**REPORT ON VERDICT’S DISMASTING**

**FRIDAY NIGHT RACE**

**28 FEBRUARY 2020**

**WIND CONDITIONS**

Forecast was 17 knots, gusting 30 knots. We started the race with a reef in the main and the No. 3 genoa in line with the forecast.

**COURSE**

S-23P-24P-19S-F. Our start time was 1825.

**CREW**

Four people on board Have been sailing together for around 15 years so know each other well, and have complete confidence in one another.

**INCIDENT DETAILS**

Approaching Mark 23 the wind seemed to be dying. Boats around us were shaking out their reefs so we decided to do the same. Minika even changed their headsail on the run to Mark 24.

After rounding Mark 24 it was apparent that the wind was building again and conditions worsened on the way to Mark 19. The wind speed at this stage was fluctuating from 11 knots to 30 knots, very violent gusts, with a choppy sea. The boat and the crew were handling the conditions and there were no concerns, except that we wished we hadn’t taken the tuck out.

The mast just folded with a bang and fell over the side without any drama. Sue went straight to the radio and put out a very quick message to Lowry Bay Sports, saying the mast was down. We weren’t sure whether this was received as by now the mast was submerged. We heard later that some boats heard this call.

Amnesty came up and asked us if we were okay. We said we were fine, and they left. We were confident in one another’s abilities so everyone was very calm on board, each doing their allocated task.

Rhys pulled down the genoa which we stowed through the front hatch. Rhys released all the sidestay fittings and the forestay: the pins knocked out very easily. The main boom detached easily with a spanner and was tied securely to the cabin top. All loose ropes were taken aboard and coiled down and thrown into the cabin as they came free.

Taking the main down proved very difficult because of the motion of the boat and the weight of the sail in the water. Rhys cut all the slides to make it easier to pull the main out of the track and eventually we were able to heave it up onto the deck and stow it below.

The motion of the boat was very violent and unpredictable at this stage.

**Assistance We Received**

Pulse came up as we were starting to attack the mast. They stood by for some time and then when we asked for help, came along side to transfer two crew members – Dwayne Taylor and one other. Because the mast had folded we had to cut it below the fold.

While tied up alongside, Pulse became the radio relay vessel for Verdict. They called Lowry Bay Sports with no response but were able to communicate with other boats in the fleet.

Kama 11 were standing by as well, and transferred a couple of hacksaws and very large fenders. This equipment was invaluable. It became evident that more than one hacksaw was required if we were to saw through the mast. The extra large fenders were necessary to keep a safe distance between Pulse and Verdict as by now the sea was very choppy and the movement of Verdict without a mast was quite violent. Gareth displayed incredible seamanship with this manoeuvre.

RossChild also stood by but were not required.

With the extra two crew members from Pulse aboard helping with the hacksawing we made good progress but as it was getting dark and the wind was strengthening we asked Pulse to call for assistance. Pulise called a Pan Pan as a precautionary measure. Wellington Radio replied and the Police inflatable was deployed.

It took 20 minutes for the Police inflatable to arrive, by which time the mast had been cut free and secured alongside with ropes. Once we had made sure there were no ropes in the water we turned on the motor and when all was confirmed okay, we motored back to the marina. The Police boat escorted us into the marina but weren’t needed.

From our point of view we felt very supported by the boats standing by to offer help if necessary. Pulse withdrew from the race to come our assistance. This support was much appreciated.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

1. Time is of the essence when dealing with a broken mast in the sea. Keep **all** your tools (not just the ones you use in normal maintenance) in an easily accessible place, Because of the conditions inside the boat – sails, ropes etc strewn in the cabin – we couldn’t find the tools easily. It was quicker to use gear offered from other boats than to spend the time down below looking for our own.
2. Keep two hacksaws on board - one is not enough. It has since been recommended to us that a battery-powered grinder is much more efficient but we’re not sure whether this is practical for inner harbour racing. Probably worth while pursuing for bluewater racing.
3. Ask for assistance early. We found it takes about four able-bodied people to get a broken mast under control. When a mast goes over the side, it is usually in bad weather so you are fighting the conditions and a yacht is very unstable without its rig. Dealing with such incidents in the dark are all the more difficult and dangerous.

**COMMENTS**

1. We commend the sailors who came to our aid. Great seamanship was displayed and a wonderful club spirit was evident during the whole incident.
2. We had no communication with Race Control in the Start Box after the incident, even though Pulse was relaying messages from us constantly. Communication was clear with other boats via Pulse’s handheld but we heard nothing from Race Control.
3. We don’t know why we had no communication from Race Control but this needs to be addressed. We understand they have a duty of care to monitor such events to completion and ensure that crews and boats are safe before leaving their station.
4. On Friday night the Race Officer had two roles: Race Officer and Race Control (in the Start Box). This is not always the case as often the Race Officer is actually out on the race course and communicates with Race Control by VHF or cellphone during the race where necessary.

It may be useful to review both these roles and add the stipulation that Race Control should not leave his/her post (either the Start Box or the Start Boat) until all boats that started the race are signed off and back in the marina. Boats have to register for the race and their finishing times recorded. If a finish time is not recorded it means they either did not start, withdrew, or are in difficulty or assisting someone in difficulty. This should be noted as part of the end of race procedures.

1. We understand that there are no wind limits for Friday night races, whereas the upper wind limit for championship races is 30 knots. It seems reasonable to set a lower limit for Friday night races which traditionally are social races where friends and family are invited to come and enjoy a night out on the water. This would give the Race Officer some guidelines to work to. We submit this recommendation to the Racing Committee for consideration.