

2011 Laser Masters World Championship Tide Information

The racing will be held between Alcatraz and the Golden Gate Bridge in the main part of San Francisco Bay. The tide comes in twice a day and goes out twice a day, just like everywhere else in the world. There is higher high tide each day and there is a lower high tide each day. Likewise, there is a lower low tide and a higher low tide each day.

The height of the tide is not important, but the CURRENT is. When there is a higher high tide, the max FLOOD current (coming in from the bridge) is stronger than the max flood current prior to a lower high tide. The same is true for max EBB current (going out through the bridge).

In August we can expect a Westerly breeze that fills in through the bridge by late morning, so in a flood current, the wind and the current are going basically the same direction. You will be fighting the current going upwind and the waves will be much smaller than in a strong ebb current with normal afternoon breeze.

When the current is transitioning from a flood to ebb or vice versa, the current will change direction first on the shore, so it is possible to have the current on the inside and in the middle of the bay actually going different directions at the same time. This is normally around the time of "slack water" which doesn't mean there is no current, but rather that the amount of water going into the bay is the same as the amount going out. All these various times are printed out in the tide books that are available from the club, so it not anything that is tricky to figure out or for any out of towners to worry about.

The time of the max flood/max ebb gets later each day by approximately 45mins to an hour so as we go through the week, the tide will change dramatically during the times we should be sailing (approx noon to 6PM). For example, on Sunday August 7th (1st day of races), the morning MAX EBB is a very weak 1.6 knots at 11:15 am. This is perfect for the first day because 1.6 knots is less than half the 4.1 knot max ebb tide that occurs just before midnight. The light ebb tide will mean that the beats take a little less time and that there probably will not be a big pileup of boats trying to round the first weather mark. In this weaker tide condition, it becomes more important to look for the wind and don't go all crazy about the current.

On the first day, SLACK water is at 14:30 so this means the current is already starting to come in on the shore, but not in the middle of the bay. The MAX FLOOD current is at 17:30 and is only 2.3 knots. By max flood (actually by a hour before) the adverse current upwind is significantly less on the shore than in the middle.

So, the first day should be pretty easy from a current standpoint. On Monday, the max currents are a little later in the day and a little stronger. The fact that the currents are moving a little later each day starts to have a more dramatic effect later in the week.

On Saturday's final day of racing the bay will not look like the same gentle place you came to know and love on the previous Sunday. MAX FLOOD current is at 11:22 at 3.9 knots, which makes the beats longer and makes the windward mark roundings more challenging. If you think that you "might" make the windward mark, trust me, you won't.

Here are a few tide tidbits that I hope will help you:

LAYLINES:

If there is a strong ebb tide (not too strong this week, but getting there in the afternoons late in the week), be careful not to over stand the windward mark.

IN OR OUT?

The important thing about the current, mainly going upwind, is the difference between the shore and the middle of the bay. A good way to check to see what's going on is to use the shore to get a range on the boats directly in front or behind you. If the other boat is not sliding up or down, there is not much current difference.

STARTLINE:

If the current is strong, you really have to take that into account on the starting line, General Recalls are very easy in the higher ebb tides, and the race committee has a ton of races to run, so I imagine they will be creative with their deterrents. Conversely, in a strong flood tide, it is very hard to be early on the line.