

Greed

By Michael Blackburn – CrackerSports.com

One of my favourite chapters of Stuart Walker's 1986 book *Advanced Racing Tactics* is that on Greed.

Being greedy, as far as sailboat racing goes, usually means trying to dominate or 'smash them' and win by a lot or gain a lot in a single risky move. Typically, greed is about attempting to nail strategy and do the extreme thing to get to the next mark in the shortest time. This usually involves risking a lot by sailing away from the opposition.

Walker says Greed has no place in the smart tactical sailor's game, labelling it more as a contagious disease, which if left unchecked would leave the infected lamenting the one that got away.

Greed obscures an accurate assessment of the risks and blocks a rational choice. ... Greed is unrealistic, irrational, a belief that because success is desired it is obtainable, regardless of the risks involved. – Stuart Walker

So, risks need to be calculated and based upon rational assessment. Of course, taking a big risk can work. When you'll well behind in a race and are running out of time to recover to an acceptable position, then you should be more risky.

But after risking big, and you suddenly find yourself in a position you are happy to accept then it does not make little sense to risk more to gain further – that would be greedy!

Actually, instead of saying 'risk' we should use the term 'reckless', meaning that the latter is less calculating and less measured.

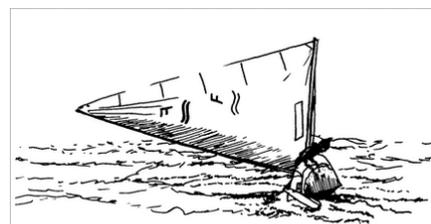
Greed is Good?

Greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures, the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind... .

– Gordon Gecko, *Wall Street*.

I can picture Gordon Gecko, the fictional stockbroking character in the 1987 movie *Wall Street*, had read that Walker chapter and then gone sailboat racing, hitting the right corner.

Clearly, Gecko frames Greed in a motivational way, while Walker prefers to keep motivation out of it. There's plenty of evidence that better tactical and strategic decision making will occur when emotions are kept in check.



7. Greed

Greed, a little of which goes a long way, must be rigidly restricted. Bob Mosbacher reminded me of the need for constant alertness to this danger after the fifth race of a recent Soling series in Bermuda. He had been in second, a quarter mile astern of us, spinnaker-reaching along the Somerset shore, when he spotted a likely-looking patch of better air nearer the beach and went for it. By the time he reached the area the wind was gone, and he was trapped under the blanket of the Somerset hills while the whole fleet closed in. After the race Bob admitted that it was greed that had taken him off the course; he was going for first, unwilling to settle for second (which he eventually reacquired). When I thought over the race, I realized that (for a change) I had won (with a lead of half a leg) by restraining my own greed.

I had opted for a late start at the weather (starboard) end to insure that I could be first off on port toward the better wind to starboard. Ten seconds before the gun, a six-foot slot appeared between the boat ahead and to leeward and the weather-end flag. It was so tempting, but I restrained myself—and waited until the leeward boat was across the line (having ultimately passed within

However, Gecko does have a point about greed helping to clarify. There can be race courses where hitting a corner is everything. The northern area of Lake Garda in Italy is a commonly given example where boats often do best by banging the right corner.

And there are many other race courses where tidal and geographic effects mean that a singular focus on doing what's needed to rapidly get to one side of the course will yield success.

Similarly, if you think of greed as a high level desire to win, then it's fair to say that Team New Zealand were not greedy enough when they agreed to a lay day requested by Oracle in the last America's Cup. The Cup rules stated that one team could request a lay day, but the other also had to agree. TNZ had Oracle on the ropes and should have been greedier to nail home their advantage.

Winning by Too Much?

Many displays of greed are seen when people find themselves in the lead. Feeling overly good about one's position can be detrimental and lead to the mental condition 'sudden situational over-confidence'. Affected individuals begin to think it's ok to ignore the opposition because 'I saw something over there' or 'I was still lifted'.

The greed to win by a lot must always be balanced by a healthy scepticism. It's best to regularly win by a little bit than flip flop between winning by a lot and losing by a lot.

If you find yourself in the lead and 'you're not meant to be there' according to your fleet's pecking order, then it's tempting to believe you need to continue to do something special to maintain your position. My recommendation in this case is not to try to be too clever but to keep doing the basics well.



Minimise greed when in the lead – tack parallel to following boats.

Imagine how this process might work in your mind with respect to the techniques, tactics and strategies you use. No doubt you're learning more about the game of sailing all the time and leading into a national title you're keen to put into practice all the new stuff you've learnt.

However, it's probably best not to view your development as linear; instead think about a spiral - you might learn a new and higher skill days before the regatta, but instead choose to make your approach more conservative and run with behaviours that are more familiar and less risky. Trying to be cleverer than you've previously proven yourself to be is somewhat greedy.

In summary, not being Greedy means:

- Not trying to take more of a lead than you need
- Racing the opposition rather than nailing strategy
- When in the lead, not splitting from the majority towards what looks like better air
- Settling for one small gain at a time

In the big picture, just one of the balances that must be struck is that between greed and complacency.