



TEAM RACING

by
Chip Barber

Photos courtesy of New York Yacht Club

We were only one hundred yards from the finish and well in the lead. The seven other J-35s in this race were battling it out behind us, and this looked like an easy bullet. Our boat speed had been superb, and even when challenged on the first beat, we were able to power through other J-35s that tried to cover us. But right before crossing the finish line our skipper, George Hinman, looked downwind and cried out that *Obstreperous* had just been passed and was now in seventh place.

“Helm to weather bearing off hard!” George turned the boat directly away from the finish line and headed back toward the leeward mark. There wouldn’t be a first place finish for us in this race; *Obstreperous* was being forced past the lay-line by another boat. This allowed a third J-35 to pass her. The only way to win

(Above) Hot action at the 2005 Grey Goose Team Racing World Championship hosted by New York Yacht Club in Newport, Rhode Island. (Photo by Dan Nerney)

this race was to go to her assistance. In team racing, it doesn’t matter how any particular boat finishes, as long as the total score of your team is lower than the other team’s score.

Team racing is perhaps the most exciting type of sailboat racing. Nobody will deny that it is exciting to surf the long waves on the 2,400 mile race to Hawaii, or to pound your way across the Gulf Stream in a nor’easter on the way to Bermuda. Fleet racing in 49ers or hydroplaning Moths certainly is good sport, and match racing in the America’s Cup has generated tremendous interest for over 150 years. But for the sheer tactical excitement of two

teams competing in identical boats around a short course, team racing can’t be beat.

In team racing, two teams of three or four boats each compete in identical sailboats. The boats earn points for the place they finish each race: the first to finish gets one point, second place gets two points, etc. The team that finished with the least number of points wins. It’s as easy as that.

No, it isn’t as easy as that. The crew of each boat has to continually know in which place every other boat is on the course, so that a running “box score” can be maintained. It would be easy to know that your three-boat team was winning if you were all in first through third place (1+2+3=6 points; while the competition would have 4+5+6=15 points). But if the boats were mixed up and you thought that your team was in first, fourth, and sixth on the second run leg, you would be losing by



The identical Vanguard 15s used at the 2005 World Championship had color coded sails to help competitors and spectators easily identify the teams.

Team Racing on Narragansett Bay requires competitors to be in top physical condition. (Photos by Dan Nerney)



one point (1+4+6=11 while 2+3+5=10; therefore, the second team is winning). Even if you were on the last beat, you would have to attack the other team in order to help one of your teammates pass a boat on the other team. In the excitement of the race, it sometimes seems that there is an infinite number of scoring combinations.

This is where the tactical excitement of team racing comes into play. Ordinarily the Racing Rules of Sailing do not allow boats to “mix it up.” The Rules are designed to prevent collisions and to allow competitors to win based on fair play and faster individual boat speed. But there is a special section of the racing rules that allows for much more aggressive sailing

among competitors in team races. Appendix D specifically allows boats to sail below proper course and to receive assistance from another boat. There are other esoteric rule changes that aren't terribly pertinent to this article, except for the fact they do allow the boats in a team race to aggressively attack and to defend against attack. The end result is exciting racing for competitors and spectators alike.

Team racing has been a popular activity between rival yacht clubs for over a hundred years. I've competed in several team racing regattas: the Nichols Trophy between the New York Yacht Club and the Royal Thames Yacht Squadron in J-35s in Newport, Rhode Island crewing for George Hinman. And a few years later as skipper for the Storm Trysail Club in an international

championship sailed in Sigma 32s at the Royal Southern Yacht Club on the Solent in the south of England, also among my team racing highlights.

The National Team Racing Championship in the U.S. is sailed for the Hinman Trophy each year. This prestigious trophy is named in honor of the father of my Nichols Trophy skipper, George. George is a lifelong advocate of team racing. He sees this form of racing as a great way of getting a large group of sailors together at wonderful locations around the world. He explains that our East Coast has become a world center of team racing, as the ranks of team racers are fed from the college teams. These young sailors want to continue what they enjoyed in college as they join local yacht clubs. Active team racing regattas

and championships fill the summer racing calendars of many yacht clubs. George says that from the intercollegiate through master's levels, team racing is a major part of the racing and social schedules of many yacht clubs.


The East Coast is, in fact, such a center of team racing that the last biannual World Championship was hosted by the New York Yacht Club in Newport, Rhode Island in 2005. American teams placed first and second.

My friend, America's Cup sailor and commentator Gary Jobson, is another advocate of team racing. In fact, Gary recently began to lobby to make team racing an Olympic sport. Because it is raced on short courses close to shore and has the added excitement of aggressive tactics, it is


Team Racing using J/44s in Bermuda. Even in these large yachts, the crews attack each other aggressively. (Photo by Chip Barber.)







Deltaville, VA
(804) 776-7575





perfect for spectators *and* for television! Olympic sailing sees very little television coverage because it is basically an individual sport that most sports aficionados know little about. It is difficult to follow a standard sailboat race on television, but team racing lends itself readily to this format. Both Gary Bodie, the head U.S. Olympic Sailing Coach, and George Hinman support Jobson's approach. And although team racing in the Olympics would do much to lower costs and to increase participation for Olympic athletes, it will take many years and a lot of effort for advocates like Gary to bring about this change.

Team racing is a great way to hone one's own sailboat racing skills. If you don't already enjoy this challenge, I urge you to try it. Again, many yacht clubs have a full schedule of team racing competition. And even if you aren't a competitive sailor or a member of a participating club, team racing is great spectator fun. Call or google local yacht clubs or collegiate sailing teams for their schedules. You won't be sorry.

**DELTAVILLE MARINA
& BOATYARD**

Full Service Marina and Boat Yard
Located on Jackson Creek
Just minutes from the Chesapeake Bay!





AMERICAN BOAT & YACHT COUNCIL
Certified Service

804.776.8900

274 Buck's View Lane, Deltaville, VA 23043
Visit us online at: DeltavilleBoatyard.com

MARSHALL FARMS CORNER



Award Winning Cheeses
Local Wine
Natural & Organic Groceries
Specialty Coffee
Deli

Open Monday-Friday 7am-5pm
Saturday 8am-3pm
Closed Sunday

540-854-6800

At the corner of Rt. 20 & 522 in
Orange, VA

www.marshallscheese.com

Charles Barber is a veteran sailor of over 40 years. He was the Director of Sailing and Commodore of the Naval Academy Sailing Squadron and was the coach on board the Naval Academy's 48-foot sloop *Constellation* in 1992 when she won the coveted St. David's Lighthouse Trophy for First-in-Fleet in the Newport to Bermuda Race. Upon leaving the Navy, Chip founded an international yacht management service and provides administrative management and special project management for high-level racers as well as for long-distance sail and powerboat cruisers.