

# Update from the Crews' Union

By Kimball Livingstone | Published: August 30, 2009

There is no reason to sail a 505 except for the love of the game, love of the challenge, love of the people. Sure, you have Olympic-level talents, but the 505 is no stepping stone to a six-figure America's Cup salary (which, though scarce, still exist).

The 505 is also a realm where mere helmsmen have been put in their place.

Crews are eyes-on-the-course on these 16-foot dinghies. They're also mojo-on-the-wire. And with the dominant win by Mike Martin and Jeff Nelson at the SAP 505 Worlds on San Francisco Bay, a ten-year mission is accomplished. Ten years is how long it took Mike Martin, after crewing Howie Hamlin to the 1999 Worlds win, to become the first person ever to win the championship from both ends of the boat. At a rousing awards ceremony on Saturday night, Martin told a packed house: "I did this for all the crews out there, to prove what we've always known — those guys in the back of the boat are nothin'."

## **Cheers. Hoots. Hollers.**

This "family" has been racing with and against each other around the world for decades. 505 sailors stick.

Half a lifetime ago, a young Paul Cayard crewed for Dennis Surtees and placed second at a 505 Worlds. In 2009 Cayard bailed out of TP52 MedCup racing a day early to join Hamlin on USA 8762, and he spent the week grinning ear to ear. "You tweak something and the boat changes," he said. "Big boats desensitize you, and I am so happy Howie asked me to do this. I feel like I'm 20 again. These are the boats that taught me how to sail."

Hamlin put in: "How many 50-year-old pro sailors could fly in, jump into one of these boats — we had [reporter mused the numbers, but whatever it was, it wasn't many] days of practice a couple of weeks ago — and really sail the boat?"

A rhetorical question, to be sure. Hamlin/Cayard finished seventh.

And here is a non-rhetorical question: How often do you see a standing ovation for first and for second? Mike Holt and Carl Smit were the only people out of 97 entries who gave Martin/Nelson a scare. Both boats had extra speed in a breeze. Both were competitive no matter what. But this was Mike Martin's regatta. This was Mike Martin's moment. Meanwhile, Holt, originally from the UK but living now in Santa Cruz, California, worked tirelessly for the good of the event and the class. Regatta chair Peter Szasz told this story: "About a week ago I called Mike Holt, and he answered on his cell phone. I asked him where he was, and he was driving to Los Angeles to pick up somebody's boat and tow it to San Francisco so they could race."

Just one example of why Holt's standing ovation was partly for his race-course performance, but mostly about spirit.

After the gear-busting opening days, and an interlude of light wind, the racing wrapped on Saturday with a race nine sailed under clear skies, over white caps, in 14 knots of seabreeze building to 18. Perfect stuff. The essence of San Francisco Bay sailing. And yes, it was still a seven-mile sail from the Olympic Circle, home to Crissy Field Beach. Cayard again: "San Francisco Bay is a little bit windy, but when you [everyone at the awards dinner] go home, you'll have something to remember. It's not about the average experience; it's the unaverage experience."

Ah, Mike Martin. It was heartwarming to see a dream come true. He worked for it. He got it. And before the night was over, he got his. Saturday night was a long night, and most of the revelers had gone off to bed when a few of the high-energy, fueled-up hardcore remainders teamed up and hauled our boy out the doors of the St. Francis Yacht Club, down to the docks, down to the water, down to that cold, salty midnight bay and . . .

Yep. He surrendered to it; there was no way out of it. So let me, by way of a bottom line, tip my hat to one of the unsung heroes of West Coast sailing. Everyone who has ever been to a regatta at St. Francis has benefited somehow from his efforts and attention, but most of you never knew it, because he works behind the scenes. I speak of St.FYC's assistant general manager, Noel Omila. I have no idea how many "fires" he put out last week alone, but if you want to know just how good the man is, know this: Mike Martin made a very big splash hitting the water, and as he dragged his sorry, dripping ass out of San Francisco Bay on Saturday night, there was the ever-prescient Noel Omila standing on the dock — with an armload of towels.

**SAP. Great sponsor.**

Hasso Plattner. Doesn't want a lot of attention, just wants to be the semi-anonymous software billionaire neck-deep in the scramble with his sailing friends. 37th place with a best finish of 19th. Yeah, he gets respect.

And it's always 505 somewhere — **Kimball**





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