



{ Feasible Freestyle for everyone! }

FLUID PROGRESSIONS: FREESTYLE FOR EVERYONE

PART 7: SAILING BACK-WINDED

THIS EPISODE MARKS the penultimate part of **Jim Collis'** Freestyle for Everyone series, a string of articles designed to help us consolidate our general windsurfing skills, through building and developing our rig and board confidence whilst having fun out on the water. Having already looked at 8 of the 10 freestyle skills, namely lifting/dragging a foot, kneeling/sitting/lying down whilst sailing, switch stance sailing, pirouettes, rig 180s & 360s, clew-first sailing, sailing backwards, and body & rig 360s, Jim is moving on this month to the 9th and penultimate feasible freestyle skill: sailing back-winded.

A quick recap...

"Freestyle for everyone"

This concept is not about learning the latest hoochy-ka-poochy manoeuvre, it's about getting on the water, whatever the conditions and whatever our ability level, and getting better at handling a rig and moving around on a board in a fun and entertaining way... what freestyle is really all about! The end result is that, as well as having a good laugh every time we go on the water, we will be learning and consolidating core skills so that we are getting better at our general sailing without even realising it. We will also be gaining key foundations in freestyle so that if we wanted to take it further, we would be set up to do so.

10 Simple Skills

Rather than heading out on the water and randomly trying twirly things on a board, we are going to work our way through a simple progression of 10 easy to achieve freestyle skills. These 10 skills, running from lifting/dragging a foot as the 1st through to a helicopter tack as the 10th, underpin the essential movements in windsurfing that help us as sailors to get better at all skills. We will find that certain skills work as great exercises for certain moves that we are trying in our general sailing, and that as we get more confident with the 10 skills, we can start to link them together to create new skills: gaining new and far-improved confidence with our rig and on our board without even realising it!

Kit and conditions

We should help ourselves from the start by jumping on a bigger board than perhaps we would usually go on, and by using a smallish rig. Ideally, good kit to go out on is a board of around 130-200 litres (depending on our weight) and a sail of between 4.5m-6.5m (depending on what we feel comfortable with). We should also start by going out in light to marginal winds (Force 1-3) rather than throwing ourselves into it during a typhoon!

As we become more confident at throwing a smallish rig and ourselves around in marginal conditions and on a more stable platform, so we might then up the ante to improve our skill level by going down in board size a bit, going out in slightly stronger winds and maybe increasing the rig size a fraction. For those really light wind days, or perhaps when getting onto the water is just not feasible for that day, then there is always the option of taking your fin off and doing some of the skills on land on a fin-less board and rig.

Keeping it stupidly simple!

As always with learning any skill, simplicity is the key. As such, each of the 10 skills will be broken down with Jim's K.I.S.S. ("Keeping It Stupidly Simple") coaching methodology; 5 basic terms that help to simplify and strip skills down to their core working components.

The 5 terms 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 causing us to naturally counter balance against it, and 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's 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 underpowered 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.

FREESTYLE SKILL 9

Skill 9: Sailing Back-Winded

Sailing back-winded, also known as sailing 'front to sail', is a great skill to try and simply involves sailing on the wrong side of the sail. It is a cornerstone manoeuvre in windsurfing that leads to huge benefits in our sailing, whatever our level, whilst being a great laugh and very achievable:

- It develops our handling and control of the rig massively and promotes far improved understanding of how a sail works.
- It promotes nimble and polished footwork on a board which, along with the improved handling of our rig, pays massive dividends for skills in our every day sailing such as tacks, gybes, planing technique, and general control.
- It provides the foundations for a huge number of more advanced skills and manoeuvres, such as helicopter tacks, upwind 360s, backwind gybes, duck tacks, vulcans, spoaks, flakas... the list is endless!

Here is the sequence for getting ourselves sailing on the 'wrong side' of the sail...

1) Get comfortable sailing across the wind (on a beam reach), and then prepare for doing the skill as if preparing for a tack:

- Wrap your front foot around the front of the mast-foot
- Move your front hand onto the mast beneath the boom, or slide it up to the head of the boom

2) Staying on a beam reach, do the same head, hand and foot movements as in a tack so as to move to the opposite side of the rig:

- Keeping your arms straight/rig away for good counterbalance, move your hands to the other side of the boom
- Move your feet around the mastfoot to the other side of the board in a 'heel to toe' fashion, keeping yourself over the centre-line to maintain a flat and stable board
- Turn your head to look where you are going so as to maintain your direction across the wind on a beam reach



3) You are now standing on the 'wrong side' of the sail, i.e. you are back-winded. To continue sailing in this position:

- Keep your head looking forwards and where you want to go, NOT at the sail
- Keep your front arm straight/rig away, but keep a very loose grip on the boom with your back arm so as to let the back of the sail 'open' up.

N.B. Your front arm is still very much responsible for your counter-balance with the rig, so the straighter the better! Your back arm is still responsible for the power in the sail, but because you are on the wrong side of the sail, sheeting-in and sheeting-out are the other way around: if you push the boom away from you with your back arm, you will power the sail up, and if you pull in on the boom/let the back of the sail 'open up' then the sail will de-power

- Position your legs/feet in a central position on the board and over the centre-line so as to keep the board flat and you stable
- Maintain a comfortable body position relative to the conditions and how you feel

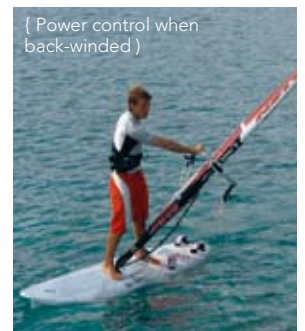


Top Tip: The temptation when you are sailing back-winded is to push on the boom with your backhand. If you do this, the sail will power-up and push you off. To avoid this temptation, take your back hand off the boom altogether and let the sail open up naturally. The foot of the sail will press against your back leg/shin and this will provide just the right amount of power from the sail for you to sail around comfortably!



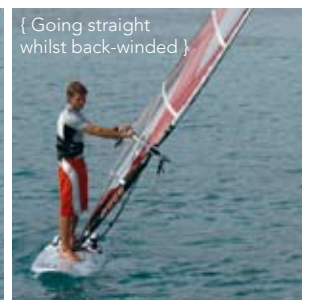
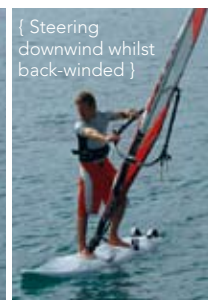
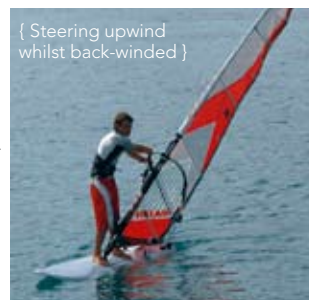
4) To control power in the sail when sailing back-winded:

- Turn your head to look more upwind, which in turn will make you sail upwind and have less power in the sail
- Allow the back of the sail to 'open up' more by pulling the boom into you with your back arm (or even letting go with your back hand) whilst still maintaining a straight front arm
- Extend your straight front arm further towards the water on the windward side of the board (side closest to the wind), which will decrease the amount of sail area available to the wind



5) To steer when sailing back-winded, everything works much the same as if you were steering from the normal side of the sail:

- To go upwind, turn your head to look upwind, move the rig towards the back of the board by extending your arms behind you, and counterbalance the movement of the rig with your body – rig back, body forwards!
 - To go downwind, turn your head to look further away from the wind, move the rig towards the nose of the board and slightly to windward (towards the wind) by extending your arms forwards, and counterbalance the movement of the rig with your body – rig forwards, body back!
- N.B. Remember, the further you go downwind, the more power there will be in the sail. Combat this by keeping your back arm very bent (letting the back of the sail 'open up' as much as possible) and by keeping a very straight front arm which can also be extended towards the water on the upwind (windward) side of the board to reduce the amount of sail available to the wind*
- To go in a straight line, keep your head looking where you want to go, bring the rig into a more central/neutral position remembering to keep your front arm straight/rig away, and keep your legs and body working as normal



6) To return to sailing normally again, reverse the above process to move back onto the normal side of the sail, remembering to keep your head looking where you want to go, keep your arms straight/rig away for good counterbalance, and to keep your feet over the centre-line as you move them around the mastfoot in a 'heel to toe' fashion



7) Try again for a little longer and, as always, try the other direction as well...

A little extra something to try...

A great progression at this point (especially for the more adventurous amongst you) and a very good way to prepare ourselves for next month's episode on the helicopter tack, is to try some tacks and gybes whilst actually sailing on the wrong side of the sail

A) The back-wind tack

This is where we tack the board from the back-winded position and come out sailing normally in the opposite direction.

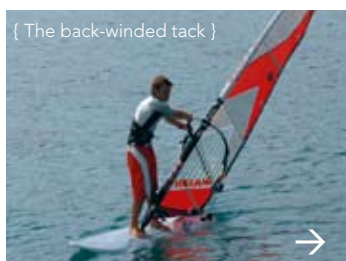
N.B. As well as being a great follow-up to sailing on the wrong side of the sail, this is also a very useful technique for consolidating our

tacking technique, especially for shorter board tacks where we might be temporarily back-winded at the end of it. It also develops essential skills for other manoeuvres such as Downwind 360s.

i) From your back-winded sailing position, steer the board upwind by looking upwind with your head, inclining the rig towards the back of the board by extending your arms behind you, and counterbalancing the movement of the rig with your body (rig back, body forwards)

ii) When the nose of the board is facing into the wind, slice the rig forwards and across you by extending your arms forwards, and adopt the usual technique for exiting a tack (head looking where you want to go, front arm straight / back arm sheeting-in, front leg straight / back leg bent, body low with hip dropped over bent back leg)

iii) Adjust your head, arms, legs and body to sail off normally again!



B) The back-wind gybe

This consists of gybing the board from the back-winded position and coming out sailing normally in the opposite direction.

N.B. This is a slightly more advanced manoeuvre that helps develop further understanding about power control whilst 'front to sail', and also creates great foundations for other manoeuvres such as helicopter tacks and upwind 360s

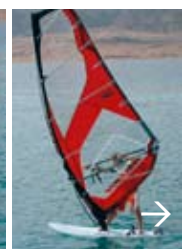
i) From your back-winded sailing position, steer the board downwind by looking further away

from the wind with your head, inclining the rig towards the front of the board and to windward (towards the wind) by extending your arms forwards, and counterbalancing the movement of the rig with your body (rig forwards, body back)

ii) As you head further downwind, control the power in the sail by letting your back arm bend (let your back hand touch your armpit) and by keeping the rig slightly to windward as well as forwards to control the amount of sail available to the wind

iii) When the nose of the board is facing directly downwind (or ideally past this point), extend your back arm allowing the clew to go through the wind and the sail to power-up on the normal side. As you do this remember to counterbalance the forward position of the rig and the onset of power by staying low and back, with your hip over your very bent back leg

iv) Turn your head to look where you want to go and adjust your arms, legs and body to sail out normally!



Top Tips for Sailing Back-Winded:

- Always keep your head looking where you are going and NOT at the sail
- Keep your front arm straight for good counterbalance and power control
- Allow your back arm to bend to let the sail open up...or even take it off completely!
- Keep your feet on / around the centreline of the board for a stable platform

"Freestyle for Everyone" is written by Jim Collis - Pro Coach, Instructor Trainer and Technique Editor for Windsurf magazine. If you'd like information on coaching or instructor training with Jim, contact him on jimcollis@windsurfevolution.co.uk or visit www.windsurfevolution.co.uk

This brings us to the end of this episode on sailing back-winded. Next month marks the final part of this Fluid Progressions: Freestyle for Everyone series, and we will be looking at the pièce de résistance... Skill 10: The Helicopter Tack.