

B'QUEST RETIRES FROM 2013 TRANSPAC RACE – QUESTIONS TPYC

San Diego, Monday, 15 July 2013; Transpac competitor B'Quest arrived back in San Diego On Wednesday, July 10. Having had their entry unilaterally revoked at roughly 6:00 p.m. Sunday evening, the double-handed team of disabled veterans decided to return to San Diego Tuesday, July 9th. After sailing for roughly 16 hours and reflecting on their status, Urban Miyares and David Hopkins decided to return to San Diego in part because their participation was clearly unwanted despite earlier congratulations and support by Transpacific Yacht Club (TPYC). The B'Quest crew now wants to clear the record concerning their status as an entry.

From the time of its entry in January, 2013, B'Quest made clear that they intended to sail as a double-handed crew with a blind skipper, Miyares and a David Hopkins, a hearing impaired veteran. Initially, B'Quest was one of several double-handed entries.

On June 23rd, a safety inspector from TPYC came to San Diego and conducted a safety inspection of the vessel. Some items were not present at that time but he was shown receipts that proved the crew had ordered the equipment. The inspector raised the issue of the required Man Over Board (MOB) test. A discussion of MOB took place between David Hopkins and the inspector because Miyares was working at a boat show at the time. The TPYC inspector told Hopkins that the missing items would need to be on the boat when they arrived in LA. The inspector asked Hopkins to have Miyares call him and left.

Upon arrival in LA, B'Quest was again inspected. Roby, who was introduced as the lead safety inspector for the TPYC to Miyares and Hopkins, conducted complete safety equipment check, questioned Hopkins on MOB, and received the medical information form and SAT phone number. According to Hopkins, "Roby told me he does not see many vessels as well organized with their safety equipment as B'Quest." When he was done, according to Miyares, "he asked me to raise my right hand and then jokingly told me to "... solemnly swear that, upon crossing the Diamond Head Transpac finish Line, to drink as many Mai Tai's as I wanted." With that oath, the safety inspection was concluded and B'Quest was led to believe that it had passed.

Unfortunately during this stressful time, Miyares did not get much sleep before the race. When he went to pick up the transponder, a couple hours after completing Sunday's (July 7) required Safety at Sea all-day seminar (with his crewmate Hopkins), Miyares was handed the attached letter from Dave Cort dated 7/7/13 stating TPYC would not accept their entry in the 2013 Transpacific Yacht Race. This letter (not on official TPYC letterhead) was provided fewer than 24 hours before the scheduled start on 7/8/13 and . Severely upset, especially after the priors day's emotional roller-coaster ride of events, to include receiving the official TPYC Skipper's Package and having his and David's photo taken at the Transpac before-race gala the day before (Saturday, July 6), Miyares immediately left the Shoreline Yacht Club's room where David Cort was stationed and other Transpac skippers were getting their transponders.

When Miyares returned to the Shoreline Yacht Club where the Team Challenged America transponder was assigned to him, Miyares signed the agreement stating he would return the transponder upon completing the Transpac Race. This again put the team under extreme stress and sleeplessness just prior to a long distance offshore race, which they were now being told they could not participate in.

With regard to the failed email test, Hopkins tried several times to do the e-mail test and it did not go through. When he inquired of the race personnel about it, Hopkins was told that TPYC was having problems with their computers receiving the tests. Hopkins believes he did get one through and that the requirement was completed.

B'Quest decided to start the race the next day with its protest flag flying. At the start line the race committee gave a "thumbs up." When David Hopkins announced the protest, TPYC Race Committee told them they were not a participant and to stay off the course. B'Quest continued its course towards Hawaii although they were fatigued from the stress of the previous weeks and months of preparation. As they continued, the B'Quest crew realized that they were not really sure if they wanted to complete the race after being shown a very unwelcome attitude by TPYC. This was no longer a "fun" and "enjoyable" race.

They believed they had completed all that was required and did not agree that the TPYC had any right to question Miyares' abilities as skipper of the vessel, especially because, as far as they knew, they were the only entrant who was asked to demonstrate MOB abilities. This was not in the Notice of Race, nor written anywhere in any of the race instructions or requirements for entrants, which they had applied for and accepted by TPYC months previously.

Hours after the July 8 start, around 4:00 a.m., Miyares and Hopkins hove to and reflected on whether to continue or not. They realized that the mission and objective in doing the Transpac had dramatically changed, and their desire and competitive spirit had left them. Being fatigued as they were, B'Quest made the decision to retire from the race and proceed to San Diego under jib. They arrived in San Diego at 1:30 p.m. on Wednesday. A Challenged America team member notified Dave Cort by e-mail they had retired.

Challenged America has dedicated its organization to getting those suffering from a handicap into a therapeutic program involving sailing. Urban Miyares, a disabled and blinded Vietnam veteran has dedicated his life to this effort, with safety being first and foremost in all of his training of his students. He is a very experienced offshore competitor and a veteran of 2 other TransPac races. He was very instrumental in bringing the annual VA Summer Sports Clinic to San Diego which enables severely wounded war veterans to compete in Sailing, Surfing, Cycling, Track & Field, and Kayaking as part of their rehabilitation. He has been recognized by many, to include US SAILING, for his efforts in advancing rehabilitation and advancing the sport of sailing to youth, adults and veterans with disabilities.

David Hopkins, also a disabled veteran, is a lifelong sailor and surfer. He joined the team at Challenged America as a volunteer 7 years ago and works to raise money for the organization through boat donations. He has dedicated the last year to getting the B'Quest fit and ready for the TransPac race. His dream was to compete in the race, double handed, with Urban. They have a long history of sailing together and he has dedicated the past year to getting the B'Quest fit and ready for the TransPac race. He took particular pride in all of the safety aspects of preparing for the race. Safety is most important to Challenged America mission working with disabled sailors.

Miyares and Hopkins are dejected that they were refused a start after they had filed and paid for an entry, solicited donations and undertaken the year long preparation for sailing to Hawaii. The B'Quest crew wishes good luck to their fellow competitors and they hope that all arrive safely and enjoy the Aloha of Hawaii upon their arrivals. Challenged America and B'Quest will await the outcome of their protest against TPYC. B'Quest does not agree with the TPYC's allegation that B'Quest failed the safety inspection or the specifics of TPYC's allegations. B'Quest will await the results of the protest and any subsequent appeals to ISAF.

Miyares, Hopkins and the entire Challenged America Team are understandably disappointed that their year long quest to win the double handed division was refused. Regardless of the reasoning or goal of TPYC, its last minute decision and spurious allegation that B'Quest failed the safety inspection were simply unnecessary actions. From the beginning, Challenged America and B'Quest sought to be treated the same as any other entry - equally. If TPYC had required a MOB demonstration from each competitor, B'Quest would have complied. Challenged America, like any disabled person, simply sought to be treated with equal dignity.

Challenged America's many supporters, sponsors, and donors, both here and in Hawaii are also disappointed. They stood by the team and made sure their goal to race was achieved. None of B'Quest's sponsors, suppliers or supporters ever questioned Miyares' ability to sail the race with Hopkins. Those who know and supported B'Quest know the crew's abilities and commitment to safety.

Challenged America thanks its individuals, sailors, maritime businesses, and government supporters. Despite TPYC's statement that B'Quest failed its safety inspection, Challenged / B'Quest was not allowed to race because they did not perform a MOB demonstration, a requirement which was not forced on any other competitor.