

USA. Competitors look to Americas Cup for pointers in Long Beach Mayors Cup

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All eyes have been on Valencia, Spain, where Emirates Team New Zealand's challenge for the America's Cup (AC) – the most sought-after trophy in yacht racing – against defending champion Société Nautique de Genève's Alinghi is underway.

Six-thousand miles away, a similar contest waits: the Long Beach Mayor's Cup presented by St. Mary Medical Center – a Grade Two all-women match race regatta.

And although these boats are only 37-feet long, as compared to AC designs that stretch 80-feet; and are raced with a team of just seven, while AC teams have an additional ten crew – the two events bear many of the same challenges.

Both are match races: contested in an elegant duel between two boats, under precise and tricky rules. And with this in mind, contestants in this year's Mayor's Cup have kept a keen eye on the AC.

"I have watched every race of the America's Cup so far and have reviewed and analyzed every pre-start a million times!" admitted Sandy Hayes of Scituate, Mass., who traveled to Valencia to watch the first round robins. Hayes will return to Long Beach for her third attempt at the Mayor's Cup July 18 through 21, 2007.

New Orleans' Katy Lovell said, "I have been watching the matches live on the Versus Channel every morning," referring to televised and internet coverage of the AC. "On just about every boat I know some of the racers so that makes it more fun to watch," she added, saying she especially liked to tune in for the pre-start.

Fleet racing, which most recreational sailors compete in, is a battle against time and many opponents – often different sizes and models of boats as well.

The exciting game of match racing, however, pits just two boats – of equal or similar design – against each other. And the competition begins in the pre-start: 10 minutes before the race, when a rigidly structured sequence begins, where competitors have just two-minutes to enter the arena. From then on, the tactical cat-and-mouse hunt begins, and continues around the windward-leeward course.

As Mayor's Cup entrant Claudia Wainer explained, "You use maneuvers to bait your competitor into making a mistake and earning a penalty, and tactical maneuvers to get the lead, and keep it, in order to win the race."

It's this thrill that has lured these women from divergent backgrounds – including a virologist, gastroenterologist, family therapist, marine biologist, and antiques importer – to the Mayor's Cup each year.

"Match racing is exciting!" exclaimed Liz Baylis, Executive Director of the Women's International Match Racing Association. "The pre-start maneuvering is fun, exciting, challenging, physical, and cerebral all in one." Baylis, who will sail in her first Mayor's Cup this year, competed in the 2000 Louis Vuitton Cup and says she would, "love to have the opportunity to go back."

The America's Cup is the pinnacle of racing for sailors, and the Mayor's Cup a training ground and stepping stone for many. But for some Mayor's Cup racers, the 2007 AC had an added appeal. Brazilian Caroline Bejar's crew member Andrea Grael is married to Luna Rossa Challenge tactician Torben Grael; while Delphine Casas and her Team MisStral from France were rooting for Areva Challenge with friends Sébastien Col and Christophe Andre aboard.

And Australian Katie Spithill, last year's first-runner-up in the Mayor's Cup, found herself in Valencia for nearly four months with her loyalty divided. "My boyfriend is working with United Internet Team Germany. Also my brother is the helmsman for Luna Rossa, the Italian Syndicate, so I have been following both teams closely and have been lucky enough to be out on the water for some of the racing."

Spithill added, "After being so close to the action this time around I would love to be involved in an Americas Cup campaign. I think to just be part of a team would be amazing, and a big learning curve."

Whether they have goals to compete in the AC one day, or just enjoy "mixing it up" as Mayor's Cup returning skipper Charlie Arms said, the recent interest in the AC has been a boon for the racers.

"The America's Cup is currently the highest level you can reach in match racing, so it will always be something to aspire to," declared Baylis.

The Mayor's Cup will begin July 18 with registration and practice, followed by three days of double-round robin match racing in a fleet of identical Catalina 37s. Organized by Long Beach Yacht Club and the Long Beach Sailing Foundation, the Mayor's Cup is presented by St. Mary Medical Center of Long Beach in conjunction with the Port of Long Beach, and operated by the Charter Communications Long Beach Sea Festival.

About the skippers:

Charlie Arms is from San Diego, CA and a member of Vallejo Yacht Club and a competition member of Southwestern Yacht Club. She is also the Director of Sailing for the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, CA. She is currently 69th in the ISAF World Women's Match Racing Rankings. She won the 2005 Sundance Cup and finished fifth in the 2006 US Women's Match Racing Championship and Mayor's Cup.

Liz Baylis is from San Rafael, California, and a member of San Francisco and Richmond Yacht Clubs. A longtime offshore sailor, Liz began match racing six years ago and has since trophied in more than a dozen events, including a first place in the 2003 US Women's Match Racing Championship. Currently in the top 20 in the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Women's Match Race Rankings, her recent victory at the Rolex Women's Match in St. Petersburg, Florida has catapulted her into a highly visible position.

Caroline Béjar is from Niterói, Brazil and is a six-time National Champion in the Laser Radial. She finished first in the 2005 Nivea Sun Match Cup and 2005 UBS challenge Salvador - Bahia, and second in the 2004 Nivea Sun Match

Cup. She finished third in the 2006 ISAF Nations Cup Regional Final Qualifier and 2006 Match Race Brasil. In 2003 she finished fourth in the Pan Am Games Santo Domingo and sixth in the 2006 Mayor's Cup.

Delphine Casas is a member of Le Yachting Club de la Pointe Rouge in Marseille, France. Just 18 years old, Delphine has already made a name for herself in several Grade 3 and 4 events, including a recent second place finish in the Punta Lagoa Women's Match Race in Vigo, Spain. Likened to a '*French Ellen McArthur*' by the European media, Delphine stands at 19th place in the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Women's Match Race Rankings after just seven events.

Sandy Hayes is from Scituate, Massachusetts. She has been active in international match racing since 2002 and has been ranked in the top twenty of the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Women's Match Race Rankings since 2004 (currently 21st). In 2006 she finished first in the Match Race Brasil and the Rolex Women's Match Race. She finished second in the 2005 Mayor's Cup and third in the 2006 Mayor's Cup.

Katy Lovell is from New Orleans, Louisiana and is married to Olympic Tornado Class Silver Medalist Johnny Lovell. Currently she is ranked 23rd in the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) Women's Match Race Rankings. She finished second in the 2006 and 2005 US Women's Match Racing Championship. She finished third in the 2005 Mayor's Cup and fifth in the 2006 Rolex Osprey Cup and Santa Maria Cup.

Katie Spithill is from Sydney, Australia, and a member of the Royal Prince Alfred Yacht Club. She is currently 6th in the ISAF World Women's Match Racing Rankings. She finished first in the 2006 New Zealand Women's Match Racing Championships. She finished second in the 2006 Australian Women's Match Racing Nationals, 2006 Harken Women's Match Racing Championships and 2006 Mayor's Cup.

Claudia Wainer represents host Long Beach Yacht Club, and the City of Long Beach, California. A relative newcomer to match racing and currently unranked by the International Sailing Federation, Claudia nonetheless placed second in the first match race of her new campaign: the March 2007 Sundance Cup. With 25 years of west coast racing, Claudia's knowledge of local waters and conditions may prove an advantage over the field of higher ranked, international competitors at the Mayor's Cup.

Sean Downey: Complete Mayor's Cup details and race coverage can be found at: www.mayorscuplongbeach.com

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