

## **VIEWS OF SPORT;**

# **America's Cup: What the Impasse Meant**

By SPRAGUE THEOBALD; SPRAGUE THEOBALD, AN ACTOR, PLANS TO COMPETE NEXT MONTH IN THE CARLSBERG DOUBLE-HANDED TRANS-ATLANTIC RACE FROM PLYMOUTH, ENGLAND TO NEWPORT, R.I. HE WILL RACE A 34-FOOT SLOOP.

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LEAD: It's over. At long last, the America's Cup has found a home. Some would have us believe that for the three long years we sailors patiently waited for court decisions to come down, yacht racing had completely stalled out on the water. On the contrary, there was a lot going on. It may be that the America's

It's over. At long last, the America's Cup has found a home. Some would have us believe that for the three long years we sailors patiently waited for court decisions to come down, yacht racing had completely stalled out on the water. On the contrary, there was a lot going on. It may be that the America's Cup crowd will find they have to work harder for our attention next time around.

The San Diego Yacht Club finally won the legal battle in a ruling April 26 by the New York State Court of Appeals. Michael Fay and the Mercury Bay Boating Club of New Zealand lost.

As luck would have it, New Zealand is now winning the Whitbread Round the World Race, one of several major regattas that have sprung up in the last three years to challenge the America's Cup as yachting's pre-eminent event.

This year's Whitbread race has been an especially grueling one. There have been broken bones, broken rigs, dropped keels, and sadly, one death. So fierce has the competition been that after sailing 2,500 miles of Leg 2, boats from New Zealand, Britain and Switzerland were all within 10 miles of one another. It must have been a bit hard for those sailors to get up in the morning knowing they couldn't shake their competition after 2,000 miles at sea.

If things continue as they have been, it appears that one of the New Zealand entries, Steinlager 2, will be the overall winner by the race's end later this month in Southampton, England. The America's Cup regatta, great as it has been throughout its 149-year history, is beginning to pale alongside the drama of this latest Whitbread.

Eleven years ago, I was basically a dockside pickup who ended up crewing for three months on the America's Cup trial horse, Intrepid. The boat had defended the America's Cup twice for the New York Yacht Club. But by 1979, the yacht was past its prime, and useful only as a pace boat for a newer generation of 12-Meters.

Being snatched up as I was for crew, with no resume or formal evaluation required for the job, reminds me of a time when America's Cup racing seemed far less sophisticated.

Our concerns were simple then: to beat France 3 on a daily basis, and to not allow ourselves to become too distracted by anything that was happening onshore. It is with great interest, if not a bit of nostalgia, that I read now of 14 teams from 11 countries that have challenged the San Diego Yacht Club for a 1992 America's Cup match.

If you hold a love for 12-Meters as I do, then you might have felt the same twinge as I did on learning that 12-Meters, the boats we have seen sailing in America's Cup races since 1958, will not be sailed in the next cup series.

Instead, a new class of boats designed by an international gathering of naval architects is coming our way. It's being called the America's Cup Class, and it's going to change yachting more than just a tad. If America's Cup racing is ever to pull itself out of the limbo of the last three years, it will be through the magic of these new boats.

On the average, the yachts will be 15 percent longer than the traditional 12-Meter, which is about 65 feet over all. They will weigh 30 percent less than a 12-Meter, and carry about 40 percent more sail area. The new boats will move through the water a good two knots faster upwind than a 12-Meter, and they will be sailed by a crew of 16 instead of 11. The spinnaker poles alone are 33 feet long. The first boat I sailed to Bermuda was 32 feet long.

These new dragsters will carry not only a mast and rig made out of carbon fiber, but also carbon-fiber hulls. No longer will we hear the banging and screeching noises of aluminum hulls and rig as America's Cup yachts round their marks.

I don't think that any of these advances would have happened as quickly had the last three years not shown it was clearly time for a change. The hiatus in court was hard on the America's Cup and its participants. But the abrupt halt to racing shifted the emphasis to design, and that was not all bad. Future challengers and defenders knew they would have to come up with something new to race in -and agree on it - or they would never see another America's Cup match again.

Too much animosity had built up around the catamaran. Justice Carmen Beauchamp Ciparick of New York State Supreme Court had ruled midway in the controversy that the San Diego Yacht Club, by competing with a catamaran, had sailed an unfair race against Fay's 132-foot monohull. The multihull design, she concluded, was inherently faster than a monohull.

The Court of Appeals didn't agree, and said it found no language in the Deed of Gift, the document that governs cup racing, to prohibit a catamaran. By the time the issue was settled last month, sailing teams from around the world had already decided on a new America's Cup Class. The move on their part may help the event claw its way back to its former pre-eminence in yachting.

There is still a lot of catching up to do, not only for the United States teams that were left at a standstill with the court proceedings, but also for the event itself. Will it continue to spark interest in the sporting world? Or have other yachting contests had a chance to catch up?

Much has happened while the cup lay hidden in a Manhattan bank vault. Ocean records have been broken with considerable fanfare. And international regattas such as the Whitbread race and the Globe Challenge, a nonstop race around the world for solo skippers, have gained in stature.

Even if the next America's Cup match fails to live up to its past glories, say what you may, many good things come from every cup series. As NASA's designs tend to trickle down slowly to us common folk, so too do yacht designers' and builders' ideas. It appears that carbon fiber will be put to the test, and might start appearing on more standardized production boats.

Remember how "winglets" started popping up on sailboat keels after the Australians showed up for the 1983 America's Cup races with wings on the keel of their winning challenger, Australia II?

We have to learn by our mistakes, and sometimes the only way to get ahead is to go back and find out just where the wheels fell off. After these last three years, I guess you'll find wheels just about everywhere. A race of this magnitude has to be more tightly organized. Nobody was happy that one of sailing's most prestigious races was settled in a room thousands of miles away from where the competition took place.