



Article by Zeke Horowitz

When GYA Commodore, Cathy Cromartie invited me to be a part of the GYA Opening Regatta this May, I quickly jumped at the opportunity. As a very enthusiastic member of the Viper Community and a fellow Gulf Coast sailor (Sarasota, FL), I knew I couldn't miss the opportunity to participate. Along with Rondar rep, Dan Tucker, and Class Administrator, Buttons Padin, we organized a fun filled weekend of sailing, eating, drinking, and learning about Viper Sailing. We had a lovely talk about all the rigging and boat handling secrets during a beautiful sunset at Fairhope Yacht Club on Friday night, and then I had the pleasure of riding on a powerboat during the weekend's racing with Dan and Commodore Cathy. We took lots of photos and videos and offered tips to the newcomers to our fleet. On Saturday evening, the adult beverages were bountiful and the fleet took the opportunity to quench their thirst as we held a well received debrief where we reviewed all the photos and videos from the day and continued the process of learning more about making Vipers go fast. I would like to thank Cathy and the Fairhope Yacht Club for welcoming me with open arms for the weekend, as well all the GYA clubs and sailors for making me feel at home! A huge thanks to Dan and Buttons as well for all that they do for the class to make sure we all have fun! I can't wait to come back and be a part of the GYA fun!

I put together a few tips to keep in mind as we all continue to learn to make our Vipers go faster! If there are ever any questions about these tips, or anything else, I can always be reached at [zeke.horowitz@northsails.com](mailto:zeke.horowitz@northsails.com) or (941) 232-3984. I'd be thrilled to help however I can!

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## Setting Your Jib Leads



When setting your jib leads, ideally you want to have about 4-6 inches of depth (or “belly”) in the bottom of the jib. To best judge this imagine a straight line from the tack to the clew of the jib and then estimate how far the furthest away point on the foot of the jib is from that line. You can see in the first photo, the foot of the jib is virtually flat. You can even see a tension wrinkle going from tack to clew. To correct this we moved the jib car forward 2 holes and the result is the rounder foot in the second photo. This is the look we are typically targeting. In most conditions you can pull about 2 inches of weather sheet on as well. This will add a little more depth down low and help keep the sail plan powered up.

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## Controlling the Headstay Tension is ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL



The biggest factor that controls your headstay tension in the Viper is your mainsheet. The more mainsheet tension you can carry the tighter your headstay gets and the easier it is to hold the boat in the “groove” (caveat: in light air we do want a “little bit” of headstay sag). This is easier said than done, since the Viper so quickly becomes overpowered but I try to always keep in mind that the looser your head stay is the more powered the boat will be! That said, it’s important that we find the right balance between “pinching/feathering,” and easing the mainsheet. In the photos above, you can see how much headstay sag there is and how deep the jib looks. Looking at the same boat from behind, you can see the leech of the main is quite open indicating the mainsheet is not pulled tight enough. It will be very hard to point with this set up and it will be hard to keep the boat on its feet when puffs hit. While the Viper does use the lower shrouds and mast blocks to help control headstay tension as well, if the mainsheet is too eased, all the lower tension and blocking won’t matter! Remember though, there is a point at which your mainsheet can be too tight! If you look up at the telltales on the leech of the main and they are not flowing at all, then you need to ease the mainsheet a couple of inches until you see them start to flow again. Below is a photo of a properly trimmed mainsail from behind.

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## Depth in the Lower Main



Controlling the depth in the lower part of the mainsail is key for achieving proper sail shape to allow for maximum speed and pointing. You can tell how deep the lower part of your main is by looking for overbend wrinkles in the lower  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the sail. If you look closely you can see the wrinkles on the main of 245 that go from the luff all the way down to the clew. These wrinkles indicate that the sail is too flat and possibly even inverting down low. This means you are “washing out” all the power and you won’t be able to get up to speed very easily. This could be a function of a couple of different tuning issues. If you pull the vang too hard, the g-nav will press into the lower mast, pushing it forward and stretching the lower part of the sail creating these wrinkles. This could also be a function of not having enough mast blocks in front of the mast.

When you add blocks in front of the mast, you are pushing the lower mast backwards (taking pre-bend out) and therefore adding depth to the lower mainsail. (adding mast blocks also adds headstay tension). Lastly, it could be the case that the lower shrouds are too loose (but we all know the risks of over tensioning the lowers thanks to Dan and Paul from Rondar!!) You can see perfect overbend wrinkles on 171. Notice that their lowest wrinkles are more horizontal than 245, and they stop about 50-60% of the way back, and do not continue all the way to the clew. You will also notice that there are more wrinkles as you work your way up the main but they get smaller (closer to the luff) as you go up the sail and stop about 2 ft above the spreaders. This is PERFECT, and will make it very easy to accelerate up to full speed, achieve maximum pointing, and make sail trim adjustments that much easier! In summation, if your overbend wrinkles are too long, add mast blocks, and if you don’t see any wrinkles, take away mast blocks. (Assuming you are in the ballpark on all other tuning)





## Sit forward!



The Viper loves to have weight forward so, when sailing with 3 people, try to have the forward most crew in front of the shrouds. As it gets windier, it becomes much easier and more effective to have the forward crew hiking just behind the shroud, but try to stay forward until your legs simply can't take it anymore! The same goes for going downwind, notice in the photo on the right, the forward most crew is actually standing in front of the mast on the fore-deck. This is great for keeping weight forward and also for looking for the puffs! You will also notice that the skipper and the spinnaker trimmer are sitting nice and reclined, "couch style" with their butts on the floor, and their backs leaning against the side of the cockpit. This is because they are trying to keep weight to leeward and down low. When the boat heels to leeward going downwind, it is telling you that it could be sailing lower. That is good! The lower you can sail downwind, the closer to the mark you are pointing. So in the absence of other tactical reasons, you always want to sail as low as you can given the breeze strength. Sitting in like this induces leeward heel which you can get rid of by heading down, and sailing closer to the mark. I have found the boat is happiest and with a balanced helm with about 5 degrees of leeward heel in most conditions sailing downwind.

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It's always great to be able to get out on the water to watch, coach and evaluate other sailors with their setup and sailing style. Though I'd much rather be in the Viper racing than watching! That said, we are targeting the International Championship in Bermuda this fall and our team is really looking forward to racing in that beautiful venue. Feel free to contact me if you have any questions on this article or ideas that you'd like to share. looking forward to seeing you on the water... sailing!!

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