

Fitting Pieces into the Puzzle

Putting together a sailing campaign means you have to organize and juggle a number of critical elements. Dave Perry explains.

A successful program for the Olympics or any other sailing championship is the sum of many important parts, each of which must be carefully planned. It is usually easy, in an unsuccessful campaign, to find the one or two ingredients that were either overlooked or taken for granted. Therefore, the following outline covers the major areas of a campaign that need thorough attention. To each section I've added some personal thoughts and experiences from our '84 Olympic Soling campaign to highlight a few of the most critical (and sometimes least obvious) factors for success. Notice that only one of the parts involves actual sailing.

Team Selection

Deciding who you are going to sail with is probably your most important decision. One comment I'll always remember is something that Peter Isler wrote in the '83 Pipeline: "On the theme of crew selection, (Dennis Conner and Tom Blackaller) both rated one attribute high above the rest — enthusiasm. Your teammate(s) must share your dedication toward your goal. Simply agreeing that you want to win a gold medal is the easy part — everybody would like that. But you must all agree to work equally hard to achieve the goal."

I suffered a situation where one of my Soling crew decided at the last moment that he couldn't continue the campaign. To avoid this kind of setback, I strongly recommend that you and your teammates draw up a letter of agreement concerning your commitment, and that you all sign it. This should cover such topics as the use of personal funds, time available away from the campaign, and areas of responsibility. It should also be made clear that any person who realizes they can no longer continue in the effort must tell the others immediately.

Without a doubt, the hardest thing about an Olympic campaign is trying to remain friends with your teammates. It's hard to imagine the pressures, tension, long hours and frustration that you'll have to handle. This doesn't make it easy to mask your insecurities and inabilities, and eventually your weak spots will show through. Learning to trust and support each other when the times are the toughest is the most critical skill, but egos and moodiness can make this nearly impossible. A common cause of tension is

when one teammate feels he or she is doing more work than the other(s). Simple, constant communication and taking the risk of telling each other how you feel is a major key to success. The team that recognizes these problems and decides to work on them from the start has the best chance of success.

Don't forget that, besides crewmembers, you need to have other good "teammates" such as a maintenance expert, a driver for your car and powerboat, a coach/observer and friends and family for moral support.

Equipment Selection/Purchase

Look closely at the equipment on the best boats in your class and related classes, and ask questions of the best sailors before you make purchases. Compare prices by getting catalogues and phoning around. When possible, use one outlet that you know and trust. If you plan to buy a lot of gear, see if you can get a discount (10-20% is reasonable). Immediately sell all gear as soon as you're through with it, so you make that money available and don't accumulate a lot of extra stuff. In order to keep the most reliable equipment on your boat, make notes about and investigate every breakdown in your class and related classes. Keep a notebook and file of photographs of gear and rigging systems that you like. Mark all your gear with your name clearly! For ideas on how to estimate and pay for your equipment costs, see "The Art of Fundraising."

Schedule/Time Management

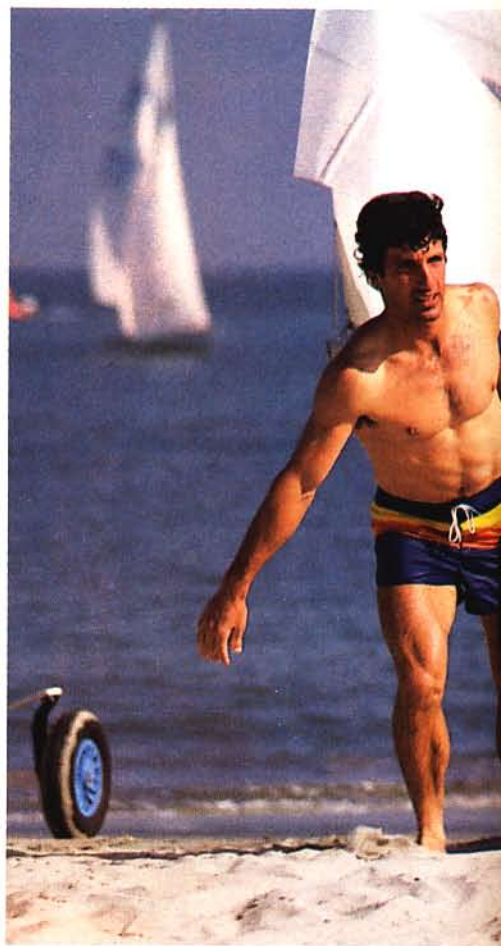
Purchase a "Year-at-a-Glance" calendar for '85, and for '86 if possible. Get regatta schedules from your class office and from the IYRU fixture list (this international racing schedule is available from USYRU). Find out the dates for any clinics scheduled by your class or the Olympic Yachting Committee. Pencil in any non-sailing commitments that you and your teammates have, including school, work or family commitments. Then decide which regattas you want to sail in.

Next, pencil in any time required for building or rigging a new boat or fixing up your present boat. Finally, schedule practice times and time off for traveling or just relaxing. You'll find that a year is a very short time!

When possible, schedule your prac-

tice time leading up to major regattas at the same or a similar site as the regatta. Plan at least a couple of weeks to allow for bad weather or problems. When planning boat work time, figure in at least two to three times as many hours or days as you think you'll need to finish the work — seriously! Murphy's Law feeds off sailors! The more people involved, the harder time management is. Time trucks along, and if you're not organized and disciplined, you'll never accomplish your goals. Continually revise your calendar to keep it realistic, because without a timetable you are lost.

Besides a yearly calendar, you should also have a daily schedule. For instance: Be at the boat by 10:00; go sailing by 1:00; get in by 4:30; etc. The more un-disciplined your teammates are, or the more teams that are involved in the training, the more specific your schedule needs to be. Don't underestimate the problems caused by a lack of leadership and laziness when it comes to keeping to a daily program. One thing we learned was that nothing ever goes smoothly, so always plan for things to take longer than you expect. Sometimes you have to abandon your schedule because your car breaks,



your tools get ripped off or there's no wind. A good program always has "Plan B" ready to go so that all your time is used advantageously. Remember to vary your activities and pace to avoid burn-out.

Logistics Planning

It's hard to describe all the little things that come up and need to be planned for, but here are a few suggestions. I strongly recommend using a regular travel agent well in advance (like three to four months) to plan trips, especially if you're going overseas. If your destination is someplace you've never been before, contact USYRU to see if they have any information about it. Recently, sailors and coaches have filed reports on overseas venues, including the best places to stay, eat and buy things, plus local contacts, race course knowledge, etc. If you're shipping a boat, talk to the OYC rep for your class (see "'88 Olympic Classes") to get the best rates possible and to find out what paperwork you'll need. One missing piece of paper could strand you for weeks!

Questions and considerations for any regatta or trip include: How will your boat get there? When possible, avoid heavy traveling right before the regatta. Where will you stay? Try to get set up where it's comfortable and quiet and not too far from the sailing site.

What and where will you eat? Restaurants are a huge and unnecessary drain on the budget, but are a temptation because they're easy and fun. Unfortunately, the tendency at restaurants is to over-eat, over-drink and over-spend. A better idea is to make a large supermarket run early, and load up on the kind of munchies that are good for you. Another continual hassle is laundry, especially at salt-water sailing sites. Set yourself up near a laundromat if possible and rinse your clothes thoroughly after sailing so they don't sit around in a sailbag for a week! A friend who can take care of your mundane chores during the day may mean the difference between winning the regatta and being miserable. It's all part of planning.

Improvement Strategy

The goal of any sailing campaign is to learn and improve in a number of areas, including boatspeed, tactics and strategy, equipment, and your physical and mental preparation — both individually and as a team. Boatspeed is best improved by training with one or two other boats that are as fast or faster than you are. A coach or expert observer in a powerboat can be a great help, as can the use of still photographs (for sail-shape, mast bend, etc.) and videotape (for boathandling). It's also a big advantage if you own your own marks (e.g.

hippity hops). A system for note-keeping is mandatory. If you don't keep notes on sailtrim, rig set-up, etc., you're wasting your time speed-testing. Spending a race or regatta in a powerboat simply watching the top guys sail is an excellent learning tool most sailors don't use.

There is no substitute for racing to improve tactics and strategy. Be sure to discuss each race thoroughly among yourselves afterward, looking for mistakes and their causes as well as good moves that worked. Remember what your competitors did, and keep notes of things to be careful of or aware of next time. Reading the rules and appeals will definitely improve your tactics. Most sailors, even at the top levels, haven't read the USYRU or IYRU Appeals books (both are available from USYRU). We may have had a different Finn class representative at the '84 Olympics if the sailors had known the IYRU Cases.

Equipment preparation is an endless task. Nothing feels worse than to lose a series because of a breakdown. Inspect everything continually, particularly Kevlar knots, nico-pressed wire loops, chafed areas of hiking straps, etc. Stuff a rag under rod rigging when trailering so it won't vibrate and weaken. Remove tape often and inspect bowlines, etc. Keep a running list of "things to do" near the boat so that your teammates can always check the list and do some work. My experience is that there is always something that can be fixed, improved on or replaced. Be sure to get an up-dated copy of the class rules and have it handy at all times.

Physical preparation of your bodies should be done as a team to make it fun. If possible, find a sports physician who can customize a planned program to meet the needs and demands of your class. Your mental preparation should include exercises to help you relax, concentrate better, and stay focused on the task at hand in the face of upsetting occurrences around you. Give positive feedback and encouragement to your teammates whenever appropriate. The books listed in Jane Kent's Sports Medicine and Science article in this issue, and/or a sport psychologist at a nearby university, can be helpful in developing a sound psychological approach.

The key in preparing your team for a sailing campaign is to get outside help and to develop an attitude to learning that allows you to have fun. You have to continually remind yourself of why you set out on the campaign in the first place — because you enjoy racing sailboats, you love being outdoors in the sun, and you are excited to have the opportunity to push yourself against a challenge that most people will never come close to facing in their lives. The campaign that succeeds in mastering all these elements will have few, if any, equals in 1988! •



Neil Rabinowitz photo