

Preventing Head Injuries in College Sailing

With heightened awareness of the long term effects which result from traumatic head injuries and repetitive brain injuries it is apparent that college sailing needs to become pro-active. Although the statistics are difficult to gather, it is also apparent that these injuries are way too frequent and most commonly occur in east coast collegiate FJs

The east coast FJ has a larger sail plan than the west coast 'Club FJs'. Along with more sail area, the boom is mounted 4" lower than the west coast boats and this brings the boom down into the cockpit area and contributes to the frequency of head/ boom collisions.

NEISA is anxious **and has voted unanimously** to request ICSA to move forward rapidly with a three pronged plan to prepare hosts for better response to student athlete injuries. Prevention possibilities include raising boom height, lightening the boom by implementing a lighter extrusion or substituting carbon fiber booms for aluminum.

1. Mandate annual education for coaches to become properly informed on current identification and response procedure. This might be in the form of an annual on-line course with a required passing grade on test for hosting certification. The CDC has a 30 minute on-line education course which is being employed throughout youth sports programs nationwide. (Mike Sego suggestion)
http://www.cdc.gov/concussion/HeadsUp/online_training.html
2. Required implementation of extended mast height for east coast FJs so that the gooseneck height is raised 4" by February, 2015. Sleeve and extrusion splice costs are approximately \$25/ boat and installation time required is approximately 20 minutes/ boat. The ICSA rules committee might prepare a draft to be approved at the annual meeting with a minimum height measurement for the center of all FJ goosenecks to be 51.5" minimum height above the bottom of the mast heel plug tenon.
3. Encourage adoption of lighter weight booms. If the booms have less mass, this will also decrease damaging impact.
Existing booms weigh 8.3 lbs and cost approx \$110.
Selden aluminum booms weigh 6.5 lbs and cost approx \$225.
Hall Spars Carbon booms weigh 3.1 lbs and cost approx \$500 each.

Universal adoption of raising boom height should be considered by the organizing authority (ICSA) because partial solutions might actually endanger students more frequently. Consider the consequences if your fleet of boats has the higher and lighter booms in practice and then travels to an event with the lower boom height. The likelihood of head/ boom injuries will become more common. All colleges and fleets need to implement within a very short time period.

Furthermore, ICSA should pursue a grant to cover the cost of extending the east coast style FJ masts for colleges which cannot afford the modification. A subcommittee should be appointed to pursue a sponsor and streamline the application process by colleges to ICSA for reimbursement. This would allow a supporting donor to fund the program through ICSA.

Implementation needs to be mandated within a fairly short timeline with or without a sponsor delivering a grant. It is our responsibility to make sailing safer for all participants at all skill levels.

Respectfully submitted,
-Fran Charles

MIT Sailing Master
NEISA Boats and Safety Chair