

What is a Successful Olympian Sailor?

Muhammad Ali said: "Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have skill, and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill."

Recently the question was asked, what does a gold medal winner of the future look like today? How can we recruit if we don't know what we are looking for? Is it enough to keep the doors open and hope they walk in? In an effort to answer this question Oakcliff, US Sailing and some individual past Olympians came together for a think tank style discussion.

Methodology: A survey was circulated to this group. Results were compiled and 5 hours of in-person discussion followed. Below is a report from these steps. Over the next few weeks, a slightly modified survey will be sent to all past sailing Olympians as well as all sailors currently campaigning.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdV8FXj7tsZ6nSZwv9jZfZqVSBItlaa8p5KnmcoJxZqBkuPYQ/viewform?usp=sf_link

At this point it is believed that the following are critical steps towards more success in the Olympic arena for America:

- Create and share the profile of a successful Olympic Sailor - see below.
 - This is the beginning of the process. The current sailors don't remember what it was like to see champion American Olympic sailors. Need to tell them and hopefully show them soon.
- Create a clear pathway to the Olympic team and share it with potential competitors. "So you want to be an Olympian" (helix)
 - This would be on the Oakcliff and US Sailing web sites. The most important things about this discussion are both the results and putting the information where young sailors can find it.
- Organize top athletes to provide coaching for developing athletes so the collective intellectual property is not lost with transitions between teams and quads.
- Create a centralized training center (at least per class) for training from development to top competitors
- Create a systematic ranking system in the US for sailors to climb with minimum or no international travel. See appendix. (still in development)

History of US Participation in Olympic Sailing:

- In the days of all amateur competition in the Olympics, the US dominated for a number of reasons:
 - Most of the Olympic Classes had large fleets in the US
 - Boats and regattas were accessible
 - There was no coaching so the drive to win was all inside the athletes
 - Multiple boats worked together to train and share information
 - Campaign costs were not outrageous- in part to large US Fleets and competitions
 - There was more cross training/ sailing different classes: “A good sailor can sail any boat”
 - The US qualifiers for the Olympics was 1 regatta, allowing more access, open to anyone who showed up and could win. It was an event with quite a few boats but only a few who had a realistic chance. Even though towards the end of this system, it may not have been seen as effective in pushing the US Athletes, it did allow future stars to see where the bar was.

- When the IOC started allowing professional athletes, other countries formed strong centralized, funded, team training structure and mentality. The US stayed with individual training and few connections between teams. “It was working, why fix.”
 - Around this time the classes also changed and became more technical and more expensive
 - The classes had fewer events in the US
 - More travel and therefore expense, was required to compete at a high level
 - US Athletes had to draw from foreign sailors for training partners to stay on top
 - Qualification system got more complex and required high level competition in foreign regattas

Survey Results and Discussion

Factors – rated from 1-5 – One being not impactful but nice and 5 being nearly mandatory. Some discussion centered around favorable traits and their ability to be ‘trained/learned’.

Personality Traits:

The summary of this in discussion was the one thing that every successful person has is an incredible self-belief, even in the face of disappointment. A real belief that they CAN come back and they CAN win. Possibly shown on television by Jimmy Spithill when he was down 8-1 in San Francisco Cup. But it is more than this. An optimistic bent, the confidence in themselves and their team, possibly borne in part because of the knowledge that they have done everything possible to prepare for success. Back to the inelegant quote from the Cup – “I wake up every day thinking what am I going to do to screw my competitors and what are they going to do to try and screw me”. The rest of this exercise might be the ‘to do list’ of what has to be created and assembled to support this magic ingredient.

- Seriousness / commitment (5)
- Maturity – what level is required or Ideal? (4.14) *Older is not a bad thing, currently it is around age 30 for US medalists. Many – but not all – identified the need for an early (if uninformed) spark. A serious desire to achieve success in sport even without many details in the 10-13 year range was reported by or attributed to many who reached success later in their career.*
- Cheerful/ happy (3.14)
- Not fussed – not easily excited - uber calm (3.21)
- Strong character – eg. Ben Rosenberg (4.36) - *Discussion: this can really encompass many of these personality traits but it was seen as one of the more important factors. You must have something unique, that you ‘own’ and an inner strength to be able to gain to success over a long campaign.*
- Sincere/caring (3.36)
- Respectful (4.36) *important to the respondents but pointed out some winners do not have this trait.*
- Working for something bigger than themselves (3.64) -*We didn’t talk about this much but think this comes when really working in a **TEAM** environment*
- Selfish (2.71)
- Humble (3.50) -*No need for external Validation – back to above, they believe inside*
- Genuine love of sailing (4.36) -*this goes back to the internal ‘thing’*
- Silent Confidence – “Bora” (4.07) – *Feeds back into being humble*
- Proudful/confident (2.79)
- Super competitive – internally (4.36) -*Links with Silent confidence and Humble*
- Super competitive – externally (3.43) – *Links with proudful confidence*
- Patient (3.93)
- Hungry – super motivated – urgent (4.29)
- Two person boats Crew Chemistry - *we didn’t get to this*

Work Ethic

- Personal Discipline (4.86) – *Can be developed/ taught but only to an extent*
- Internal fire (4.57) - Absolutely required. *Has our nation as a whole lost some of this fire for Olympic competition? Over exposure, scandal, move too fast to 'X-Game sports' and losing the history?*
- Strong coaches who push (4.21)
- Lots of hours training hard on the water – required. Stu and Dave are regularly out there for 200 days a year.
 - Year 2: 200 days on the water - plus competition
 - Year 3: 220 days on the water- plus competition
 - *Practice Days 4-6 hour:*
 - Diminishing returns? Is it possible to work too long? *Consensus is that no one in the US have reached this point.*
 - *Cycle is 2 quads so essentially 8 years. Need a manual as to how to do this and 'live'.*
 - *It is entirely possible to be creative – eg. Sail 6-9am, work 9:30-5:30 – sail 6-9pm Summer and 2 before and 2 after*
- Always first at the gym last at the boat park – puts in the hours. (3.64)
- Work hard – play hard (high energy) (3.79)

Organization

- Completely unorganized (1.5)
- Space cadet thinking outside the box (2.64)
- Relaxed - makes it look easy – no stress – little organization but stuff seems to happen (2.64)
- Maximum attention to detail very organized (4.29)
 - is it possible to be too organized? – *NO!!!*

Stress Management Profile:

- Consistently perform under pressure (4.71)
- Coping techniques like yoga/meditation (3.31)
- Preparation – visualization for stress management (3.79)
- On the edge of brilliance and breakdown (2.29) *again it has worked in the past but not for long*

Learning Style:

- Fast learner but maybe too quick to jump (2.86) – *From Malcolm: this is for the tactical brain- need quick thinking to start with then corral this train in to train*
- Methodical but slow learner (3.43) – *From Malcolm: This is more important for learning technique/ boat handling mechanics- need the methodical repetition to be the best at it*
- Visual, Hands on – learn by doing (3.85) – *Important to go and DO IT. Nothing is a substitute for time on the water – see above.*
 - *Sailing is always a **quest for learning** that never ends – it's an attitude; 'the more you learn, the more you learn you need to learn'*
 - *Other sports, there can be one right way to do it but in sailing there are so many variables that you need to experience to be able to process on the race course.*
 - *Use of data/ analytics in training- youngin's want to see it and are glued to their devices anyway- might as well meet them where they are*

Technical skills

- Engineering mind (2.93)- *Can be taught? (Dave Dellenbaugh mind) Bow, Tactics, Nav*
- Artistic talent (2.71) – *(Buddy Melges Mind) spin trim, helm?, the finesse in sailing*
- Ability to communicate technical issues (4.14) -*Have to communicate with the rest of the team; ask the right questions and use words that accurately give the facts as opposed to jump to conclusions. This is very important.*
- Ability to fix and adjust on the fly/water (4.64) – *can improve but there's a genetic factor. Need to have flexible thinking.*
- Ability to 'feel' and 'just know' (4.08)
 - *Buddy vs Dave Dels*
- Judge /umpire / rules guru (3.38) -*Can be taught but important to be comfortable with the process and be able to make it around the race course*
- Grasp of technical rules – eg pushing boat setup to the edge of the limits (but not over) (4.21) -*Need to at least make people comfortable with measurement process*
- Sail-making / sail shape (4.57)
- Rig tune concepts (4.43)
- Innovative (4.08)
- Math skills (2.77)
- Physics knowledge (3.08)
- Media and PR skills (see money) (3.50)
- Social skills (see above) (3.64)

Sailing Education:

- Junior sailing at a top program (2.50)
- Sailing with family as a kid, eg 'late' starter to racing (2.5) -*Valuable to get a larger skillset at an early age- loving the sport- cross training, etc.*
- Opti travel team importance (1.71) – *Can actually be a detriment, can burn out kids early on. Not Mission critical.*
- Early coaching – private or high level (2.71) -*Has to be the right type of coaching- broader in early ages. Too often training gets too narrow too quickly. Some discussion about 'intervention coaching'. In other words, going along – having fun, learning naturally and then get 'stuck' for whatever reason: skill, talent, motivation, stress etc. That is the time to get a coach, not before.*
- Success in racing U-14 (eg Optis) (2.21)
 - How does it translate to future success
 - Burnout? *This is a real thing.*
 - *Why are they successful at this early age? Maybe find examples who are really good and pick the 'why'. And then the 'why not' as in why they don't continue?*
- Non-traditional sailing (2.5)
 - Instead of junior racing type
 - Complementary to junior racing activities
- Other sports / cross over (3.43) – *first have to be a good athlete- random stats: 80% of coordination developed by the time you are 8 years old*
 - *Can you find a 6'4" 140lb female and train them to be a FX Crew? - YES! Have to be careful not to use size and weight (especially at an early age) as an automatic disqualifier as opposed to a guideline.*
- Strong Male/Female role model in sports (3.77)
- One boat whole time – pick early and stick with it (1.79)- *Over coach and over specialize too early on*
- Cross fleet experience – different levels and different types (3.86) – *Don't be afraid to change equipment as your body size/ type changes- also goes back to 'a good sailor can sail any boat'*

Physical -

- First be a great athlete – then become a great fit sailor
- Height / weight by class fits class – see below (4.43) – *the only thing you completely can't change is your height.*
- Body fat % of 10% or below (3.36)
- Natural talent (vs 'trained') (3.29)
- Body proportion? *Long arms? Short arms?* (3.07) – *Should do study for different classes – better to have short legs and long upper body?*
- Flexibility? (3.86)
- Agility? (4.21)
- Other?

By Class:

470 Skipper	5'5" – 5'10"	135-145
470 Crew	5'9" – 6'1"	155-170
Laser	5'10"-6'2"	173-180
Radial	5'8"-5'10"	135-155
RSX	5'8" – 6'1"	160-175
RSX f	5'5"-5'8"	120-135
Nacra Skipper	5'7-5'10"	135-145
Nacra Crew	5'10"-6'	165-180
49er Skipper	5'8"-5'11"	165-175
49er Crew	5'9"-6'2"	170-180
Fx Skipper	5'7"-5'11"	135-150
Fx Crew	5'7"-5'11"	135-150 (why crew not taller than skipper like men?)
Offshore	?	

Can be somewhat moldable -- Physical attributes more important on skinny boats than wider boats.

Two main types of athletes: Strong and flexible. A kinesiologist recently told me that you can train the strong athlete to become more flexible. To get the flexible athlete stronger, you need to be careful about how you do that as if done incorrectly, they will lose or 'train out' their flexibility. He also said the better matches are two of the same type of athlete, i.e. 2 strongs together or 2 flexibles together. They will synchronize better than trying to pair 2 athletes trying to match strengths and weaknesses, i.e. a strong and flexible athlete paired together.

Must be able to work with different fitness programs not just one specific style.

OUTSTANDING Must create a standardized metric of physical test. Provide weight and strength metrics as targets for potential athletes as well as specific tests (body fat, pull ups, sit ups etc)

Vision- Peripheral vision very important in many sports – glasses/ contacts hard in the dinghy sailing environment- dealbreaker?

Past Campaign Experience: This is for discussion not for ranking

Olympic:

- Previous Campaigns - What is the % of people who make it on their 2nd or 3rd try?
- Over all, is it better to 'try' and fail to make it the 1st time or state 'training for 2 quads away?'
 - Pressure for success too hard or lack of urgency
 - Fundraising
 - Training
 - 'Life'

- *Conclusion was that it was possibly but would be surprising to make the games let alone win a medal on your first campaign. There is nothing that says that you have to stay in one boat for the full 8 years so it is not the boat but more the process that you learn.*

America's Cup

- Experience/feedback from Olympians who have transition 'to' AC– The AC sailors work so much harder than we do/have.
- Experience/feedback on transition 'from' AC from DR;
- Single athlete v team mentality
 - Work load (rowers wanting to sleep – pure athlete)
 - Complications of our sport: again pure athlete of running vs sailing, horses, skiing?

Volvo

- Does it add anything?
- Is there any cross over?
- *Not really*

Other campaigns?

- J70 –boat owner (John Dane) 'tactician' Steph – does this help her cross over?
- TP 52 – would a 'pro' want to go to the Olympics? Why?

Education

- HS?
- College?
 - Are these important in the pathway?
 - Character building?
- Campaign Replaces Education?
- Delay higher education?
 - Have a path laid out as to 'how'?
 - Scholarships? Mentorship?

Lifestyle

- Young (2.86)
- Single (2.50)
- In a relationship (2.00)
- Married (1.79)
- Kids/elderly parents (male) (1.62)
- Kids / elderly parents (female) (1.77)

Money

- Plenty of money – no need to fundraise (3.07)
- Enough money – eg can cover personal life just not campaign costs (what does this look like) (3.43)
- Barely able to get by but willing to work cleaning boats to fund. (3.57)
- No money but huge talent (3.5)
- *Overall consensus seemed that Money was always a factor that can be overcome if the athlete has the drive, skills, 'talent', etc.*
- *Creating a more cohesive team with the 'centers for excellence'/ centralized training, centralized admin, marketing, PR support will also help run more financially efficient campaigns, sponsors, fundraising, etc.*
- Moving towards a 'west coast circuit' for the LA Olympics
- Sept – Oct – Nov are the opportunity months and then Miami and then Palma

Current Sailing Crowd: For discussion (I put all this at the top)

- Why the drop off? Eg -success in youth worlds and Optis but not in Olympics.
- I420 – is this only popular so you can get into college?
- Oakcliff Ranking System – to be put into place ASAP – see attached

- (1) Moving selection back to US will build participation in Olympic classes.
- (2) Oakcliff can hold these events in Oyster Bay starting with the 2019 season.
- (3) Scoring will include results from World Cup, World and US Class champions as well as Triple Crown events in Oyster Bay.
- (4) World Cup events receive double weight.
- (5) Class Championships receive 1.5x weight.
- (6) Assume each event awards 5 points for winning (or highest US sailor in international events).
- (7) Second place is 4 pts, 3rd 3 pts, 4th 2 pts and 5th 1 pt.
- (8) No points earned below the first 5 finishes.
- (9) Maximum points in 12 month period.

	Pts.
World Cup (3 events)(*)..... 3 x 5 x 2.0	30
Class Championships	
US 5 x 1.5	7
World..... 5 x 1.5	7
Triple Crown – Oyster Bay 3 x 5	15
Total pts in 12 mos.	59

- (10) Team with the most pts goes to the Olympics for the US.
- (11) Four year Quad should stress latest 12 months with credit for earlier years.

e.g. Latest 12 months 100%	59
Prior 12 months 30%	18
Prior year 20%	12
- (12) Huge advantage of this system is incentive for College sailors to get started earning points while still in College.
- (13) Oakcliff can host the Triple Crown events:
 - 50 sailor dorm
 - Over 50 Olympic hulls onsite
 - 20 ribs for coaches and rule officials
 - Well trained race committees
- (14) US has top OPTI sailors and I-420 sailors on world-wide basis.
- (15) US sailors need to see beyond Club 420 College racing – more racing in the US will help achieve our Olympic sailing goals.