



FLUID FOUNDATIONS

Episode 4: Developing your Stance

Summer is upon us and with it the prospect of lots of great sessions on the water. With this in mind Jim Collis continues with his Fluid Foundations series - articles that take us back to first principles and concentrate 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 and footstrap work, and the series continues this month by looking at developing our general sailing stance; for gaining control, or sailing that little bit faster on or off the plane. Future episodes will concentrate on improving tacks and gybes, and honing our beach and water starts.

The Fluid Foundations series is designed as a tool to be used by any level of windsurfer; entry level sailors looking to improve their skill level, through to advanced sailors who may benefit from taking on board simple tips that will help to hone and consolidate their 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 5 themes that run through your windsurfing, whether you're an absolute novice, or a world champion. These themes underpin the essential core aspects of the skills within windsurfing, helping you to concentrate on the root cause of why a skill works. This provides you with a solid foundation for your skill level, rather than confusing you by concentrating on peripheral aspects that might happen as a result of doing the skill. For example, in a tack - focusing on what your head is looking at to help control your direction, rather than thinking about what your little toe is doing as the board steers!



THE 5 THEMES OF K.I.S.S. ARE:

HEAD - Looking where you want to go and being aware of everything around you.

ARMS - Keeping a straight front arm thereby distancing yourself from the rig and causing you to naturally counter balance against it. Using your back arm to 'sheet in' or draw power from the rig.

LEGS - Adjusting leg and feet positions on the board to keep it flat and you stable!

BODY - Changing your body's position/shape according to conditions and how you feel. For example if you feel over-powered or threatened: get lower, and if you feel underpowered or inefficient: become more upright.

BREATHE - Remembering to breathe so that you can be relaxed, alert and responsive when sailing, which in turn helps you 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 'base' level and 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 your windsurfing. This episode concerns developing stance and looking at how you can use your body more effectively and efficiently, whether to go faster, or to feel more comfortable and controlled on the water.

This should be achieved whatever the wind or water state and regardless of whether you are planing.

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 over the next few issues, Jim has recently released a DVD called Fluid Foundations that 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

DEVELOPING YOUR STANCE

Stance, or the use of your body when windsurfing, has been prevalent in all of the Fluid Foundations articles so far. It is an integral part of how we windsurf, but as well as this, by paying a little more attention to it, you can fine tune your performance on the water, giving you more control and making you more efficient and quick on the water.

In years gone by, 'stance' was considered a fairly static position that you adopted in order to windsurf well. There may have been several different 'stances' that were on offer according to whether it was windy or not, but the concept was more about learning fixed positions for certain circumstances, rather than understanding how you can use your body effectively when on the water.

Unfortunately the original concept of stance was wholly flawed by the simple fact that we are all individuals who are shaped dramatically differently and, as such, certain fixed positions might have worked for certain people in certain conditions, but wouldn't work for others in the same conditions.

Luckily, with the recent growth of understanding about body mechanics in sport, across a wide spectrum of disciplines, the concept of 'stance' has changed dramatically and is now an aspect that can be focused on and tweaked to get the best performance out of the performer.

In relation to windsurfing, the simple understanding and realisation that stance is a very individual concept, relating to how you use your particular body when sailing – i.e. you change your body shape according to how you feel on the water – has opened up huge potential for windsurfers to just get better and better at the sport that they love!

CONTROL, SPEED AND EFFICIENCY

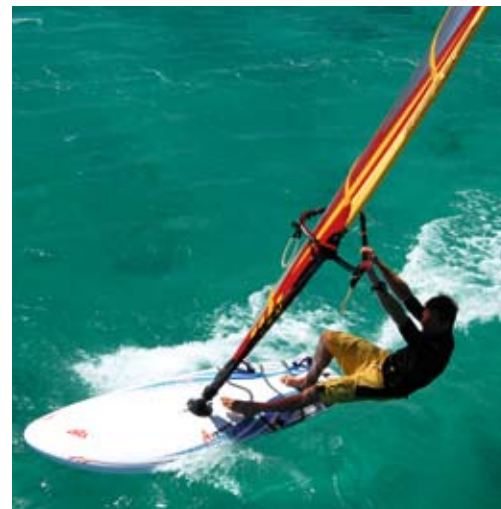
When related to the K.I.S.S. methodology, stance involves:

BODY - Changing your body's position/shape according to conditions and how you feel. If you feel over-powered or threatened: drop lower, and if you feel underpowered or inefficient: you become more upright.

The range of movement at your disposal with your body is huge and you should take advantage of this fact. Stance nowadays is not static or designed to be about adopting set positions. It is fluid and constantly changing: you adjust your body shape by lowering or raising your hips while sailing, according to the conditions and how you feel.

The result of doing this effectively is threefold:

- You will gain control at times when you perhaps used to feel insecure.
- You will become more efficient at channelling energy from the sail to the board at times when you might have felt quite ineffectual and sluggish.
- You will generally feel slicker over or through the water whatever the conditions.



Example of the extremes of stance range both planing and non-planing

To really get to grips with stance, and how you can use your body more effectively (i.e. when and how you should raise or lower your hips and the effect this will have), we are going to look at the three aspects mentioned above that result from using stance well: control, efficiency and speed.

CONTROL:

Having control on the water is crucial for you to be able to sail well. Need for control becomes increasingly important when you feel threatened by the conditions or the kit you are sailing with. You can feel threatened on the water, whether you are planing or not, due to a variety of different reasons:

- Being overpowered because your sail, or board (or both!) is too big for the conditions.
- The wind picks up when you are out there, perhaps in the form of a gust or the general wind strength increases, and so you feel overpowered.
- The water state is bumpier than you are used to and starts to throw you about.
- You are on different kit that feels electric, but also quite intimidating (for instance, going out on dedicated slalom kit for the first time, having been

used to relatively sedate freeride kit in the past).

- Before, during or after doing a skill, when the power becomes quite noticeable in the sail, e.g. coming out of a tack, going into or coming out of a gybe, finishing a beach or water start, getting planing etc.

Whatever the reason, the solution is simple in relation to the K.I.S.S. methodology: you drop your body lower...

BODY - Drop your hip over your very bent back leg, keeping the front leg straight.

As you drop your hip, your weight will naturally roll onto your heels and your toes will naturally point up – this is good and will help you to naturally put more weight on your heels. This helps to 'pin' the windward rail of the board down and thereby keep the board flat and happy!

N.B. The amount you drop your hip down depends on how threatened you are feeling as an individual – the more threatened you feel, the lower you should get!

Top Tip – Imagine you are becoming a heavy 'sack of spuds'...breathe out and feel heavier!

JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE



Examples of controlled stance with hips dropped

Whilst adjusting your body to suit how you are feeling, your head, arms, legs and breathing should be playing their part as always...

Head - Keep looking where you want to go
N.B. If you feel really threatened then you should start to look upwind as well, to steer closer to the wind and thereby reduce the relative amount of power in the sail.

Arms - Keep both arms relatively straight and relaxed, whether in the harness or not, to keep a good distance between you and the rig, and hence good counter balance and stability.

N.B. The temptation will be to pull on the boom as you drop your hip low...try to avoid this and maintain good distance between the rig and you by having relatively straight arms.

Legs - Front leg straight, back leg bent and flexed, feet positioned to keep the board flat (slightly more in-board and central if not planing, and further outboard and back – ideally in the footstraps – if planing).

N.B. As mentioned above, as you drop your hips over your back leg your weight will naturally roll onto your heels and cause your toes to point up, which is a good thing as it helps to put more weight on your heels and thereby 'pin' the windward rail of the board down. This in turn keeps the board flat and happy!

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



Examples of a more efficient stance with hips raised

EFFICIENCY:

Sometimes when sailing, you can feel that you're perhaps being less than efficient with your kit, the result being that you sail quite sluggishly, maybe coming off the plane or just generally moving slowly through the water.

This is usually caused by a couple of reasons:

- Being underpowered because your sail or board (or both) is too small for the conditions.
 - If the wind drops off when you are out sailing, in the form of a lull or a general decrease in the wind strength, so you feel underpowered.
- Whatever the reason may be, the solution is, as

always, nice and simple! Whereas when you felt threatened you dropped your body low, when you feel inefficient you raise your body up to be in a more upright, efficient position...

Body - Raise your hip towards the boom, letting your back leg straighten and keeping the front leg straight.

As you raise your hips, your weight will naturally roll onto the 'balls' of your feet – this is good and will help you to naturally put more weight inboard to help keep the board flat and you happy!

N.B. The amount you raise your hip depends on how inefficient you are feeling – it is totally up to you as an individual.

Top Tip – Try to imagine you are making your body into a very straight block of wood...your head, shoulders, hips and heels are all in line and you feel like you could hold a fifty pence piece in-between your bottom cheeks!

Whilst adjusting your body to suit how you are feeling, your head, arms, legs and breathing should be playing their part as always...

JIM COLLIS TECHNIQUE



An example of a slalom sailor when sailing typically overpowered – adopting a low hipped stance for control and hence speed!

Whilst adjusting your body to suit how you are feeling, your head, arms, legs and breathing should be playing their part as always...

Head - Keep looking where you want to go, allowing your head and shoulders to fall further outboards as your hips are raised.

N.B. If you feel really inefficient, then you might start to look downwind as well, so as to steer further away from the wind and thereby increase the relative amount of power in the sail.

Arms - Keep both arms relatively straight and relaxed, whether in the harness or not, so as to keep good distance between you and the rig and hence good counter balance and stability.

N.B. The temptation will be to pull the boom in to you as you raise your hips due to you feeling like your upper body is falling away from the boom...try to avoid this and if necessary let your fingertips be the only point in contact with the boom.

Legs - Front leg straight, back leg quite straight as well, feet positioned to keep the board flat (slightly more inboard and central if not planing, and further outboard and back – ideally in the footstraps – if planing).

N.B. As mentioned above, as you raise your hips towards the boom, your weight will naturally roll onto the 'balls' of your feet, which is a good thing as it helps to bring your weight more inboard and thereby keep the board flat and happy.

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

SPEED

Without realising it, by developing your range of body movements by raising and lowering your hips as above, you have actually conquered the mysteries of 'stance' and how you can use your body more effectively and efficiently when on the water.

For the most part, this will make you more efficient and faster, in a wider range of conditions, as well as giving you that feeling of control that we all crave to greater or lesser degrees!

For those of you looking to just go faster and faster you might well think that there is a secret formula on top of what we have already discussed. In actual fact, with regard to what you are actually doing when on the water, there is no special fancy technique – it's all about using your body as effectively and efficiently as you can.

As it happens, the majority of people looking for out and out speed tend to use big sails and extremely efficient boards, but all this means is that they are overpowered a great deal, if not most of the time.

As a result, the way that they then eek the most speed out of their kit, is by dropping their hips super low to control the kit and keep it flat and stable, which in turn results in blistering speed.

Here is an example above of slalom sailing... Note the body position and in particular the toes that are pointing up as the weight has rolled onto the heels... the windward rail of the board is locked down and the board stays flat, happy and extremely fast!

All in all, stance is purely and simply about using your body effectively. Due to us all being a different weight, shape and size, and the fact that we all use different kit and like going out in a variety of different conditions, the body position that you might adopt to be effective on the water, will more than likely be different to somebody else's. Remember – stance is an individual thing according to how you are feeling as an individual. It is affected by raising and lowering your hips to change your body shape in order to gain control, be more efficient, and generally sleeker over or through the water.

This brings us to the end of this episode on developing your stance. Hopefully, whatever level of sailor you are, this has given you some helpful pointers or tips on how to sail more efficiently and effectively when next out on the water.

Next month we will be moving onto turns and looking at the tack, whether planing or non planing; cutting through the minefield of information out there, by just keeping it stupidly simple!

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