from filling as well at times. While the current should certainly play a huge factor in your decision making, the winds can still come from all directions this time of year. Hopefully some nice wind from the SSE will prevail which may get the wind trending right in the evening as the sun begins to set over our Holy City.

Keep an eye out for the Lyrid meteor Shower which should peak around 2:30 a.m. on Sunday night, if you still happen to be up and enjoying yourself.

For the best tide predictions in the southeast refer to the 2012 Tidelogs. www.tidelog.com from Pacific Publishers, LLC.

—Ward Cromwell
College of Charleston Sailing