

INTERNATIONAL YACHT RACING

BY H. F. WHITON

Even in the field of international sports competition, the tensions existing between countries have spoiled and sullied what should, by rights, be the camaraderie of participants—except in recent international yacht racing and, especially, the Olympics. Here, such a high degree of sportsmanship existed that even in the toughest grinds, good fellowship prevailed. Among those to whom most credit for this is due—as is credit for upholding the racing prowess of the United States—is H. F. ("Swede") Whiton, Olympic Gold Medal winner, captain of U. S. Metre teams, boat designer, business executive, and a firm believer in international sports competition as one means toward mutual understanding. Who better to write these reports, your Editors asked themselves, than H. F. Whiton? But, would he have time to do it—time from his sailing and club and business and designing activities? He would make time, he told us, and we proudly present the result herewith.

But first something more about the man himself. Mr. Whiton got his degree from Princeton in 1926, his subject being Physics. Further studies at Harvard Law School and Columbia's Department of Geology contributed to a background which led him to the Board Chairmanship of the Union Sulphur and Oil Corp. But boats and racing were ever a part of his life: in his first successful international series he won the Scandinavian Gold Cup (in the Six-Metre Lanai, in 1926); then another Gold Cup victory ten years later (again at Hanko, Norway) in Indian Scout, a boat he designed himself; then that Six-Metre Gold Medal we mentioned, in Llanoria (Torbay, England, '48); then other series races in '49 and '51, as helmsman of Firecracker and Goose. The International activities of 1952 he describes in the ensuing article. And to give our readers a little better "feel" of what the Olympics can mean to a participant, we append a letter which Mr. Whiton wrote to a friend on his return from abroad.



Llanoria on the ways at Nevins

The United States won two gold medals and one silver medal in the 1952 Olympics, the gold medals being in the 6 Metre and 5.5 Metre events and the silver medal in the Star Class. It seems curious that although practically all of the racing done at home was in One Design classes yet our best Olympic performances were in Open classes where the design of the boat forms part of the competition.

There were also International 14-foot Dinghy races in Bermuda and Canada, the winners of the two outstanding cups in the latter being John Carter of Essex, Connecticut, and Colin Ratsey, also representing the Essex Yacht Club. The design of the 14-foot dinghies is open.

Most of the other international events, however, were in One Design, notably the team races between

Long Island Sound and Bermuda skippers in the International Class won this spring by Bermuda, and a series between the Indian Harbor Yacht Club and Bermuda in L-16's, also one designs, won by the United States. The International Star championship was won this year by the Italian helmsman Straulino, who also won an Olympic gold medal.

There were the usual annual races for the Scandinavian Gold Cup in the 6 Metre Class, this time at Hanko, Norway, in which our *Llanoria* unsuccessfully challenged, the victor being the Norwegian *Elisabeth X*, which had won a silver medal in the Olympics.

It seems fair to say that the home training in One Design classes apparently has not hurt Americans racing in Open classes, judging by these results. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the application of some of the principles of mass production has proven that we can get the most boat for the least money in One Design classes and it is presumed that this economic fact accounts for the great popularity of One Designs in the United States. However, in competition with other nations, Open Designs seem to be more popular although there is a trend toward smaller boats because of the greater initial cost of open class boats. There is an added thrill in representing one's country in what may be thought of as a more complete sort of competition, where the test is not only of the helmsman and the crew handling and tuning up but also of the ability of the designers.

It is indicated that Open Classes are likely to continue indefinitely, in some form or other, with the interest tending toward smaller and less expensive boats. At present the ultimate as to type, size and form of rule of design appears as an unsolved and much discussed problem.

Dear Jim:

The Olympic yachting at Helsinki was indeed a fascinating experience. There were five classes of yachts competing, one boat representing one country in each class. This year the U. S. was represented in all five classes and succeeded in winning two gold and one silver medals.

Yours truly was at the helm of good old Llanoria, which also won in the Six Metre Class in Torbay in 1948 but this time, although we had the same number of opponents, namely eleven, we had more difficult competition. In fact, when it was done, no one was more surprised at our victory than I.

Six Metre boats used to be almost the smallest yachts in international competition but in 1948 and 1952 they were the largest in the Olympics. Their overall length varies with individual designs but usually is 36 to 38 feet overall. We carried a total complement of five people, all amateurs of course, and usually men, though my wife Emelyn crewed one day when Johnny Morgan was sick.

When one wins, as we fortunately did, everybody on the crew gets a medal, gold, silver or bronze for first, second or third.

The racing goes on for as long as it may take to sail seven races, one a day with a couple of days layoff in between. Points are awarded according to your standing on a cumulative basis and the medals go to the top three standings at the end, with each contender permitted to discard his poorest race. Our races were each about thirteen and a half miles long, laid out to test the boats on various points of sailing several times in the same race.

The U. S. also won in the 5.5 metres, our Complex II being sailed by Dr. Britton Chance of the University of Pennsylvania.

Our other medal was a silver one won by our Star Boat sailed by Jack Price. This group performance was enough to put us out in front on any basis as the top country in Olympic yachting, though we did not take any medals in the Dragons or Finn dinghies.

The last day was very exciting both for us and for Dr. Chance because each of us had to get a first place to take our series. Not only that, but Norway was enough ahead before our last race so she had to do worse than third in our class.

In the early stages of our race we were third, Switzerland leading by about three-quarters of a minute, Finland a couple of boat lengths ahead of us at the end of the first windward leg. Then we had two reaches. At this point Norway was sixth. Our crew set our spinnaker like lightning and we roared past the Finn. Moreover, the wind, which had been very light at the start and not to our liking, began to increase. The third leg was another reach on which we materially reduced Switzerland's lead and pulled away

from Finland. Then we had a long beat to windward. In the freshening breeze Llanoria's great power began to tell against the light weather Swiss boat. She tacked to cover us, but when she might have taken our wind she apparently was alarmed at the progress of the Finns, for she went on and tacked on them, giving us our wind free. On came the breeze, almost double its original force now and Llanoria was really moving.

We finally had to tack for the mark and converge on the Swiss, we with right of way and going very fast, having gone a little further on the port tack than was needed to make it. To this day I don't know whether the Swiss could have crossed our bow and tacked on us or not. Anyhow, he saw the hole we had left but in the excitement he tacked a boat length too soon to interfere with our wind. Fifty yards from the weather mark we passed him to windward. More and more wind. "Duck soup" for Llanoria. It was only the halfway mark! We won going away.

Much to our added joy, as we sailed slowly back toward Helsinki harbor we were electrified to find the U. S. 5.5 metre Complex II winning in her class and also to find the Norwegian "6" metre securely back in fifth place.

I believe those who have been as lucky as we will agree that there is nothing quite like participating in the Olympics, especially these Games at Helsinki, so ably run and where, for once, at least, there was a surfeit of evidence of good sportmanship and good will. Too much credit cannot be given our Finnish hosts for promoting this atmosphere.

Now that it is over some flashes stand out in my mind that may transmit some of the high points of excitement, tension, woe and joy that kept us enthralled for ten days.

One came near the end of the fifth race. Norway was leading on the all important total cumulative score, we a close second. We had just passed the Canadian boat to be leading boat in this race. The finish lay two and a half miles to windward. The wind was blowing off the land and freshening. I wanted to go toward the land. I had done so the first time up wind when it was light weather but it had not paid off, hence the struggle with Canada. Canada and Sweden tacked away from shore. We went with them. However, Argentina and Norway, fourth and fifth respectively, went on in. I consulted my very excellent and seasoned crew. We must cover second place and let Norway go. My argument was that the inshore leg was faster in smoother water and if Norway won and Argentina got second, Norway's lead would become commanding.

Finally, I did what I hated to do, namely, ignored my crew's advice and tacked inshore. As we went on we saw we were drawing further ahead of Norway and Argentina. However, the wind

kept making it more and more difficult for us to tack and head for the finish line. I could see that unless the wind shifted the other way, Canada and Sweden would be ahead of us. On and on we went. Finally, we could see the surf breaking on the reefs near the shore and we knew we must tack soon.

Then Norway and Argentina tacked far down to our port. Then our sails began to flutter. The wind was changing. We swung over, about one hundred yards from the rocks. About thirty degrees it shifted and we went home three minutes ahead. As we got the gun Julian Roosevelt stood up and said:—

"Congratulations, Skipper. You did it in spite of us." I could not answer.

Then there was the morning of the last day, Norway ahead of us. We had to win. Norway had to be worse than third. We had become good friends with the Norwegian helmsman, Finn Ferner, and his splendid crew.

Frederick Horn, one of the non-competing leaders of the Norwegian team asked me:

"Herman, are you going to win today?"

I found myself replying:

"I don't know, but if we have to lose there is no one I would rather lose to than Finn Ferner."

That night we had a celebration. The Argentines, Norwegians, Italians and ourselves were all at the same yacht club. So were the Russians, but they ate elsewhere. Incidentally, relations with the Russians were cordial but formal. They proved able seamen, but their boat was old and seldom competitive.

The Argentines put many bottles of I don't know just what on our table and on the Norwegian table and the Italian table. Italy had a gold medal in the Stars to celebrate. The Norwegians had one in the Dragons and silver ones in 6-metres and 5.5's. Soon the corks began to pop. It was quite wild and very wonderful. I noticed that at each drink the smile on Finn Ferner's face became broader and a touch sillier. A great sportsman! I knew he was disappointed. Anyhow, he had his revenge later when he beat us in the Scandinavian Gold Cup.

Many other incidents there were, too many to tell, but if you ever get a chance at the Olympics, don't miss it. Don't do what we nearly did, namely stay in the stands out of the rain the opening day. At the last minute my wife kidded us into joining the rest of the team and marching around, soaking wet and covered with mud, but we heard 75,000 people cheering us, cheering the Americans and we knew we were not alone in the world. Don't miss it if you get the chance. In fact, I get excited all over again as I write this.

Sincerely,

Swede.