Notes for Kayakers

There may be rain, fog or mist early in the race that may turn into sun later in the race, or rain could persist for the entire race. Rain for your swimmer isn’t all that much of a bother, but for kayakers can make you cold quickly if you aren’t prepared.

You should properly prepare yourself to be comfortable in these myriad conditions and temperatures. Consider cold-weather gear as necessary as well as head covering and sunglasses.

For 10K and 5K racers there may be some surge on the outside and in the area of Battery Island, kayakers must be prepared to paddle with all of your equipment and the equipment and fueling and hydration products for your swimmer. Ask for help if you need it or if your swimmer can not negotiate the conditions. Your swimmer cannot compete without you so they are dependent upon your success staying with them as they swim the course.

On race day, the water conditions in Sitka Sound may vary from glassy smooth

to turbulent with swells, surf and whitecaps. You must prepare yourself to handle the entire range of possible water conditions. Both close to shore (waves and surge) and crossing bays and channels (surface chop, kelp and other marine debris). Of course, if at any time, you believe your swimmer has reached their physical and mental limits, immediately call the safety team and allow your swimmer to hang on and rest near your kayak. Race Directors reserve the right to change course destinations and even cancel the race entirely if conditions do not warrant safe conditions for both swimmers and kayakers at any time. Please refer to race safety and rules for specifics.

The water temperature may vary from 55°F – 60°F with fluctuating water temperatures throughout the course depending on the currents, winds and waves. If the water temperature is outside this expected range, the Race Director shall make this announcement before the race. Even if your swimmer wears a wetsuit, they may get cold during the race, especially towards the end.

The course will be marked by a series of marine buoys, marine markers and navigate around rocks and islands marked on your map. You and your swimmer must pass on the designated side of all marked obstacles. Each race will pass through the Sitka Channel where you and your swimmer must exercise EXTREME caution, taking care to provide adequate visual reference for other marine traffic in the area. DO NOT ASSUME ANY WATERCRAFT WILL SEE OR STOP FOR YOU OR YOUR SWIMMER. DO NOT ASSUME YOU HAVE THE RIGHT OF WAY. BE CAUTIOUS AND CAREFUL. GIVE WIDE BERTH TO ALL WATERCRAFT AND BOATS.

10K and 5K races, your swimmer must reach the Mt Edgecumbe High School ramp and the Change Your Latitude Finish Line by 12:00 noon. If not, you and your swimmer will be assisted back to the finish.

Keep your swimmer within 10 meters of you. DO NOT ALLOW YOUR SWIMMER TO SWIM OFF BY THEMSELF. You are the eyes and ears of your swimmer and they should follow you.

You should be positioned parallel to your swimmer on their predominant breathing side. The mid-point of the kayak should be parallel to your swimmer, near your head and within your swimmer’s line of sight. The only exception to this rule is at the start, finish.

Kayakers must be in position 5 minutes before the start of the race. Discuss with your swimmer where and how you will meet them after no more than 200 meters into the race prior to the start.

The start will be sounded by an air horn. A 10-minute, 5-minute, 3-minute and 1-minute warnings will also be given. The race Start/Finish line will be in between two buoys with flag poles just off the ramp. Racers may start from the ramp or in the water at the Start line between the buoys.

Kayakers should wear some colorful or distinctive clothing or a hat so your swimmer can more easily recognize you in the water.

As your swimmer starts the race and heads north, kayak to your swimmer WITHOUT impeding the progress of other swimmers. DO NOT KAYAK OVER OR IN FRONT OF OTHER COMPETITORS. UNSPORTSMANLIKE CONDUCT ON YOUR PART WILL BE GROUNDS FOR IMMEDIATE DISQUALIFICATION OF YOUR SWIMMER. Kayak along side your swimmer or wave to your swimmer so they can swim out to your position. Once you and your swimmer have teamed up, then proceed on course.

NEVER LET YOUR ATHLETE GO BEYOND WHAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF, EVEN IF THEY REQUEST YOU TO LEAVE THEM IN THE WATER UNTILTHEY HAVE TO BE FORCED OR PULLED OUT.

If you think your swimmer is getting cold, ask them their telephone number or name of their high school or birthdates of their children or any other simple questions that they should immediately know. If your swimmer cannot answer these simple questions, immediately call a safety boat over and get your swimmer out of the water. While they may be disappointed at not finishing, they will live another day to do other sports and other swims.

All swimmers will have their competition number clearly displayed on their cap and on the back of one hand. Each kayaker will have their swimmers number clearly visible on the back of their lifejacket. Know your swimmer’s number.

You must be physically capable of kayaking for the entire course your swimmer is swimming. While paddling with a swimmer isn’t very fast, it is at least 1.5 hours of sitting in your kayak. Kayakers should be experienced enough to carry your supplies and hand food and drink to your swimmer while balancing on your kayak. Your swimmer is completely dependent upon you for navigation, feeding and hydration.

It is extremely important to keep eye contact with your swimmer. You should also provide them with food and/or drink at least every 30 minutes. The food and drink is entirely up to your swimmer but you need to keep your swimmer well-hydrated and fueled.

Determine your best line from point to point, keeping in mind kelp forests and other obstacles. Keep your kayak parallel to your swimmer so you can guide them on the straightest or most optimal course at all times. If there are oncoming waves or swells, you may want to adjust your tangent to take advantage of the elements. Conversely, if there are waves or swells pushing adversely along the course, modify your course to benefit from Mother Nature as much as possible. Before the race, the Race Directors will inform you of the conditions which may change throughout the day. In any case, remain diligent and vigil at all times.

You may see marine life on the course it could range from fish, kelp, and jellyfish to sea lions, seals, and porpoise. You will be in their ecosystem so remain calm and collected. If your swimmer is stung by jellyfish, they will be disappointed, frustrated or hurt. Household vinegar or standard first-aid products like StingMate® or Safe Sea Lotion can be applied on the skin. If they have an allergic reaction, immediately call the lifeguards and seek medical assistance.