

How To Start a High School Sailing Team

By

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1. First, you need to approach the school and get their approval to start a team. Some teams will use the approach that the team is simply a club (such as the chess or science club) and get approval through the school activities director. Other programs go through the athletic department, and get approval as an athletic team. Either way works, as long as you can get approval to form a team.
2. Once approved, it is best to find a local sailing center/yacht club that you can co-ordinate with to use their facilities (boats, etc) to hold practices (but it is not necessary to have a practice facility to form a team - some teams have none, and simply go to regattas). Most YC's will charge you a fee, and some can provide coaching through the yacht club program. Otherwise, you will have to provide your own coach. Each situation/team is different. Some teams practice every day, and some teams practice only one day a week, or not at all. Again, each case is different. Insurance is always a question. If you have a US Sailing certified Level I coach as your coach, they come with a \$1 million liability insurance policy, and if you join MISSA/ISSA, they also have insurance. Also, the school usually has insurance coverage for school activities.
3. Once you form a team, you need to join ISSA (and your district high school sailing association). The cost to join ISSA varies by district, with part of the dues going to ISSA, and part going to the local district. To be a full-fledged member of High School Sailing, you must be a member of ISSA. Paid membership allows you team participation in all the National caliber events - i.e. Mallory qualifier, Baker Qualifier, Cressy Qualifier, Great Oaks and ISSA National Open. If you are not a current paid member, you are not allowed to participate in these regattas. In addition, most regional events all require you to be a member (although I'm not sure they check all that closely). Some events, encourage membership in ISSA, but allows you to race even if you are not (we are trying to encourage participation, and don't want any roadblocks in the way). If you are going to play, my feeling is that you should be a member - if nothing else, it give you credibility when voicing your opinion about policy matters. The cost can be borne any way you choose - when we first started our program 11 years ago, I just ponied up the dues out of my pocket. Since then, we have run fundraisers, which have helped to bear the brunt of this, or spread the cost among all the team members. My suggestion - 10 parents dividing the cost = \$16/sailor. You join by going to

the ISSA Website (www.highschoolsailingusa.org) and following the instructions under registration for registering a new team.

4. Once you have paid your ISSA dues, there are no additional fees other than regatta fees (usually in the neighborhood of \$50-60/ regatta), travel fees (gas, food, lodging, etc) and fees you may have to pay your local yacht club for the use of the boats for training/practice. At Grosse Ile, some of the kids are members of GIYC and some are not, so the YC charges all the kids a \$75 boat/facility usage fee - this helps defray the cost of boat and sail maintenance and repair, gas for my coach boat, and incidental expenses. With 12 kids using 11 boats, things break and need repair on a pretty regular basis.

5. Once you are established as a team, go to your district web site to review the schedule, have a parents' meeting with the team parents, decide what kind of a schedule you want to do, and just go for it. Come to regattas and start racing. The best thing about HS Sailing is that the regatta venues supply the boats, so there are no boats to trailer to regattas.

6. If you start the process now, you can be sailing by the following season. All districts have a full fall schedule, and then in the spring, there are a number of additional regattas, including the Baker (team racing) and Mallory (double handed team) national qualifiers. We follow ISSA rules, not the state high school rules.

7. In what way should you get the school involved? It all depends on what you want to achieve with the program. As stated previously, if you simply want a place for the kids to sail in the fall (our initial intent when we started), simply approach the school and ask to start a sailing club (similar to the chess club, science club, German Club, etc). The school should have no problem doing this - the only issue that usually comes up is the liability thing - have all the kids sign a waiver. Liability issues can be gotten around.

8. If you want to carry it further (say and become a varsity sport - for us it came at the behest of the kids. They asked, "Dad, what can we do to become varsity?") To use my own situation as an example, for us at Grosse Ile High School, it was to start small - first become a club team, show the administration you have some staying power, and then approach the school (in our case it was after two years) and we petitioned the school board, athletic director and superintendent. The two caveats that we had were that we don't ask the school for any money (ever) - that the sport would be totally self-supporting - no problem parents of the team members foot the bills. The other caveat was that it be open to all students. So we hold tryouts, and if the kids show any interest/ability I keep them. Of the 19 kids on our team this year, only 11 are members of our summer race program at GIYC, (and three of them are a direct result of being HS sailors). We have found that it helps as a feeder for the summer program, and

vice versa. So it's a win-win situation for us. I was never more proud than the day I saw our kids walking around the school with a varsity jacket with a sailboat on the back, where there usually is a football or basketball.

9. As an example, at Grosse Ile High School, we practice one day a week - I'd like to do more, but my work schedule doesn't allow it. Our practices are on Thursdays (my early day off) and we go from about 4 pm until dark. Our practices are very intense, and concentrated on racing skills - starts, upwind, downwind, tacking and gybing drills, etc. I do very little individual skill work - we simply don't have enough time. The kids can work on these skills during summer sailing or on their own. We do lots of starts and short (5-10 minute) races. In a typical practice, we may do up to 8-12 races, which is equivalent to a whole regatta. It really helps. When we can't practice due to weather, I will do a chalk talk at the YC on the dry erase board, and watch video of past regattas, with commentary and a lot of two-way discussion. The kids are brutal critics of themselves and each other, much more so than I would be. They definitely learn a lot from watching their mistakes on video.

10. We set our schedule at a parents meeting at the beginning of the school year, and we try to do as many regattas as possible. I have attached a copy of our schedule, and the rules that all team members must follow (if you read them, you can see we have become very structured and sophisticated - necessary for a varsity sport that has no school financial support, and with many parents who have different agendas.)

11. We have a blast doing this, and now have 15 of our alumni sailing in college. I have found that HS Sailing is a great training ground for college sailing, and if any of your kids have thoughts of doing college sailing, I was amazed at how many doors are opened by having a viable High School program. The college coaches notice.

Hopefully, this helps you a bit in your decision making process in how to start a team. If you need any more information, do not hesitate to contact me, or any member of the ISSA board, for more information.