

By Gary Jobson, President  
National Sailing Hall of Fame

September 22, 2013



Can Emirates Team New Zealand dig into their collective inner soul and find a way to win the 34th America's Cup? The way it is going, the Kiwis are in deep trouble.

Oracle Team USA is on a roll. They are winning starts, sailing really smart, and at times they are blazingly fast. The USA still needs to win four races to successfully defend, while NZL only needs one victory to take the Cup down under. Race 16 on Monday will mark the longest period in Cup racing days since the first defense in 1870. Several thousand fans from NZ, who are here in San Francisco, can't believe what is happening. Neither can the team. Three races have been abandoned when NZL was ahead for either too much wind, or too little, hence the bad luck. I still believe the Kiwis can pull this off.

It starts with a renewed attitude. NZL skipper, Dean Barker, has got to ignore all the noise, expectations, thoughts of destiny, or even winning the regatta. He needs to declare to his team that they are going to win, and do it with such determination that everyone believes him. I

watched Ted Turner do this many times. True conviction is infectious. The sailors and the design team need to work through every possible improvement that is available. Any changes must be in sync with the wind, current and wave conditions. The USA has been masterful at making innovations after going 1-3 in the first two days of the regatta. Today, in 16 knots of wind, I watched USA 17 race by my position on the race committee boat on Leg Three at 29 knots. The boat was up on its foils while sailing to windward. In contrast, at that moment, NZL was sailing at 22 knots. Does NZL have an answer?

Since Race One, OTUSA seems to have a small edge sailing downwind. If the USA has a weak spot it is sailing upwind in lighter winds. Tomorrow the weather is forecast for light wind in the morning. This might be the best opportunity for NZL. If they lose the first race, and the wind starts to build, NZL might pull out a postponement card for the second race of the day, and hope the wind is light for the next day. Certainly the Kiwis want to avoid a winner-take-all race with the score tied up.

To win, Dean Barker has to take the start. On my unofficial score card, in 15 races Barker has won six starts, and OTUSA's Australian skipper, James Spithill, has won nine. Before today's first race I watched Spithill and crew methodically practice several starts.



They did short timed runs, long timed runs, acceleration practice, and worked the middle, leeward and windward ends of the line. They maximized their practice time like it was their last opportunity to hold on to the America's Cup. Oh, wait a minute — every race is their last opportunity to hold on to the America's Cup. In contrast, ETNZ went through their normal routine, which is to cross the line, sail to Mark # 1 and do some jibes. But, they did not use the pre-race practice period for intense starting practice. Maybe they should set up a starting line early in the morning and schedule some practice starts.

If the Kiwis can win the start, the next item is to stay ahead on the downwind leg, knowing they might be a little slower. This is where the tactician, Ray Davies, needs to make good calls. Most of the time the leading boat must cover, but sometimes it is better to stay in stronger wind than make extra maneuvers. Over on USA 17, British tactician, Ben Ainslie, has found the correct balance between covering and going for better wind. This is where championships (or America's Cups) are won.

ETNZ has plenty of strengths. Dean Barker is doing a really good job steering. The crew continues to handle their boat with precision on every maneuver. But for Mr. Davies? This is his hour. My advice is to simply go out and have some fun. Treat the next race just like you would in any weekend regatta. If you get caught up thinking about the high stakes of this event, you are cooked. Going with your gut instinct always seems to work.



A few days before the first race of the 1977 America's Cup I will never forget Ted Turner telling me, "I am going to have fun in this regatta, because I think it will improve our chances of winning."

Oracle Team USA's owner, Larry Ellison, has a lot on his plate at the moment. About 60,000 people are here in San Francisco for Oracle Open World, a huge technology conference. This is an important event for his company. Yet, he is on the water for every race. Mr. Ellison stopped by our race committee boat yesterday for a brief hello and seemed very energized by his sailing team's turnaround. My only regret for him in this Cup is that Ellison should have been able to sail on his boat. Whatever format evolves for the next America's Cup, I hope the owners can be aboard. Surely, this would be a good incentive for captains of industry to organize sailing teams.

The number of spectator boats on the water is getting smaller by the day. I have never seen so few boats watching an America's Cup. I spoke at a local yacht club here on Friday night. I asked why more boats were not out on the bay? Several people at my table said, "Its better watching on television." Lucky me; I get to do both. Being aboard the race committee boat with our television crew, cameraman Greg Peterson and engineer Bruce Jackson, has been great fun. We have the television images, AC LiveLine graphic information, and get to see the boats up close. At times they sail past within one boat length.

Racing on San Francisco Bay certainly provides good theater for spectators all along the shoreline. But I would like to add an editorial comment. The restrictions of where the course can be set makes it a difficult challenge for the race committee. Yesterday we were unable to get a race off because the wind was left of 230 degrees. If a race had been sailed the boats would have reached to each mark. A parade would be unfair to the competitors. The race committee will not start a race if the wind is to the right of 280 degrees. To make the short 40 minute time limit the wind needs to average at least 8 knots. But, they cannot race in winds over 23 knots for safety reasons. These are severely limiting parameters. If the races are to be held on San Francisco Bay in the future, a little more flexibility is order.



As I mentioned in an earlier AC Report, I like cheering for one team at sporting events. Right now I want both teams to win. It would be heartwarming to watch Dean Barker and his Kiwi crew break out of their slump and win it. It means a lot to that tiny nation. At the same time, I am really enjoying watching James Spithill and his team come charging back after near-certain defeat. While commentating on the races for television I always have my tactician's mind engaged. Ben Ainslie is great fun to watch. He is like a chess master. Ainslie gets a helpful mental boost from the observations of OTUSA's strategist, Tom Slingsby. Every sailor should

listen carefully to the communication between these two Olympic champions.

I guess a tie is out of the question. One team must win nine races. It could happen tomorrow, or it could come down to one race with the score tied at 8-8. Either way the conclusion is going to be fascinating. Tell your friends to tune in and watch sailing history being made. We may never see anything like this again.

At 4 pm Eastern Time (1 pm Pacific) Todd Harris, Ken Read and I, along with our very energized production team, look forward to bringing you the finale of the 34th America's Cup defense on the NBC Sports Network.

Photos courtesy of photographer Steven Tsuchiya.