

**Editor's Note:**

*Congratulations to Chuck Buckingham who completed his first Solo Mac from Chicago to become a GLSS member this year. Chuck sails Miller Time a Beneteau 36.7. In this article he shares his insights on the race.*

**My First Solo – Notes from a Rookie's Playbook****By Chuck Buckingham**

In February, I turned 33 years old. With the usual reflection that goes along with another year passing, I decided that this was the year I was going to do something really different. I decided to do the Chicago Mac Solo Challenge (thank you Jeff Stack on Compensable for the friendly encouragement). I registered for the race, started buying all the safety gear (including the rental of a life raft) and was getting ready to go...the only thing missing was a boat (I had sold my C&C 29 the summer before). Come April, I took possession of my 'new to me', but 'previously enjoyed' Beneteau 36.7, completed the 100 mile qualifier sail and was ready to go. It was a very busy spring with the qualifier, learning my new boat and getting mentally and physically prepared for the challenge.

As with any rookie there are copious learning's from year one. "If I only knew this", or "if I only did that"... With this said, here are some notes from my rookie playbook. If I could go back in time and have breakfast with Chuck on the morning of June 23 before he left the dock in Chicago here's what I'd tell him. Now Chuck's never been the sharpest tool in the shed, so I have structured my thoughts in simple 3 buckets – what he should start doing, what he should stop doing, and what he should continue doing! Here goes...

**START**

- Sleep early. Rick and Ken told all 7 of us rookies from the Chicago side to start slow and ease off from there - easier said than done gentlemen! With absolutely no wind at the start, it was a drifter of all drifters of a beginning. I stayed up the entire first day worried that if I went down for a nap that I'd wake up to that dreaded 0.0 reading on the knot log. So a nice calm, slow first day - ideal for proactively charging the batteries – was wasted as I was far too excited to sit (let alone lay) down. On Monday, I was trying my best to keep my eyes open between quick naps, and I wished I'd slept more on day one. Next Year – I'll cross the start line and then start thinking about my first nap.
- Thinking 3 steps ahead. On several occasions, I would just act (time to gibe) with no thought as to what I was going to do next. You may be able to get away with this on a crewed boat, but when you are on your own – you've got to be proactive. Towards the end of the race, I was talking aloud through the steps of the gibes, douses etc. This forced me to think 3 steps ahead – shame that I only started doing this while I was in the Mackinaw Straits.

**STOP**

- Losing my cool in the lulls – cursing at the lack of wind, and letting the flies (or fresh water sharks as our friend Cole from Australia calls them) get the better of me does not help move the boat. Next year, during the lulls, I'm putting on some loud music, and I am going to sing like there is no tomorrow and just keep looking for ripples on the water.
- Second guessing myself and my boat. Sunday night was a bit ugly (cold, wet and dark with the winds out of the north) but the boat had adequate canvas up given the conditions, and I need to trust my gut and 'keep calm and carry on.'

#### CONTINUE

- Camaraderie with other sailors. The radio banter was a ton of fun and kept the competition friendly. I can't imagine if we only used the radio for our position updates. Thanks for all the laughs guys!
- Frequently eating & drinking (water) throughout the race. I had the boat well provisioned and enjoyed a variety of warm and cold meals...although hopefully next year my friends on Alfa Puppy (pizza) and Kismet (fresh pasta) will share some of their gourmet meals with me.
- Seeing the glass as half full – this was a challenge and not everything went perfect from the start line to the finish – but overall, it was a great experience and with a positive attitude, the small screw ups don't weigh heavier than all the good times.
- Keep the end in mind – that first beer after crossing the finish line tasted SOO GOOD!

Overall, I had an absolutely amazing time, I wanted a challenge and boy did I get a challenge. Thanks to all the competitors for allowing this rookie to join in the fun. You are a great group of sailors and I'm honored to have the chance to be associated with such a fantastic group. Special thanks to Ken and the race committee for putting this all together – you guys did an amazing job!

If anyone aspires to complete a solo challenge, and you have a seaworthy sailboat, a solid sailing background and the desire to challenge yourself mentally and physically, I'd strongly encourage you to give the GLSS a try. Life is far too short to miss out on such an awesome experience like this.

See you all next year! Until then, MILLER TIME will be standing by on 72!