



Defending world champion Ian Pinnell (2nd left) was the "rabbit" for a Gate Start in the 505 North Americans



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### **Can bananas stop Martin in 505 Worlds?**

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Bananas, black cats and winning the prelude regatta to a major event---bring 'em all on, because it doesn't matter to Mike Martin, the skipper favored to win the 2009 SAP 505 World Championship that starts Sunday, sponsored by SAP and APL and hosted by the St. Francis Yacht Club.

SAP is the title sponsor and APL is the presenting sponsor. Marine Media Alliance, Drystone Berridge Vineyard Estates, Lindsay Art Glass, North Sails, Ronstan and 505 American Section are supporting sponsors.

Nine races are scheduled on seven days through Saturday -- two each on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday and one on Monday, Friday and Saturday, with Wednesday off. The race course on Berkeley Circle in the East Bay, six miles from the club, measures from 1.5 to 1.8 nautical miles, three times around with a reach on the middle lap, for a total length of about 10 miles.

A noteworthy feature is the absence of a conventional starting line, instead employing a Gate, or "rabbit" start, as is traditional in 505 Worlds. More about that below.

Martin, 44, with longtime crew Jeff Nelson, both from Newport Beach, Calif., not only won this week's 505 North American Championship without having to sail all six races and has won three of the last four as a skipper and four others as crew, but one factor sets this one apart: it leads into the Big One.

"He's very superstitious," says one rival, Mike Holt, a transplanted native of Great Britain living in nearby Santa Cruz, Calif., who finished a clear second in the NAs. "He can't let a

### **Views from the North Americans**



Mike Martin and Jeff Nelson fly away from the fleet



Germany's Jens Findel and Johannes Tellen right their 505

banana on the boat, won't let a black cat cross his path . . ."

Martin scoffs at the notion that he'll be carrying a curse as extra ballast on his 16 1/2 foot dinghy.

"I'm not superstitious," the tall man said.

A more valid concern is hard-driving rivals like Holt and the five competitors among the 100 entries (as of this report) from nine countries who have won seven of the 53 previous 505 Worlds: Ian Pinnell, Great Britain, 2008; Jan Saugmann, Denmark, 2007; Chris Nicholson, Australia, 1992, '94 and 2002; Ethan Bixby, U.S., 1981 (the last time the event was in San Francisco), and Howard Hamlin, U.S., 1999.

Martin crewed for Hamlin when the Long Beach, CA sailor they won in France 10 years ago. Hamlin also says Martin is not superstitious.

"In fact," Hamlin said, smiling at the notion, "you know how the Australians think green is an unlucky color for a boat, and I remember Mike going around putting green stickers on the Aussie boats."

Ah, the mind games sailors play.

"As for winning an event before a Worlds, Hamlin added, "it's easy when you're in first place. It's when you're back there groveling that you're learning things about the venue, the boat and yourself."

This time, until Paul Cayard returns from the Audi MedCup in Europe Sunday night, Hamlin will be sailing with Ian Mitchell of Great Britain, who has won two 505 World titles as crew in 1997 and 2006.

So what is Martin's edge?

"An Australian friend I know named Carter Jackson taught me everything I know," he said in the boatyard on Crissy Field this week.

Jackson, who led early in one race this week, happened to be standing there leaning on Martin as they did knee and hip stretches on one leg.

"You do this every day so you can go tomorrow," Jackson said, noting the physical factors of sailing a 505.

Otherwise, Martin said, "We don't have anything that everyone else doesn't have. We're bigger than average but we're not the biggest team here. The important thing is getting the setup right for the conditions. We have good boat speed."

Jackson said, "I'll tell you, he drives the boat like a windsurfer. While other guys are just hanging on, he's just going harder and harder."



**Australian father-son John and Jack McLean managed to save it**



**U.S.'s Peter Scott and Jonny Moseley go submarine**



**California sailors Howard Hamlin (r) and Mark Dowdy (blue cap) pitched in to measure boats Friday**

Physically, Martin, 6-2 at 175 pounds, and Nelson, 6-4 at 210, benefit less from weight for ballast than from height for hiking leverage.

Nelson said, "We've been sailing together for 10 years now. For this class that's a long time. We know our tendencies. We know when we can push it and when it's better to throttle back. We have a bit of an edge upwind but downwind is when teamwork comes into play."

But Holt has a plan: "We may put bananas on his boat."

A half-dozen teams that planned to sail in the Worlds already had the worst luck. They were eliminated on Day 1 of the NAs when they flipped in strong breeze near the starting area, where the water depth is only 8 to 10 feet and their 22-foot masts broke when they got stuck in the mud.

Pinnell, the defending champion with crew Carl Gibbon, served as the "rabbit" for the first of two starts Thursday and had his best day with a third and a fourth to finish fourth overall, two points behind Hamlin in third. That belied the notion that the light winds at Palermo favored him last year.

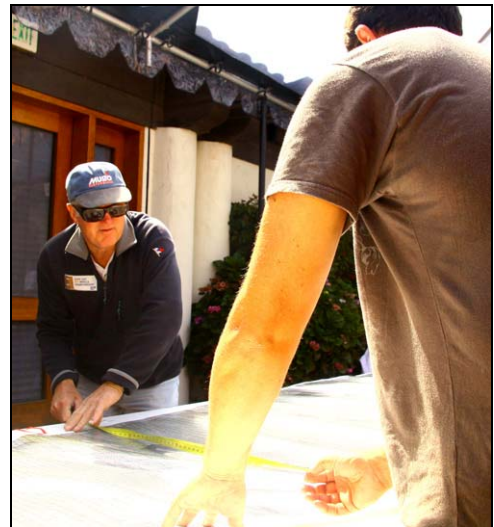
"No, no," said Pip Pearson, the 505 International Class President from Australia, "he can do it in any conditions."

He'll have a chance to prove it here.

As for the "Gate Start" explained in the Sailing Instructions, it's an evolved version of the "rabbit start" in which all boats start by crossing on starboard tack behind a single "Pathfinder" boat sailing on port tack from the pin mark, closely followed by a small "Gate Launch" power boat.

The SIs state: "Approximately 10 seconds prior to the starting signal, the Pathfinder will begin a close-hauled port tack from the Port Limit Mark with the Gate Launch close astern of the Pathfinder ... The Pathfinder shall sail its close-hauled course until it is released by the hail from the Gate Launch, after which it ceases to be a starting mark and may continue or tack onto starboard tack. After the release of the Pathfinder, the Gate Launch will continue its course and speed until the gate has been opened for the posted period in Sailing Instructions. It will then stop, make a long sound signal, drift for three minutes, and finally signal the close of the gate by lowering flag G with a short sound signal. Thereafter no boat shall start."

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**505 International president Pip Pearson (left) measured sails**