

## **A Form Guide to the SAP 2009 5O5 Worlds**

*By Pip Pearson, President, International 5O5 Class*

With the SAP 2009 5O5 World Championships looming very large on the near horizon, the local Californians and most particularly the San Franciscans are feverishly practicing to produce a home town winner. The most asked question around the 5O5 community right now is, "Who is the most likely winner of Worlds?"

Having competed in 13 of the last 15 Worlds and always keeping a watchful eye on what's happening, I have been invited, as Class President, to provide a "Form Guide" and "Best Bets" list for this championship. My first Worlds were in Adelaide 1966, the last in Palermo last November in 2008. And in 43 years never have I seen a hotter fleet!

### **This year's Worlds will be the "Show Down of all Show Downs" in 5O5 history.**

A past performance Form Guide is usually of little use in yacht racing, as often you are only as good as your next race. True enough. But just take a look at the credentials of the line-up for this year – and ignore past performance at your peril...

Who do I tip to be a winner? You must be kidding. The strength of the 5O5 Fleet internationally is so strong, that any one of the top 20 boats is perfectly capable of being World Champion – and most of those will be in attendance at this year's Worlds.

### **Potential Local Favorites**

You still want an opinion?

Well surely the blinding speed on the Bay this season of the Mike Martin/Jeff Nelson team would have to put them pretty high on the "best bets" list. At this stage they would be attracting the shortest odds. (Ladbrokes have them backed in pretty heavily at this stage.)

But hang on, has anyone ever heard of Howie Hamlin? World's runner-up seven times and takes a look at his crew -- Paul Cayard. Who? Yes, that Paul Cayard. Don't think 30 years out of the boat has affected his ability in a dinghy. He's one of the Worlds' best yachties and he's in his home waters on the Bay. (How the heck did Howie manage that deal?) If you want my tip for the best brains on the course - this team has my first vote right now.

The local list goes deeper. Mike Holt is pushing the leaders and occasionally getting his nose in front when it counts in his new boat with Carl Smit back on the wire. Carl's previous experiences in "special operations" put him in a class of his own when under pressure. And my spies around the Bay Area have informed that Mike is doing lots of running -- and even cut back on the liquid intake -- and this team is putting in heaps of hours on the water. Remember the old adage: Practice makes perfect. After the first three races, the Holt/Smit team was leading the Worlds in Adelaide in 2007. Their capability is there and the desire much stronger than two years ago. On the Bay in strong breezes -- they're high on my list.

Ethan Bixby is coming to Worlds. He won the Worlds here on the Circle in 1981. Did I hear someone say, "Yeah, but that was 28 years ago?" I'm telling you right now, Ethan is a much smarter sailor today than he was then. He is without his regular crew, Eric Booth, with whom he won the 2008 Europeans, but ever heard of Simon Gorman? Simon was for many years Australia's top 5O5 crew and now has teamed up with Ethan. What a combination! Speaking off the record, we all know Australians make the best crews, so with Simon on board Ethan is probably capable of the 1981 - 2009 Double.

Then there's a string of other local Yanks who I'm not quite so personally familiar with, but with whom I'm very aware of their prowess on the race course. Fail to cover Nick Adamson/ Steve Bourdow and pay the price. Take your eye off them for a few minutes and suddenly they are past you – and just try catching them once they're in front of you.

What about the 2009 Mid-Atlantic Champions, Ramsey Key / Drew Buttner? Not to be ignored by anyone's reckoning.

This event is being hailed as the ultimate heavy weather challenge. Keep in mind however, that the racing is starting at noon. My experience on the Bay suggests that the breeze will not be 20-25 knots at noon. On the days of two races, we will certainly be finishing in a solid 25-30 knots if the normal weather conditions prevail. However, over all the racing, it may not be the "gear busting - gut busting" weather everyone is talking about. If my weather predictions are correct it opens up a whole range of opportunities for surprises in the overall results.

### **The Visitors**

Don't be misled into thinking this will be a certain home town winner to a local American. The visitors to San Francisco Bay are just dying to show the locals how to sail on their own waters.

The Germans are sailing at break neck speed these days. Jens Findel/Johannes Tellen are fresh from a 4<sup>th</sup> in the 100 boat Europeans at Kiel and the top European Boat at last year's Worlds. They are real contenders. Jens and Johannes love a strong breeze and will revel in the conditions on the Berkley Circle. In addition, their compatriots and current European Champions Wolfgang Hunger and Julien Kleiner are every bit as fast as anyone else in the World.

One of the World's most successful dinghy team and current World Champions & British Champions Ian Pinnell/Carl Gibbon are desperate to show the World that Britain still rules the waves. Along with the other significant British team of Terry Scutcher/Christian Diebitsch in Christian's brand new boat, these two teams are perfectly able to do just that. Terry Scutcher is one of the best downwind sailors I have ever seen and the conditions on the Circle are going to suit his style.

The legendary "Fast Danes" team of Jan Sagmann/Morten Ramsbaek will be on the Bay. These two were the 2007 World Champions in Adelaide and a few weeks ago scored results of:- 4,7,2,7,3,1,1,5 to be 2<sup>nd</sup> overall in the 100 boat Europeans at Kiel. You don't earn a reputation of "Fast Danes" without good reason.

And the Aussies -- Mike Quirke has been haunting the International Circuit for years. Teamed up with Simon Reffold, with their past performance and experience and the preparation they have done for this attempt, they're "arced up" and ready to spark. Also on the entry list is Chris Nicholson -- three times Worlds: 1992 Santa Cruz, 1994 Durban and 2002 Fremantle. What does that tell you? It says to me, "Heavy weather expert." With his experiences in recent years since active 505 sailing, Chris is one of the most capable yachtsmen in the World. (He has a lot in common with Paul Cayard.) Chris is missing brother Darren on this occasion, but teamed up with another successful dinghy sailor and Chris will be looking to maintain his World Champion status in a 505.

Who else to look for? A dark horse in the field could be the Higgins family in Australia, who are synonymous with success in 505 and Sharpie racing. Sandy Higgins/Paul Marsh won a heat at Santa Cruz in 2004 and won two heats in Adelaide in 2007. With a new boat and a string of Australian Championships under their belts, these two are my "hot tip" Aussies for success. Malcolm Higgins is there also -- again in the dark horse category. He is a brilliant sailor just itching to show the rest of the Worlds what he can do. Teamed up with the Nick "The Camel" Johnson, these two will blast around the circle praying for more breeze. If it blows as hard as the locals are suggesting - keep an eye on these two.

Okay, so you want my hot tips? Close your eyes and take your pick from the any of the above. Just keep in mind there are others who I haven't mentioned simply for lack of space.

I'm going to keep my money in my pocket until halfway up the last beat and then see if anyone will take my bet in the last five minutes. But even that might not be safe. In this fleet, I'll bet the lead will change in those last five minutes in every race.

I can't wait to watch it from the Committee boat.