

FLUID FOUNDATIONS

Episode 7: Beach Starting & Water Starting

With the autumnal winds now well established, offering no end of opportunity to get on the water for some great sessions, Jim Collis continues with his Fluid Foundations, a series of articles that takes us back to first principles and concentrates on the core skills and techniques within windsurfing in a simple, easy to follow progression, helping us to get the most out of our time on the water. So far Jim has looked at getting planing, harnessing, footstrap work, developing our sailing stance, tacking and most recently gybing, and the series now draws to a close this month by focusing on developing and honing our beach and water starts.

The Fluid Foundations series is designed as a tool to be used by any level of windsurfer. Whether an entry level sailor looking to improve your skill level right through to an advanced sailor who might benefit from taking on board simple tips that will help to hone and consolidate your performance on the water, this series works for one and all!

To help with this easy progression, all the skills within the Fluid Foundations series are broken down and simplified according to Jim's "K.I.S.S." methodology - Keeping It Stupidly Simple (See Jim's KISS Series from June 2007). K.I.S.S. consists of five themes that run through our windsurfing, for the absolute novice through to a world champion. These themes underpin the essential core aspects of the skills within windsurfing, helping us to concentrate on the root cause of why a skill works, thereby giving us solid foundations, rather than confusing us by concentrating on peripheral aspects that might happen as a result of doing the skill. For example, in a tack - focusing on what our head is looking at to help control our direction, rather than thinking about what our little toe is doing as the board steers!

The 5 themes of K.I.S.S. are:

- HEAD** - Looking where we want to go and being aware of everything around us
- ARMS** - Keeping a straight front arm, thereby distancing ourselves from the rig and helping us to naturally counter balance against it, while using our back arm to 'sheet in' or draw power from the rig
- LEGS** - Adjusting leg and foot positions on the board to keep it flat and us stable!
- BODY** - Changing our body position/shape according to conditions and how we feel. i.e. If we feel over-powered or threatened we get lower and if we feel under-powered or inefficient we become more upright
- BREATHE** - Remembering to breathe so that we can be relaxed, alert and responsive when sailing, which in turn helps us to flow and perform more naturally whatever the skill or conditions

K.I.S.S. is not some crazy, half-hatched idea but rather an interpretation of a widely used concept in a huge number of sports; the idea of bringing everything down to a 'base' level, creating firm foundations from which to build a solid skill level and above all complete understanding through simplicity. In essence, this Fluid Foundations series is about simplifying skills and techniques essential to our windsurfing. This final episode concerns improving and fine-tuning our beach and water starts, whatever the wind or water state and whether we are learning them for the first time or we are a seasoned pro looking for a few top tips to make them even more slick and efficient! Before continuing, it is important to point out that this series does not go into equipment and kit set up. For information on this, please refer to Jim's Tech Spec Series from September 2007.

It is also worth mentioning that, in addition to the articles in this series, Jim has recently released a DVD called Fluid Foundations, which runs through all of these core skills in windsurfing on film. For more information on obtaining a copy of his DVD please contact Jim on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk

BEACH STARTING & WATER STARTING

The beach start and water start, although featured in the final episode of this series, are far from last when considered amongst the core skills within windsurfing. In fact, conquering beach starts and then the water start gives us bags of confidence to go out in stronger winds, use smaller boards, possibly bigger rigs and to venture out at new locations where we always know that we'll be able to get back on our board and sail home safely. Whether we conquer the beach start and water start early or later on in our development as a windsurfer is irrelevant, so long as we achieve them when we need to, and progress with ease and in a simple manner, rather than struggling for a long period of time.

SIMPLICITY WORKS...

Just as with all the skills in this Fluid Foundations series, if we keep everything fundamentally simple, technique is easy to achieve and progression quick, whatever our ability and regardless of the conditions. This is exactly the same with the beach start and the water start. Whether we are learning the beach start for the first time or want to perfect our water starts in harsher conditions, the fundamentals are the same. The beauty is that if you get the basics right and learn to beach start effectively and correctly, the water start will be a simple progression rather than a new skill.

GIVE YOURSELF A CHANCE...

As has been mentioned in all previous episodes of this series, as well as keeping everything simple, we also need to make sure that we give ourselves a chance by not cluttering our minds with lists of things to do. Similarly you should try to create a healthy learning environment, so as to take away the psychological factor that can so often inhibit our performance and learning progression. Try to avoid list learning (i.e. learning a skill by following a sequential order or list of things to do as we do it) and instead concentrate on one or two core essentials (such as what our head, arms, legs or body are doing), this is far more beneficial than trying to remember and reproduce a sequence of 30 things in a skill that only takes 3 seconds to complete. In this situation we will end up at a complete loss as to why it didn't work if we crash and burn! With this in mind, we are, just as we did with the tack and the gybe, going to break the beach start & water start into the beginning, middle and end; the beginning involving the recovery of the rig from the water to getting it flying, the middle consisting of the positioning of the board and ourselves, and the end comprising of getting on and away! As always, to keep our minds free of clutter and allow us to focus on the core aspects for quick and easy achievement and progression, we will use the "K.I.S.S" methodology

- considering what our head, arms, legs, body, and breathing are doing throughout.

It is also exceptionally important to practice these skills on kit and in conditions that we are comfortable with. Going out in howling gales and on kit that we have never used before is never going to be conducive to helping us settle down and focus on the skills that we want to learn, as we will spend more time trying to control the kit and our own emotions. The ideal learning environment for practicing and honing our beach starts and water starts is a shallow shelving beach/shore that offers a superb progression by allowing us to get deeper and deeper in the water, whilst always being able to put our feet down if we want to. For kit, we should ideally be using a board that we are used to and can possibly uphaul on if the need arises, and should use a sail that we can lift and manoeuvre easily and that offers enough comfortable power for us to achieve the skill without becoming threatening or proving cumbersome.

THE BEGINNING: RECOVERING AND FLYING THE RIG

This is often the area of the beach or water start that can make or break your performance for the rest of the skill. It is all about working with the kit and saving energy, rather than trying to wrestle it into submission and being too knackered to then do the rest!

To fly a rig (or get it into the air), we need to position the mast across the wind. To achieve this, use the buoyancy of the board to walk/swim the rig rather than trying to manoeuvre the rig on its own as it will move much more easily and save you bags of energy!

Either walk/swim the tail of the board to the mast and then pivot them together until they are both across the wind.



BEACH START

Use the buoyancy of the board to manoeuvre the rig across the wind



WATER START

Or hold the end of the board closest to the mast and walk/swim towards the wind and the mast will position itself across the wind.



BEACH START

Use the board to bring the mast across the wind



WATER START

Once the mast is across the wind, our arms come into play...

Arms- Front arm straight keeping the rig away, back arm 'sheeting in' to draw power from the rig... With the front hand on the mast (hand closest to the front of the board), 'slice' the rig over your head and towards the wind with a straight front arm. With the rig overhead, place your back hand on the boom

and gently 'feather' the power in the sail so as to keep the sail floating in the air over you. Once comfortable, transfer your front hand from the mast to the boom, remembering to keep that front arm straight! (see pics on the next page)
N.B. If in deeper water with chop/waves, swim towards the wind holding the mast, then gradually lift it up as you drag the mast into the wind - the rig will clear easily rather than the clew catching in the water.

JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE



BEACH START >>

Fly the rig like flying a kite...launch it towards the wind as well as up above you!



WATER START >>

BONUS TOP TIP FOR BIG SAIL USERS:

If you are using big sails and the luff tube is filling with water (especially on camber-induced sails), once the mast is across the wind, go to the mast tip and lift it up. Then gradually work your way down to the boom, whether in a beach start or a water start. This will empty water from the luff, making it lighter and easier to handle.

THE MIDDLE: POSITIONING OURSELVES AND THE BOARD

To be able to position the board, the first thing we need to do is position ourselves correctly, as otherwise controlling the board is very tricky and energy consuming! Our ideal position is on the windward (upwind) side of the board by the tail (next to the back windward foot strap if we have one).

TOP TIP:

When standing/swimming by the board with the rig flying over your head, see if you can reach out with your back hand to touch the tail of the board/back foot strap. This shows you that you are in the correct position. For water starts, you can rest with your back hand on the board whilst 'feathering' the sail above your head, so as to save energy by using the buoyancy of the board to stay afloat.



BEACH START

WATER START

In the right position and saving energy!

Once we are in the right position, we can position the board according to the wind strength and how much power we have available in our sail. For comfortable wind strengths and/or when we feel comfortably powered, we position the board across the wind.

For more marginal conditions and/or when we feel slightly underpowered, we point our board slightly downwind (to increase the power in our sail) For windier conditions and/or when we feel slightly overpowered, we point the board slightly upwind (to reduce the power in our sail)

To achieve this, we use our arms again.

Arms - Front arm straight keeping the rig away, back arm 'sheeting in' to draw power from the rig.

To point the board downwind, keep your front arm straight and pull in with your back arm (sheet in), the board will steer downwind.

To point the board upwind, bend your front arm and straighten your back arm (sheet out), the board will steer upwind.

To position the board across the wind, keep your front arm straight and gently control power with the back arm so as to keep the board's position.



BEACH START

WATER START

Board across the wind when comfortable wind strength



BEACH START

WATER START

Position the board upwind for less power when windier



BEACH START

WATER START

Position the board downwind for more power when less wind

JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE

TOP TIP FOR POSITIONING THE BOARD

Practicing steering and controlling a board in the shallows, gradually getting deeper and deeper, is a great way to develop good skill level for this crucial part of a beach and water start. See if you can turn the board a full 360 degrees while you stay in the same spot!



Practicing steering and controlling the board pays big dividends!

THE END: GETTING ON AND AWAY!

Having got the rig, board and ourselves ready, all that remains is to get on and away!

For this we use our head, arms and legs.

Head - Looking where we want to go. In this case at the mastfoot – as we want to get up and onto the board!

N.B. Once you are on the board, look up and in the direction you want to sail.

Arms - Front arm straight, keeping the rig away, back arm 'sheeting in' to draw power from the rig. Extend your front arm forwards and up as you sheet in with the back arm

N.B. By moving your front hand down to the harness line on the boom and your back hand a bit further down the boom you can gain much more 'projection' with the rig and get much more useful, useable power earlier in the sail for more marginal beach starts/water starts

Legs - Adjust leg and foot positions on the board to keep it flat and us stable. Place your back foot on the board first (where it usually goes when you are sailing) and draw the board into you by pulling in/bending the back leg. As you come up on the board, place the front foot up by the mast foot and have a straight front leg and a bent back leg.

N.B. When first placing the back foot on, place your heel on the upwind (windward) side of the centre-line so that when you come up and over the board, your foot ends up over the centre-line



Head, arms and legs in action to get on and away!



As we are practicing this so the other aspects of the 'KISS' formula, our body and breathing should be working as always in the background...

Body - Change your body's position/shape according to conditions and how you feel. As you come up on the board, keep your body low with your hip dropped over your bent back leg and driving through the straight front leg – just like the exit of a tack, the entry to a gybe, and the position we adopt to go faster!

Breathe - Slow breaths to stay relaxed rather than hyperventilating and thereby tensing up!



Body and Breathing working as always in the background

TOP TIP:

A really good exercise to develop our ability and a very useful progression from beach starts to water starts, is to initiate the beach start/water start, but then leave the front leg in the water and 'drag' it alongside the board. You can also do this from the sailing position, gradually lowering your front leg into the water whilst sailing along. See how long you can hold it and how deep you can get your front leg!



Practicing leg drags for good beach start and water start technique

This brings us to the end of this episode on beach starts and water starts, hopefully there are some useful things here for you, regardless of your level. This also marks the end of the Fluid Foundations series. All that remains is to get out there and see if keeping it stupidly simple makes a difference to your sailing!

The Fluid Foundations Series is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach, Instructor Trainer and Test Editor for Windsurf magazine. If you'd like any more information on coaching or training to be an instructor with Jim please contact him on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk or visit www.windsurfevolution.co.uk