

Dave Ullman is the president of Ullman Sails, a three-time 470 world champion, and winner of a dozen other national championships. By common definition he is a professional. In this interview at the MORC Internationals with Editor John Burnham, Ullman says:

"Get the Pros Out of Racing"

Sailing World: Why do you want 'professionals' banned from racing?

Dave Ullman: People in the industry—the professionals—are hurting the sport of yacht racing. To win on a bigger boat you need somebody with a lot of expertise to sail your boat. So you find sailmakers, yacht designers, etc. But to get them to sail your boat you have to buy new equipment, whether you need it or not.

In the long run that kills the sport for a couple reasons: 1) There are only so many good sailors in the industry—there's only X amount of talent—and if you can't get one of those good people you probably don't have a chance of winning; 2) it takes the fun out of it for owners; they pay the bills and don't race their own boats. People who want to race their boats get out of the sport because they don't have a chance of winning. I know a lot of people who have quit sailing because they didn't think they had a chance to win.

We need to ban industry people; we need to exclude them from normal weekend sailing, one-design sailing except Olympic classes, from MORC sailing totally—I don't mean just driving, I mean off the boats entirely. And we need to ban them from IOR events, except for a professional division. Hell, right now there are people like myself sailing PHRF weekends in Newport (Calif.). That's absurd.

SW: Is that because a customer has asked you to sail with him and that represents a "sale"?

DU: It's strictly a defensive move. "Joe Blow has got Sam the Sailmaker with him this weekend, you've got to come along because I usually beat Joe.



Could you come sail with me this weekend?" Rather than keeping both of us off the boats. But the only way that we'll all be kept off is through legislation. It's never going to happen voluntarily. The customers want to win and the sailmakers want to sell sails. Or the boat designers want to sell boats. And it's no better having me sit next to the customer saying, "Up, down, up, down." A lot of people say, "Maybe the professional should still be on the boat to help us sail the boat." I say he should be on board Friday, not on the weekends.

SW: Many people will say that racing with professional sailors, usually the best sailors, improves people's learning curves. They enjoy competing against the best. That's why many one-design classes won't legislate them out.

DU: I think that's garbage. I think we can do much more to help somebody on Friday, on his boat with his crew, than we can by racing his boat around the course. We don't help them by racing.

That's an excuse we use, and it's an excuse used by people who like to win with us on board their boats. I don't think it's healthy for the sport, and I don't think it's a valid excuse.

I do clinics sometimes for customers on a Friday with their whole crew—I can do so much more for them in one day on the water than I can racing with them all the weekends of the year. When you're racing you can't teach them that much because you're in the fight of the race. I really think the owners would have a much, much better time sailing their own boats, and there would be many, many more doing it. Then have a separate professional division.

SW: A division exclusively for professionals?

DU: I'm not saying that amateurs couldn't race in the pro division like in any other professional-amateur sport. Any amateur can play at Wimbledon anytime if he can qualify. Have a pro division and then let the amateurs sail in it if they want to test themselves.

SW: The RORC is doing something similar to this in England right now, with an open pro-type division and an amateur division. But I don't know if professionals are strictly excluded from the second division.

DU: They're not, and they should be. Where you need to put the pros is in a professional division or in Olympic-class boats. Let them sail in that arena. Let that arena have corporate sponsorship to pay for it. Open it up to advertising so money is no problem. Have a professional division for the pros, and then get the amateur division back for people sailing their own boats—weekend sailors where they belong.

SW: Should professionals be legislated out by the USYRU?

DU: Have to be. It cannot be on a voluntary basis, because people won't do it on their honor.

SW: An organization such as MORC could do it on their own.

DU: Some have done it. And some one-design classes have already done it. In the Catalina 22 class, which is the biggest one-design class in the U.S. right now, a professional can't be on board the boat. It's in their by-laws, and it's right.

SW: In the Express 27 class they have what's become a fairly prestigious award for owner-driven boats, but all the boats are on the same starting line together.

DU: I think that's a half-baked step. Why have professionals out there at all? What good do people like myself do out there? They don't do any good at all.

Let's put a division between amateur and professional like every other sport. When was the last time a club amateur had to go out and play golf versus Jack Nicklaus in a club tournament? I mean that's what we're talking about. And so what's he do—he hires Arnold Palmer to go out and play against Jack Nicklaus under his name. You've got to do something to discourage that. Having someone like Greg Fisher or myself come in to a one-design regatta is the same thing as Arnold Palmer going to some weekend golf tournament in east Georgia and teeing it up and playing. We're doing one-designs no favors.

We should be selling our sails by helping the customer rather than going out and beating him. We should be spending more time teaching, more time working with the customer rather than going out and pounding on him. I don't care how you sugar coat it, that's what we do, right? We go out and pound regattas, beat them up to sell our sails. I consider myself pretty good at it. That's the truth to it.

Some way we have to get around that, and I'm real open to any ideas anybody has. I think it has to happen. This came up about six years ago, and I didn't think much of it because the sport was healthy; or it was just starting to do its nose dive.

SW: What if we kick out the pros and then Dave Ullman goes to work outside of sailing?

DU: I'm an amateur again.

SW: As long as you're not actively

pursuing a business in the marine industry.

DU: Right. You know, my expertise gets so much better because I sail so much now. My expertise isn't better because I was born better. It's because that's all I do now—sail. Well, that's an unfair advantage.

SW: How many days do you sail in a year?

DU: Actually go out in a boat? Over 200.

SW: How many days are you racing?

DU: Since the first of the year, I've had four weekend days that I didn't go out and race.

SW: How many week-long regattas have you been to?

DU: Eight or ten. The only people spending more time sailing than I am are the 12-Meter guys. That's unfair going out against weekend guys. I'm deriving my livelihood by sailing boats.

SW: There doesn't seem to be any doubt that Dave Ullman is a professional. But what would be the broad definition?

DU: Anybody who derives their livelihood through sailing is a professional. Yacht designers, sailmakers, boat brokers, on down the line. Anybody who's in the marine industry, to me, is a professional. That would be the strictest interpretation of what I'd like to see.

In the long run a lot of the people who now come into sailmaking or other fields because they like to race boats would get regular jobs and stay out of the industry. That would help lower the price of sails because you'd have people in the industry really working as workers, not sailors. You don't hire a guy in the assembly line at GM because he wants to be a race car driver. That's what we're talking about, right?

SW: You're talking about factory teams.

DU: In the skiing industry you don't hire guys that make skis—the guys that make skis for Kneisel aren't downhill racers. They're manufacturing people. That alone will lower the price of the product.

SW: Going back to the definition, inevitably there are going to be grey areas.

DU: Yes, and there are going to be some people hurt by this. But you're talking about only a handful, I think. If the sport thrives, and a handful get hurt, that's OK. There's going to be some cry-

ing, but I think you're talking about only a couple hundred people that could potentially get hurt for potentially bringing the sport back. Maybe I see it not as it is, but every time I bring this up people applaud me. I think the reception out there would be very good with only a few voices dissenting.

SW: Let's say you own a boat shop. You're in the marine industry. But you have to work on the weekends too.

DU: As you say, it's marginal. I don't know how you treat that one.

SW: Or a marine hardware wholesaler, who works five days a week and races on weekends.

DU: If he doesn't race with people he sells his products to then maybe he'd be an amateur. I don't know how you would treat the fine lines, but if I had my way, the fine lines would be too deep, not too thin. I'd rather hurt a few people to benefit the majority. I'd rather not see this thing fall on its face because there are some loopholes.

SW: I suppose like changing a tax law—there would be a scramble.

DU: There's going to be people filibustering to stay in when they're kind of on the edge, but if I had my way I'd just chop it in a straight line and say that anybody in the industry would be out. And sure, the wholesale distributor who isn't a red hot racer would probably be hurt. But if amateur racing is that important to him he'd get into another business.

SW: If you develop a thriving professional circuit, you might then attract people into it who are interested in racing for their livelihood.

DU: Absolutely, but these people wouldn't be in the industry, they'd be professional racers. That's a bonus. If this whole thing happens why shouldn't somebody with very good talent, someone like Dave Curtis, actually be able to make a living sailing? A Jack Nicklaus of sailing ought to be able to make a living sailing, and not have to make sails or be in the marine industry.

SW: Do you think there is a kind of racing that could make money as a professional sport, some kind of photogenic or media-oriented sailing—you think it would be good or bad for the image of the sport?

DU: I think it would be good for the image of sailing because I think its image now is very bad. Yachting to non-racing people is a very snooty upper class yacht club-oriented sport, which keeps people out of the sport. I think it

Last spring, a USYRU committee began examining the issues of professionalism and advertising in yacht racing. Following are excerpts from their candid, constructive report, which was released as this issue went to press:

Another Angle On Professionalism

The report begins, "Today, commercial sponsorship, professional sailing, and advertising are an established part of yachting, and their continued growth is certain." It goes on to say, "Some of the traditional attitudes and rules within the yachting community have inhibited commercial growth and forced some commercial and professional racing to develop outside of USYRU. Sailing is a diverse and highly segmented sport...What works...for one segment may be all wrong for another. There is no reason to require uniform application of rules to all segments, particularly the rules for the commercial aspects of the sport. Decisions on these matters should be left to the organizers of each event."

That excerpted statement sums up the straightforward, neutral-bias tone of the report, which goes on to make specific recommendations advocating a USYRU stance supportive of commercial and professional racing, changes to Rule 26 ("Advertising"), and an addition of an appendix to classify Open, Grand Prix and Corinthian events. Since the appendix proposal relates specifically to Dave Ullman's comments, we'll print it in this space. Turn to a special report in "The Finish Line" for a look at the other recommendations.

Recommendation—That USYRU adopt, effective immediately, the following as a prescription to the racing rules:

USYRU Appendix 16—EVENT CLASSIFICATION GUIDE

This appendix shall apply only when and as prescribed in the notice of race and sailing instructions. It may be used by an organizing authority to classify an entire event, or a division, fleet, or class within an event. This appendix shall not affect the definitions in Appendix 1—Definition of an Amateur and Eligibility Regulations, or the provision of any class rules.

Eligibility requirements may be prescribed by stating the required Appendix 16 status of a number, percentage, or certain positions of the crew, or by stating the desired event classification below.

1. Open Classification

1.1 An Open event is one in which all classifications of sailors compete together. There are no limitations or restrictions of the status of any competitor except those which may be prescribed in the notice of race and sailing instructions, or the class rules.

1.2 No participation payments, monetary prizes, or their equivalents shall be offered. No prize with a value or more than \$300 (other than a prize offered only for temporary possession) shall be offered except when USYRU consent has been given in accordance with Appendix 1, Par. 1.2(ii).

1.3 Advertising on yachts is prohibited except as permitted by Rule 26.1 and the event sponsor's flag permitted in the USYRU prescription to Rule 26.

2. Grand Prix Classification

2.1 In a Grand Prix event there are no restrictions on sponsorship, prizes, or commercial support of yachts or participants, except that advertising on yachts shall be in accordance with Rule 26 and the USYRU prescriptions.

2.2 A Grand Prix event is any event that

- is so designated in the notice of race and sailing instructions, or
- offers participation payments, monetary prizes, or their equivalents, or
- permits advertising on yachts beyond that permitted by Rule 26.1 and the event sponsor's flag permitted in the USYRU prescription to Rule 26.

3. Corinthian Classification

3.1 All participants shall qualify for Corinthian status.

3.2 No participation payments, monetary prizes, or their equivalents shall be offered. No prize with a value or more than \$300 (other than a prize offered only for temporary possession) shall be offered, and this limitation shall not be waived.

3.3 Advertising on yachts is prohibited except as permitted by Rule 26.1 and the event sponsor's flag permitted in the USYRU prescription to Rule 26.

3.4 A Corinthian sailor is a person who, during the preceding 15 months, has not:

- raced in any Grand Prix event, division, or class,
- been remunerated in any way, directly or indirectly, for racing,
- used, or permitted his racing activities to be used, to promote a commercial enterprise,
- been classified or registered as a professional under IYRR (International Yacht Racing Rules) Appendix 1,

(e) raced in any yacht when it received a participation payment or was eligible to receive monetary prizes or their equivalents, except when his share of such payments or prizes was assigned to USYRU in accordance with Appendix 1, Par. 1.2(i), or

(f) raced in any yacht granted an advertising exemption under IYRR 26.2.

3.5 Corinthian status is accorded to full-time students under the age of 18, except those excluded by 3.4 (b, c, d, or e) herein; and paid hands employed solely in connection with the maintenance and delivery of yachts.

3.6 Participation in an Open event or reimbursement of travel and nominal expenses shall not, by themselves, be grounds for loss of Corinthian status.

In a supporting statement, the committee says, "Sailors (should be) identified by the events in which they race, not by their occupation. The open classification mirrors today's events with the traditional limits on advertising and cash prizes, but no limits on who participates. The Grand Prix classification provides a new game for top level sailors, professional or amateur. It is fully commercial, permitting cash prizes and advertising. The Corinthian classification provides an option for those who wish to compete only with those of similar interests and skills."

would be good for the sport to have an image of grand prix flat-out racing like Indy-car racing. I think that would be very, very, very good. It would be a by-product of what we're talking about. It would force a lot of people into that arena, and you'd have no trouble getting corporate sponsorship for it to pay the bills if they can advertise. Obviously that end of it would be hands off: Why shouldn't IBM be able to put IBM across the sail if they're paying the bills?

Look at IOR now: It's so expensive that only a handful of people in the world can properly play the game. The whole thing is falling on its face because it's too expensive. A lot of corporations or individuals could afford it if they could put the name of a company on it and write it off. Why not let them? Why not have one IOR division be professional and have the second division of IOR be amateur, have the Olympics be open and have some professional 40-foot unlimited-type catamaran class and stuff like that?

SW: Do you think IOR would hold up?

DU: I think IOR would not only hold up but thrive. I think IOR right now is in its death throes. The numbers are decreasing extremely fast. I think two divisions of IOR would be a good deal; a corporate division with big bucks and a weekend division with the local guy sailing his own boat—maybe it wouldn't even be IOR, but it would be handicap racing that isn't arbitrary handicap like PH. The rule doesn't matter; it's the people out participating.

SW: So you think in big boat sailing it will just be a couple of years until one way or another there is essentially going to be a commercial division.

DU: It's already happened in Europe. USYRU is very conservative and slow and it hasn't happened here yet, but the pressure will make them do it eventually. I'm really of the opinion that if we don't do something pretty soon, there's going to be no sport left. I think it's to that point. I see it every day—I make my living counting the numbers. This is all going to collapse on its face if we don't do something, and I think this professional deal is really the right way to do it. I feel awfully strong about it. I think the more people participating, the better off we all are.

SW: Would one of the results of banning the pros be that most sailors would end up sailing

lower-tech boats?

DU: I hope so, because the pressure now to build all these good high-tech boats is not coming from the owners. It's coming from the people who are putting the projects together—the sailmakers, the yacht designers. Most of the owners wouldn't know the difference. Without us you'd see more racing production boats, less high-tech, less *extreme* high tech.

SW: Isn't there a danger we'd end up with a case of the rich getting richer? The wealthy owner would still be in the driver's seat, could buy the most sophisticated boats, and buy talent—people not in the industry but very good sailors—and still have professional-type efforts.

DU: You're going to have that to some degree, but I think far less because right now these projects are all being put together by people like myself who really know what's good and what's bad. The average college kid won't have the time to spend to really put a project together—he might step on board to race it after the owner has put it together; but I think more often you'll see owners driving their own boats. And once in a while there will be a couple of owners who happen to be very good sailors and will do really well—that's fine.

SW: Looking at the MORC Internationals, can you give us some specifics about what might happen with the costs if pros weren't here?

DU: Let's look at our 27-foot MORC boat. We had a Kevlar/Mylar main, three No. 1s, a 2 and a 3, three spinnakers—about \$14,000 worth of sails. That's absurd. There's no reason why these boats shouldn't have a \$5,000 inventory: They should have a Dacron main, Mylar No. 1 and No. 3 and two spinnakers.

And our boat probably cost \$40,000. It's a baked boat—pre-preg and cored construction. Should not have been allowed. They ought to be fiberglass boats, and cost \$15,000 or \$20,000, retail. Then you'd have a \$25,000 26-foot MORC boat. You could have a lot of people out racing if that were the upper limit.

But we'd need legislation. We'd need restrictions on the production of boats and materials in sails—anything to reduce the cost of the product to get more people out sailing.

SW: Yet as a sailor who's seen the development of all the fancy equipment, all the lines, the sails, don't you find the boats more interesting to sail today?

DU: No, no. Not particularly. The development of the sails—like all the

Kevlar mains at this regatta—doesn't make the sailing any better at all—it just makes it more expensive. It makes the boats one or two percent faster, but so what? What's the difference if you're going across the bottom at 6.0 knots or 6.1? It doesn't change the sport, it just adds an extreme amount of cost to the sport; it doubles the cost of the sport for one-tenth of a knot.

These boats ought to have all Dacron sails, or certainly Dacron mains and maybe Mylar jibs—no Kevlar at all—and they ought to have half the number of sails, and they should not have any exotic construction. They all ought to be straight fiberglass, and cost half as much. A \$90,000 MORC boat is absolutely absurd. And the pressure comes from us, not the owners. The owners come to us and say, "We want to win, what's it going to take?" and then we lay out a program for them.

SW: And you try to make it a little bit better than the last one.

DU: Yeah, just accelerate a little more because we want to win to sell our products. I should be pushing my product in a professional arena like Pennzoil

pushes it against somebody else in Indy, and then I should be doing everything possible from an educational standpoint to be helping the average sailor.

What I'd really like is to see the numbers increase to what they used to be. I used to have a very thriving business because there were once 10 times as many people out racing sailboats as there are now. I don't think those numbers are that far off. You look in the back of your magazine at the national championships, and some of those only have 8, 10, 15 boats. They used to have 50 to 100 boats in all of those classes. I mean a bad regatta in the old days was 30 or 40 boats for a nationals. Now the best ones have 30 or 40, right?

I'm not saying that this is the whole problem with the sport; but I think that the USYRU and the powers that be in the sport must face up to the fact that yacht racing—not sailing—is in a nose dive, is heading for a brick wall. It's crashing. The numbers are down dramatically, and anybody who says any different is looking at isolated cases and has their head in the sand.

What Do You Think?

Do you agree with Dave Ullman that racing sailors should be divided by profession? Or with USYRU's working committee that events should be classified, and sailors should choose the competition that suits them? Would the one proposal be too severe? Would the other be too complex to administer? Perhaps the status quo isn't so bad, and things should be allowed to develop as they will?

Check off the approach you support; add comments, on a separate sheet of paper if you'd like. Let us hear from you.

I support the

- Ullman Proposal to exclude those in the marine industry from amateur sailing;
- USYRU Working Committee Recommendation to divide sailors by the type of event in which they choose to race;
- status quo, allowing qualifications of sailors to be determined by classes and sponsoring organizations.

Under the USYRU recommendation, I would be classified as a

- Corinthian sailor
- Grand Prix sailor

If the Ullman proposal or the USYRU recommendation were adopted, I would prefer to compete in

- Corinthian events or divisions
- Open events or divisions
- Grand Prix events or divisions

Send to: Professionalism Survey, Sailing World, 111 East Ave, Suite 200, Norwalk, CT 06851