BVI Spring Regatta & Sailing Festival

RACE STRATEGY GUIDE

Bareboat Racing Strategy

Race-proven tips for Caribbean bareboat regattas.

Neil Harvey, an Australian ocean racer and longtime marine-industry veteran, refined bareboat regatta sailing into a practical science across top Caribbean events like the BVI Spring Regatta, Antigua Sailing Week and St. Maarten Heineken Regatta. His advice still stands today — we've distilled it into this guide.

2027 DATES
March 29 – April 4

Covers crew & charter · boat prep · pre-start rules · upwind & downwind sail handling · fleet positioning

General Crew & Charter

- **Charter Registration** Book early, provide a sailing résumé, pay the race-supplement fee, secure the damage deposit and get the charter company's permission to race.
- **Crew Assembly** Build a core racing group complemented by sailors of varying experience levels.
- **Pre-Regatta Practice** Practise together before the first race — if nothing else, sign up for the Sailing Festival and use those three days and two races to hone teamwork.
- **Sun Protection & Hydration** Carry large water jugs to refill individual bottles; use strong sunscreen and SPF-rated clothing.

Boat Optimization & Preparation

- **Arrive Early** Get to the boat 1–2 days before the event. Split the team into bow, mast and cockpit squads to inspect every block, shackle, halyard and sheet, eliminating chafe points.
- **Thorough Bottom Scrub** Take particular care with the leading edges of all appendages and the underside of the keel bulb.
- **Traveler Maintenance** Flush salt crystals out of the midboom traveler car and track with fresh water and dish soap, then treat with McLube or WD-40.
- **System Rigging** Re-lead the jib-furling line to a cabin-top organiser and winch so the primary winches stay free for sheet trimming.
- **Marking Control Lines** Tape the deck alongside the jib tracks with white electrical tape, numbering each hole for fast pin-stop reference. Sharpie baseline upwind marks on halyards and outhauls, with secondary marks behind the clutches for off-wind.

Pre-Start & Rules

- **Regulations & Penalties** Make sure several crew know the Notice of Race, sailing instructions and penalty system (360° or 720° turns).
- **Rule Compliance** Stay strictly within bareboat charter rules. Primary anchor, chain and rode stay in the bow locker. Dodger and bimini canvas may come off, but all canvas and frames must remain pinned or stowed on board.
- **Backing Down** Back down minutes before the gun to shed seaweed or kelp – and make sure the gear shifter is back in neutral.

Upwind Strategy & Sail Handling

- **Continuous Traveler Work** Shallow keels and small rudders mean active traveler play is essential to control heel and stop the boat spinning out in gusts.
- **Avoid Mainsail Reefing** Don't reef the main unless winds pass roughly 28 knots – swept-back spreaders and slug-track mains make dropping or re-hoisting under way difficult.
- **Roller-Depowering** Depower by rolling 4–5 turns into the jib instead: it opens the slot, lets you drop the traveler in puffs and reduces load tacking into chop.
- **Asymmetrical Tacking in Waves** Roll in 4–5 turns on the tack into choppy, offset seas, then shake out 1–2 on the smoother board. Use a jib halyard end as a temporary sheet to hold the clew while moving cars under load.
- **Traveler Lock-Off** Never cleat off the traveler control lines – keep them free for instant adjustment.
- **Crew Positioning** Crew on the windward rail (leaning against the cabin side is fine; no one below).
- **Jib Car Coordination** Move port and starboard cars together using the numbered tape so the helm can tack at will.

Downwind Tactics (White Sail)

- **Sailing By the Lee** With poleless, non-spinnaker rules forcing wing-on-wing, steer about 5° by the lee to keep the heavy Dacron jib filled.
- **Weight Distribution** Shift all crew weight to the headsail (leeward) side, legs over the rail, to induce windward heel and keep the headsail full in sloppy swells.
- **Boom Securing** In light-to-moderate air, ease the main fully and tie the boom off to the cap shroud, padded with a towel or duct tape.
- **Weight Forward** Move all crew forward of the shrouds to lift the stern out of the water.

Fleet Management & Positioning

- **Prioritize Clear Air** In dense, staggered bareboat starts, finding a clean lane out of dirty air is the single biggest factor in boat speed.
- **Monitor Current & Drift** Compare Speed Over Ground (SOG) with Speed Through Water (STW) to track the westward-flowing Caribbean equatorial current.

See you on the start line.
Notice of Race, registration and charter options at **bvispringregatta.org**

Adapted from advice by Neil Harvey, first published by Cruising World (2018).