

The Road to Winning the SAP 2009 505 Worlds in San Francisco *By Ethan Bixby*

Cam Lewis and I won the 1981 505 Worlds in San Francisco after not having much time to sail that season. But we blocked out the time to finish our preparation on the boat, and managed to pull it all together at the end. Here's hoping you can learn from our example – and benefit from some of the things we'd change for the next time.

One important thing we did was to set the date to leave Boston and drive to San Francisco. We probably didn't give full disclosure either to our employers or my wife Trudy as to the actual event start date. But we had to be able to step back from work and finish up the boat and get some sailing in! So we managed to arrive out west early, finish some projects on the boat and then start to sail.

Our training system would probably shock today's coaches. We would sail from the Richmond Yacht Club up through the Golden Gate and crash around for a while. Then we would stop by the San Francisco Yacht Club, have a beer, and then rip on down the bay and back across to Richmond -- all in all, a very fine day on the water, with enough tacks and jibes to keep it challenging. We thought it was pretty good training and for east coast sailors in need of some time in the boat, it was perfect. When the Pre-Worlds started, we were very comfortable in the big breeze and the three days of grueling heavy air racing was feeling pretty normal.

Five Steps to Success

Step one in our recommended plan is to sail with the best teammate you can. For a venue like San Francisco that has a breezy reputation, you just plain need to have righting moment on the boat. From what I can tell from 3000 miles away, the top west coast teams have crews that are in the 200 to 220 pound range. They also tend to be tall. Skippers don't seem to matter as much! Ideally you get along great both on the boat and ashore. Your communication is easy and clear. With time the crew's ability to "paint the picture" for the helm matches the expectations and needs of the blind driver in the back (whose face is always soaked). That helm really needs to concentrate on speed, getting the boat speed feedback and tactical info without having to look around. Over time the visual judgments get calibrated and consistent, so lay lines are hit and shifts on the other side of the course are understood.

Step two is keeping that perfect teammate from breaking the boat -- or busting it yourself. Spend the time to make sure your equipment is well sorted and strong. If a part has failed on some other 505, take a good look at yours and consider replacing that part with something that won't fail. It sounds simple, but things do break -- make sure that it's not on your boat. Be ruthless on this, as the Bay will be ruthless on your equipment.

Step three is to dial it up a bit. Spend the time to get the mast perfectly trued up in the boat. Shim up the partners to your liking. Make sure the spreader sweep is the same on each side. Then check it sailing to see if it is really setting up the same on both tacks. This is easier to do with that coach guy in a powerboat with a camera, but we are in the 21st Century! Now also spend some time making sure that your board fits perfectly, jibes with a good fit, and then stops gibing when you want it to.

The creative side of your program may be bursting with ideas, which is a good thing. But get those trick systems sorted and tested. That double pole system better work 100% of the time, and your new top secret (fill in the blank) should be fully operational well before the worlds. Stay attentive to the latest developments in sails, rigs, foils and systems and consider how new ideas and changes will play out in your sailing.

Step four is to target the events you can make leading up to the Worlds. Most of us mortals don't have as much sailing time as we want or think. So choose the best events that will benefit your

ramp up. For east coasters it is hard to find windy venues in the middle of summer, so that may mean some cold late spring breeze-on training might be the only time for some suitable training.

Step five: Now get in shape! There are plenty of proven conditioning programs to help you with this, but the issue is often motivation. If you can sail every day, you will get in shape, but most of use have way too many demands on our time and sailing is limited, so you'd best hit the gym. That way when you do get to sail, you can put 100% into it. Core training is often overlooked, and obviously upper body strength is very important for high wind sailing. We are all dreading the long cold sail upwind back to the club, but with some good training you can still be pushing hard on the last leg of the day and cruise home feeling good about that part of your program!

For us out-of-towners, there is a lot to learn about the bay. I recommend reading Kimball Livingston's note on racing on the Berkeley circle, which can be found at http://www.505sapworldchampionship2009.com/documents/OlympicCircle_KLivingston.pdf. Then watch the locals and try to understand why they are going where they are.

So saddle up, strap on the wool hat and life jacket, and send it!
Hope to see you in San Francisco and good luck to all,
Ethan
USA-8715