

To: Program Participants and Friends of the Baltimore County Sailing Center

Re: Drowning During Severn Sailing Association Lesson

The news of the death of a 14 year old sailor in Annapolis hit the Chesapeake Bay sailing community very hard last week. Olivia Constants, a junior sailor and member of the Severn Sailing Association race team drowned during a practice session on the Severn River near the Naval Academy. According to Hal Whitacre, Commodore of SSA, Constants drowned when her “420 capsized to windward while sailing downwind, and then rolled into a “turtled” position (mast pointing downward). The coach immediately approached the boat, radioed for additional assistance, and worked diligently to dislodge Olivia, who at that moment appeared to be unconscious. Concurrently, another instructor phoned 911. Once she was retrieved from the water, coaches immediately performed CPR and proceeded to the Naval Academy’s seawall, which was the nearest point of land, to meet the emergency response team. Unfortunately, Olivia could not be resuscitated.”

This is a terrible tragedy to be sure, and our sympathies go out to the family and to the entire SSA community. Our Director, Eileen Fahrmeier has contacted SSA to express the sadness and concern that we here at BCSC feel as a result of this accident. We add our voice, our sympathies and our prayers to the many who have contacted SSA and the Constants family to let them know how profoundly sorry we are at this great loss.

To our own BCSC community... you should know that this incident has prompted us to again scrutinize our already good safety procedures to ensure such an accident won’t befall our program. We know that Constants was wearing a harness that became entangled in the rigging, and even though she was wearing a PFD, the tangle prevented her from coming to the surface when the boat capsized. We do not use harnesses at BCSC in any of our sailing programs, and yet we are taking stock of all our safety procedures, nonetheless.

Specifically:

- Our Director has met with her staff to review the accident at SSA to ensure our instructors are aware of what happened and what actions were taken
- Also she has reviewed with the staff our own BCSC safety procedures and reinforced the expectation of absolute compliance with all rules and procedures aimed at keeping our programs safe for participants
- At the beginning of this season we upgraded the communication procedures by extending the range of VHF radio send/receive capacity of our equipment

We will continue to place personal safety at the top of the priority list here at Baltimore County Sailing Center. Staff instructors and our Director are always on the scene with our program participants to ensure safety rules are understood and followed, and that responsibility is taken very seriously. Should you ever have any question or concern about safety relating to any aspect of a BCSC program or activity, please address it immediately with the staff or Director on-site, or to any member of the Board of Advisors.

Thank you,

Baltimore County Sailing Center Board of Advisors