

Thoughts on the 2017 StFYC Yachtsman of the Year Award, Nicole Breault

On Tuesday, January 9, 2018, the St. Francis Yacht Club awarded me one of their highest honors, the Jerome B. White trophy for Yachtsman of the Year 2017. I am blown away by the notion that my name joins a such a weighty list of names in the club's history, and many with great fame in the sailing world. I am deeply moved by this acknowledgement of my racing and contributions to the club, even more so by the symbolic gesture to grant a woman the rank of yachtsman... and the club did so during the milestone election and inauguration of their first female commodore, Theresa Brandner.

I hold a deep respect for the women in competitive sailing who have preceded me with successful racing careers, as well as for the female competitors who have challenged me on the water and have helped make me the competitor I am today. All of these tenacious women have had to struggle against the inertial forces of a sport historically enjoyed by men alone, and by doing so they carved a sphere of accomplishment within the wider field. When a woman achieves distinction as "yachtswoman," the recognition is loaded with gender-specific importance, and the title is loaded with the legacy of women in the sport. Kudos to those leading ladies of the sailing world, and especially to rockstar foiling kite world champion Daniela Moroz, US Rolex Yachtswoman of the Year for 2016 and repeat StFYC Yachtswoman of the Year for 2017.

Whether intended or not, in naming me the StFYC Yachtsman of the Year for 2017, the club has made a huge statement to neutralize the gender qualification of this top award. Perhaps the name of this honor should change to "yachtsperson," and yet in delaying such a change while awarding it to me, we see the cultural paradigm of our past and its sticky influence on gender disparity in sailing laid bare.

Over time, the courage of female sailors and their male advocates has eroded the rules of exclusivity, and using me as an example, the StFYC has made a bold move naming me their 2017 Yachtsman of the Year. Were that merely for a successful racing record, it would be significant enough. However, the club also focused attention on my efforts to bring more women into sailing and create opportunities to advance their skills, thus amplifying the message and mission of inclusiveness going forward.

I remain amazed and astounded by this honor. My heartfelt appreciation goes to:

- Commodore Jim Kiriakis and First Lady of StFYC Kathleen Kiriakis for I am certain of their leading role in support of me and the women's sailing initiatives this past year.
- Team Arbitrage & Good Trade (J/105s #116 & #96)
- Sisters- and brothers-in-arms I affectionately call Team V
- Team StFYC for the Hinman Masters
- Volunteer coaches for the StFYC Women's Spring Sailing Course
- Coaches, umpires, and RC volunteers for the SF Bay Area Match Race Clinegatta
- StFYC Race Office and all the other support staff that run this ship day-to-day
- Members of the Executive Race Committee and the J/22 subcommittee
- Women of StFYC and the broader sailing community who came out of their comfort zone to try something new in a very challenging venue and emerged with great enthusiasm for more
- St. Francis Sailing Foundation for their support of my racing and coaching efforts
- UC Berkeley Sailing Team for their patience in sharing my volunteer time with others

And finally, much extra love goes to Bruce Stone for his great talent, smarts, generosity, experience, and encouragement. My boat's been up on a plane since I met him. He is my yachtsman of every year.