

## Notes for those new to Optimist sailing

Firstly a warm welcome, if your child is just starting or is thinking of starting Optimist sailing I hope these notes will be useful in giving you some idea of the in's and out's of Optimist sailing in the club. If you need more information or the odd helping hand please feel free to email or ask any of the other parents you see around, everyone started off at some stage.

Starting Optimist sailing is like starting anything else, there are loads of questions to be asked and the answers are out there but where are they? Well hopefully these notes are starting point for you.

### *Other sources of information*

- **For Club related stuff**
  - Sign up to receive the Optimist emails on the club Optimist webpage – fill in the section “subscribe to Optimist email & SMS”.
- **IODAI**
  - IODAI is the International Optimist Dinghy Association in Ireland
  - The IODAI mission statement is “To promote a life-long love of sailing”. There are several IODAI events throughout the year to do any of these the sailor must join IODAI, see [iodai.com](http://iodai.com) for details. The IODAI website has plenty of information for those new to Optimist sailing, although some of it can be quite detailed.

### *What is an Optimist?*

Most of the kids will tell you it's a lean mean racing machine, most others say it's a bath tub with a sail in it. In the end it's what the kid makes of it, somewhere to have fun in or somewhere to go racing in, it's up to them.

The original concept should never be forgotten. Back in 1948 a group of people in Florida saw how much fun kids and adults were having with soapbox cars, then they thought why couldn't that be done on the water. They asked a local boat builder Clarke Mills to design something that would suit, and he designed the Optimist pram (that's what sailing dinghies were called back then). The idea was it could be built by an adult and child in a garage using one piece of plywood, some screws and some glue. It was easy to maintain, rig and learn how to sail in and at the same time sailed well and provided enough challenge to interest the older kids. Fibreglass has replaced wood but the original concept is the same, “teach young people to sail and have fun whilst doing so”. It is still easy to rig, easy to learn how to sail in, easy to maintain but can be sailed well enough to provide tough competition for older kids.

Age group is generally from 8 to 15, however getting towards 15 most kids are getting too big to fit into one easily (although you do see the occasional adult in one come the “At Home”). There is life after Optimist sailing, Toppers, Lazer 4.7, RS Feva's or 420's etc are all a possibility.

### *Where is a good starting point*

This depends on what level the child has already, for my halfpenny worth the club runs a very good 'introduction' for new kids on a Saturday morning in April & May. This has been run very successfully by Darren O Keeffe ( Ex Rear Admiral Dinghies) and his band of volunteers (everything in Optimist sailing depends on volunteers) over the last few years. The kids are divided into different groups based on their experience and then they are brought out in Ribs and Optimists with more senior Optimist sailors for an hour or so just to give them the feel for it. It is a great way for them to get a taste of being on the water and for you to see how they enjoy it (or otherwise) before committing to the next 7yrs of Optimist sailing!

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After that there is a variety of sailing courses and Cara na Mara course available –see the club website for dates and course details.

### *What you will need*

The boat: boats can cost anything from 600 euro to 4,500 euro, when starting off there is no real point in getting a top of the range boat. A perfectly good boat can be picked up for less than 1500 euro. Most boats should come with at least two sails, a launching trolley, top & bottom covers, a mast clamp, buoyancy bags, the mast, sprit, boom and foils (rudder and dagger board). Some may come with more, all the better if they do. There are different manufacturers of all the bits including the boat but starting out that really doesn't matter too much. The sails come in different sizes as well, google this and you'll find plenty of information.

When it comes to racing at different competitions everything needs a certificate, most boats being sold have all of these so look for them when buying.

### *Where to buy*

Any of the usual boating websites or done deal, iodai.com is also a good place and there is occasionally a notice the club.

Just remember when buying a boat that says 'won the worlds' it wasn't so much the boat that won as the person sailing it.

### *Insurance*

Insurance is required for club racing and any national event. Average cost is 54 euro per year. The IODAI website and an event information will give details of what level of cover is required. Also check out any of the insurance companies website e.g. craft insure.i.e.

### *What the child needs*

April onwards, a wetsuit, lifejacket with whistle, booties, and a cag (waterproof smock), gloves are also handy but it can be difficult to get gloves to fit small hands. Wetsuits are easy to come by, it's just a case of whether it will be a winter or summer one. Winter ones have a few more millimetres to give that extra warmth so it depends on how your child is regarding the cold.

For later and earlier in the year, well it is Ireland and they will get cold easily if they get wet, if they get cold they get miserable and that's no fun for them, or you when they come in. Certainly the dry-suit is the way to go, they can be expensive so shop around, but they will last if looked after, just make sure to get the size right.

Second hand dry-suits are around but just make sure to check for tears and cuts especially on the neck and wrist seals as well as the knees and feet.

Most kids wear some sort of fleece under the dry suit – an all in one pyjamas or something similar. To keep the hands warm try a surgical pair of gloves (some put Vaseline on the fingers' to help keep the gloves on) then a pair of rubber gloves over those. It can be difficult to get the feet into the booties when wearing a dry-suit so try putting a sandwich bag over the dry-suit foot, it will make it easier to slide into the bootie.

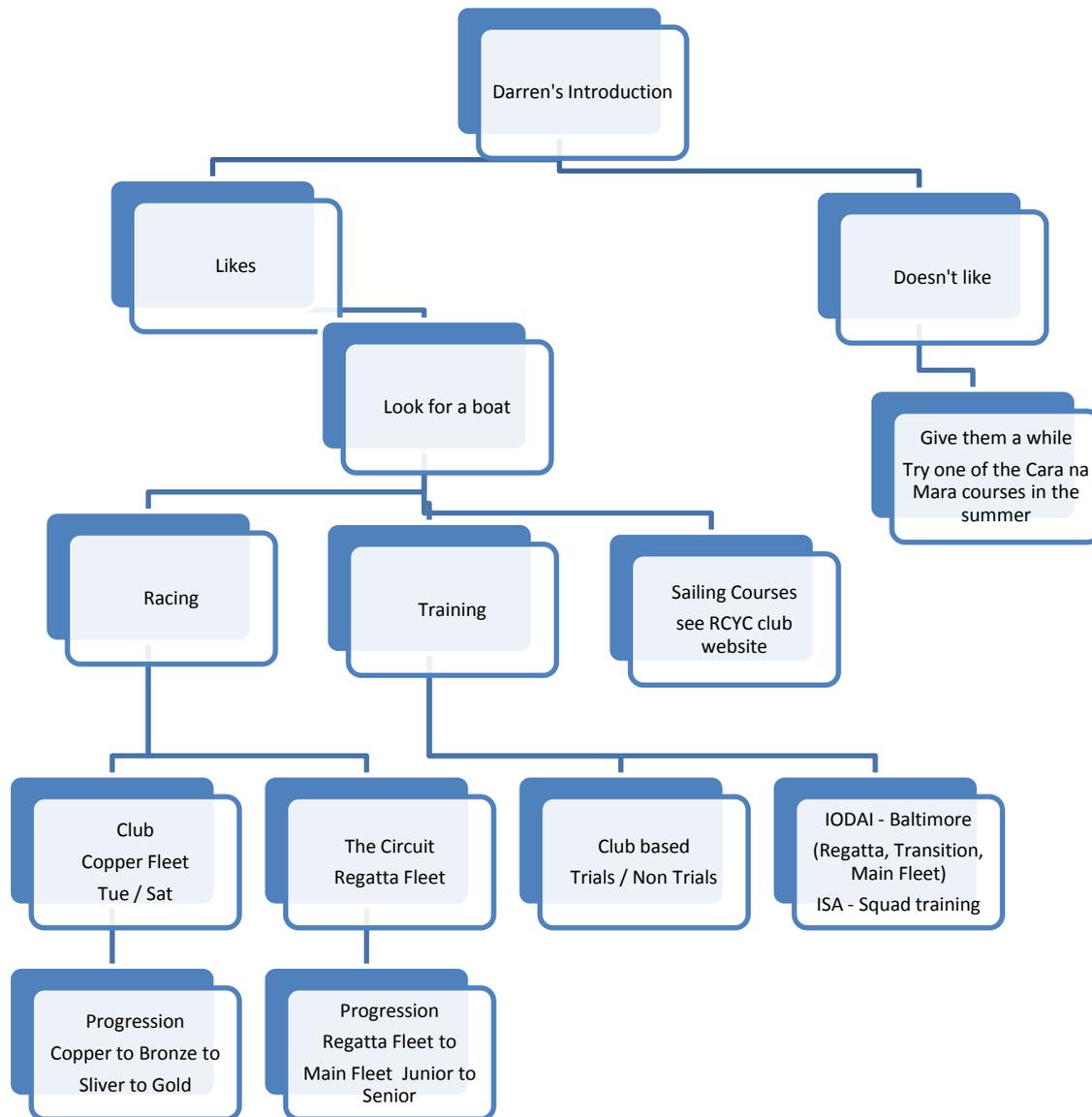
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### *How to rig an Optimist*

Follow the link on the Optimist section of the Club website, there's also loads on You tube.

### *Racing and Training*

Most kids thrive on competition, there is no shortage of that in Optimist sailing. How far and how much a child wants to do is entirely up to the child and the parents, the flow chart below should give you some sort of idea of the usual Optimist route.



### *Racing - Club*

Anyone starting off and wishing to race will start off in the Copper Fleet. The idea is to introduce them to racing gently so the races tend to be short. As they progress through ability, participation in national and regional events and other criteria they progress up through bronze, silver and on to the top level Gold. Club racing is on Saturdays and Tue evenings when it gets brighter i.e. May - Sept. Progression is decided by the Optimist committee.

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### *Racing outside the club*

There are five IODAI events during the year these are commonly called the Optimist circuit. There are 4 regional events Munster's, Connaught's, Lenister's and Ulster's. There is also one national event. The regional events are held over 2 days and the nationals over 5 days. Full details can be found on the IODAI website ([www.iodai.com](http://www.iodai.com)) regarding dates and how to enter.

Those starting off should enter the Regatta Fleet where the idea is to do a little training first then have lunch and a couple of short races after lunch each day. It is a good introduction for them to the wider Optimist scene.

IODAI have a good 16 step guide to your first event which goes through everything from entering to getting your coloured ribbon!

There is nothing compulsory about going on the circuit but generally kids want to go further and gain a higher standing with their peers so the desire to go and compete in the various events builds.

### *Racing outside of Ireland*

Yes there is plenty, see IODAI website for details, but for those just starting out ,that is a few years away. You will hear of people going to the UK to compete in the British Nationals and Braassemmermeer in Holland. Those in the ISA squad travel to Braassemmermeer and Palma to compete in events there.

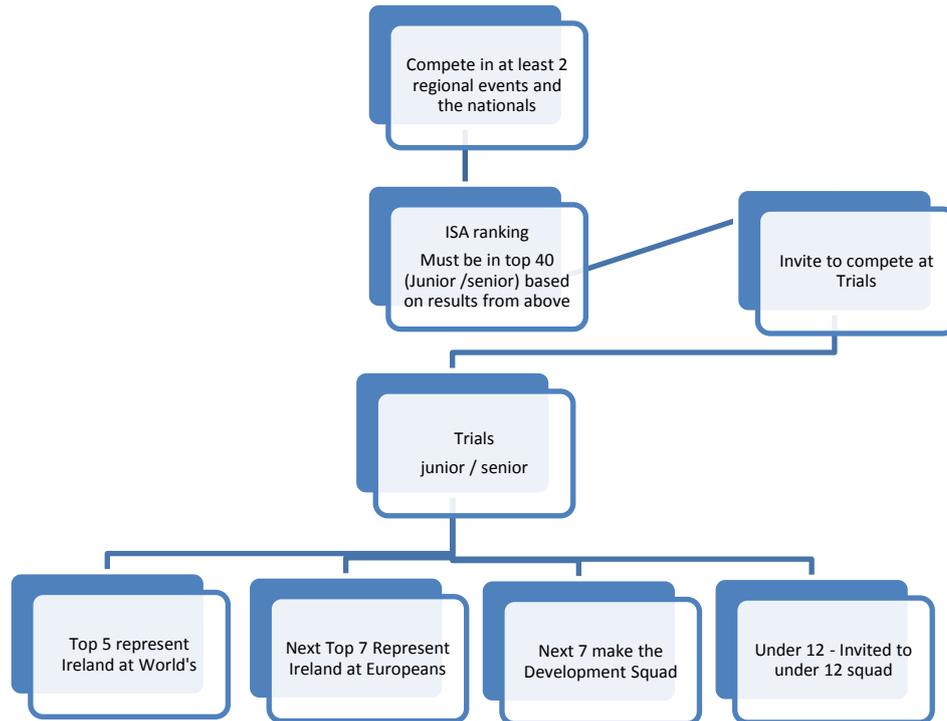
### *Training & Coaching*

There is a lot goes on regarding training and you'll see emails from the Optimist committee throughout the year. The training is optional and there is a fee, how much depends on a variety of things such as how long, who's doing the coaching and who it's aimed at.

The following flow chart might give you an idea as to why there is a fair bit of training & coaching, the end goal is one to make them better sailors but two so they can get to the Trials and then possibly on to represent their country in International events.

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### *The route to the Trials*



Trials are basically the qualifying event for a place on an Irish Team. It is not an Open event, the sailor must be invited. They must attend 2 of the 4 regional events and the Nationals. They are given a ranking once these events are over based on their results and if they are in the top 40 (junior or senior) then they are invited to the following year's trials.

The under 12 squad is those who have completed the trials and are 12 on that year.

Again IODAI website has full details.

### *Training & Coaching*

- *Trials coaching*
  - This is a coaching programme for those who have qualified for the Trials. You may also hear the word 'clinic' this is basically a longer coaching session i.e. 4 to 5 days rather than a couple of days for coaching.
- *Non Trials coaching*
  - Coaching for sailors making their first attempt to qualify for trials.
- *Squad training*
  - This is training run by the ISA for those sailors who have qualified to represent Ireland on the International stage.
- *Baltimore*
  - Baltimore is an IODAI organised event for all sailors from Regatta to transition (those aiming at moving from Regatta to Main fleet for the regional events) and main fleet. It's a good week for both their sailing development but also for the social scene (both kids and adults). Anyone that has been recommended it highly.

## Notes for those new to Optimist sailing

### **The Optimist committee**

Everyone loves a good committee – at least you've someone to direct your 'questions' to!

Yes there is a committee, the idea is to ensure Optimist sailing and training for the kids runs smoothly. In that regard the committee is made up of volunteer members, generally parents of Optimist sailors with a good mix of those that have been involved in Optimist for a good while, those who are a few years involved and those who are just starting. Each committee member is given a specific responsibility such as Trials coaching, non-trials coaching, prizes, results, secretary, safety, treasurer etc.

Comments and questions are always welcome and can be directed to the committee via the email on the club Optimist web page.

### **Volunteering**

I mentioned before a lot rely on volunteers, I would go so far as to say everything in Optimist sailing requires volunteers. Those volunteers have to come from the parents of Optimist sailors, you must give so that they can take (they being the kids not the tax man for once!).

People are always required for duties such as managing the launching, organising the racing, driving the safety boats (RIBs) and that's on a normal day. When it comes to events there's lots more. Don't worry about not having done any of it before, once you volunteer people are more than willing to show you what's required. For those wishing to get wet i.e. RIB or Race Officer the club runs courses for club members throughout the year to train people for these duties, formal ISA qualification is required to operate a safety boat. Email the Class Captain or send an email to the Optimist email address and someone will reply with the details.

When the kids start racing it is stressed on parents that in order for it to run, all parents must do their fair share i.e. if your kid goes racing you are expected to assist now and again. Simple reason is racing requires 3 ribs (2 people per rib), a race officer and at least one person ashore so if they aren't there then the kids don't get to go out.

To organise all of this a 'Duty Roster' has been set up where you sign up are given a date & duty, if you can't make it for whatever reason then you must endeavour to find a replacement.

Another way of looking at it is your kids see you being interested in what they are doing so they're happy and for the younger ones whilst they may not admit it it's always nice to have the reassurance of having a parent nearby. Then there's the added bonus of a social side, you'll find the kids make friends easy as a consequence you get to know the parents of their new friends and that's what sailing should be, as much about the social side as the sailing.

Well that's about all, as I say there is a lot on the IODAI website, feel free to email as well and ask anyone you see around the dinghy park. Above all remember sailing is like any sport, great for developing their confidence, ability to think for themselves and most importantly a great way to meet new friends. Of course you could look at it the Ted Heath way and say "*sailing is like standing under a cold shower and ripping up fivers*"

*Enjoy*

*Cormac Mac Sweeney – On behalf of the Optimist committee.*