

North of Scotland Sailing Squad (NoSSS) Frequently Asked Questions (Spring 2009)



What is NoSSS?

NoSSS is the regional squad for the North of Scotland. It is administered by the Royal Yachting Association Scotland (RYAS). NoSSS provide race training for 11 to 18 year old dinghy sailors. Its main aim is to feed the national squads with sailors but for those that don't have high aspirations then it provides useful club racing skills.

How do you apply for a place at NoSSS?

Prior to the squad weekend a registration form must be completed and returned, along with payment, to RYAS. Without a form being present at RYAS offices on the Friday before the squad weekend, the sailor will not be allowed on the water due to insurance requirements. No form, no sailing! The forms are available from the RYAS site (www.ryascotland.org.uk/racingsct/Pages/areasquads.aspx) or from the head coach (paul@thrumster.fslife.co.uk)

What area does NoSSS cover?

NoSSS covers all of the Highlands and Islands from Fort William up to John O Groats. There are also West and East regional squads for people out with the Highlands.

Where does NoSSS take place?

Historically, NoSSS travelled to different clubs but recently has settled at Chanonry SC based at Fortrose on the Black Isle. Using just one club has given the squad numbers some stability and the club has excellent facilities. Chanonry SC is fully supportive of NoSSS and encourages squad members to join as Junior/Youth members (£12/year) to enjoy winter club racing.

How many times does NoSSS meet each year?

The squad meets 6 times a year. Each session is a weekend and these usually occur in March, April May, September, October and November.

How much does NoSSS cost?

Each weekend currently costs £35 per sailor excluding food. Accommodation is not provided but there are a lot of B&B's locally and Inverness is only 30 minutes away by car. Squad fees are payable to RYAS in advance and should not be paid on the day.

What is a typical NoSSS squad weekend?

Typically we start at 10am on Saturday but this on the water so most people arrive around 8.30-9.00 to allow time to rig boats and get changed. Before going on the water the squad will be briefed on safety and what exercises will be conducted. We have lunch around 12 in the clubhouse and discuss the mornings sailing. We go back on to the water around 13.00 for more exercises and some practice races. We normally finish around 16.00 and head in to get a shower and pack the boats away. We then have a debrief in the clubhouse using video taken during the day. A small amount of sailing based homework is set on Saturday evening which is reviewed on Sunday. We normally finish around 16.00 on Sunday to allow people to travel home.

What do the sailors do on the water?

The whole purpose of NoSSS is to improve the sailors racing abilities. Dinghy racing requires a varied and large skill set so NoSSS breaks it down into manageable chunks. We look at specific parts of a race; e.g. the start and may do 3 or 4 different exercises that concentrate on one aspect. When all these new skills are brought together racing becomes manageable. We try and make the exercises fun and varied but they do involve repetition to turn techniques into skills.

Are NoSSS weekends like a commercial sailing school?

No! There is a fundamental difference between learning to sail and race training. NoSSS weekends are about improving the young sailors racing abilities and not learning how to do the basics. The weekends are run by coaches not instructors. The coaches aim to get the sailors to identify their weaknesses and help them turn them in to strengths. We aim to avoid shouting "pull this, do that" replacing it with questions like "why did that happen" or "how do you think you can improve that".

How do I know NoSSS coaches are the right people for the job?

NoSSS has a head coach who is responsible for organising the weekends and the overall safety and management of the weekends. Where necessary, additional coaches will be employed to maintain a ratio of 6 sailors to 1 coach at all times on the water. All coaches are employed by the RYAS, who ensure that they are qualified to coach, have a valid first aid certificate and have been trained to drive a power boat. Most of the coaches have been involved with NoSSS for several seasons although we may from time to time use newly qualified coaches to allow them to gain some experience along side a more seasoned one.

How do I know NoSSS weekend will be safe?

All sport carries some risk and where water is involved this risk can be higher. RYAS have strict operating policies which include risk assessment of the venue on the day to ensure risks are minimised. The head coach will decide if the conditions on the day are deemed suitable for training. A club representative will liaise with the coaches to pass on any risks that may not have been considered. All coaches have received guidance on child protection policies and procedures.

What sailing standard should new NoSSS sailor be?

All sailors should have at least RYA Stage 2 or equivalent experience. The ability of squad members varies enormously from those just starting to club race, to those that are competing at national level. It is therefore unfair for all if sailors need help with the basics like tacking or gybing as it holds the group back. NoSSS doesn't expect sailors to be very good sailors but does expect sailors to be able to tack, gybe and sail round a triangular course in reasonable conditions.

What about boats?

NoSSS prefers sailors to use Toppers and Laser Radials although Pico's are acceptable. Optimists used to be part of the squad and if there are a few (i.e. 3 or more) then they can participate, it is hard for a single optimist sailor, however good they are, to keep up with a group of Toppers! Other boats like 420's, Mirror's etc can be accommodated but you should talk to the head coach before registering to make sure it is ok.

Does NoSSS provide boats?

No, we expect the sailors to have their own boats or borrow them. NoSSS does not have any access to boats at all. If you need assistance with finding a boat to borrow please contact the head coach who may be able to help, although there is no guarantee.

What about sailing kit?

Again, NoSSS expect sailors to have all the necessary kit required for sailing in the conditions of the day. It does not have access to sailing kit. The squad weekends in March and November can be very cold and we do expect the sailors to have suitable clothing; i.e. full length wetsuits, waterproof, gloves, boots, buoyancy aid etc. There are several good websites selling reasonably priced sailing kit should you need it.

What about food?

Food isn't included in the cost of the weekend. Chanonry SC prepare lunches for sale (around £5 per head) during the weekends which are typically soup and sandwiches. Snacks and drinks are available to buy throughout the weekend. Sailors should have enough food and drink to ensure strength and concentration levels are maintained.

Who looks after the sailors?

When we are on the water, the coaches have responsibility for the sailors. Once the sailors are back ashore, they are the parent's responsibility. This means that a parent should be present all weekend. One parent can supervise other sailors as long as it has been agreed with all parties and the head coach is involved. Emergency contact numbers should be put on the registration form.

What happens if there is no wind or too much wind?

If the conditions are not deemed suitable for sailing then shore based activities will be organised. In the case of no wind conditions we may take the sailors out in the power boats. Generally we will finish earlier on non-sailing days.

Where can the sailors go after NoSSS?

The sky is the limit! Those sailors that show potential should consider applying for Scottish national squad. This squad is by invitation only and sailors at this level are expected to compete in regattas across Scotland and at national events throughout the UK. NoSSS is the first rung on the Olympic ladder and the head coach can discuss any plans the sailor may have with parents at anytime. For those sailors that don't have any Olympic dreams, then NoSSS will provide a good platform for club racing. Many ex-NoSSS sailors have gone on to become instructors and coaches, putting back in to the sport what they have taken.

What if a sailor is unsure about attending NoSSS?

NoSSS is an open squad and we are more than happy for a sailor to come and try a weekend to see if its for them. The squad is very friendly and the sailors quickly form friendships. If the sailor has any fears or questions then please contact the head coach to discuss them in more detail.

What about discipline?

NoSSS is a very social squad and the sailors are encouraged to voice their opinions. The coaches are not school teachers and are there to enjoy the weekend as well. We do expect a certain level of behaviour from the sailors. Should a sailor behave inappropriately then they will be removed from the group and asked to leave should this be deemed necessary. Behaviour considered inappropriate includes, but is not limited to, swearing, bullying, deliberately acting in an unsafe manner, vandalism, and being rude or aggressive to club members or the public.

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