

# Tip & Shaft

## / SAIL RACING



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### MIKE GOLDING : "SAILING CAN BE A PEOPLES SPORT !"

Under normal circumstances [Mike Golding](#) would have been in Saint Malo to enjoy the [Route du Rhum-Destination Guadeloupe start](#). But the **four times Vendée Globe starter** who dedicated nearly 20 years of his life to the solo round the world race and the classic Transatlantics was in Sarasota at the [World Sailing Annual Conference](#). He was invited there along with [Dee Caffari](#) to give their perspective on **solo and short handed ocean racing** at a key forum. Golding was not directly involved in [the decision to bring an offshore event into the Olympic roster for 2024](#) but knowing French sailing like he does, and especially how the oceanic sport has a huge public following in France, this time he was happy to forego the pleasures of Saint Malo and undertake **essential missionary work** at just the right time.

#### What was your feeling about your first World Sailing conference?

The whole World Sailing set up seemed inordinately complicated with so many meetings and mixed agendas. I would say the offshore and oceanic forum was well attended with people like Dee there helped. I took some risks. **I stood in a room full of Olympians and told them the Olympics was the equivalent of go karting compared to Formula 1.** That was a bit of a gamble. But to some extent it was water off a duck's back. Five seconds later they were arguing the toss about Olympic event minutiae. But in the context of offshore inclusion in the Olympics, it was part of a general impetus for a representation of offshore sailing in the Olympics.

#### So you are happy with the outcome?

Of course there are so many people complaining we have lost the Finn. But in the end that is one of ten medals. If it goes that far that there is offshore racing in the Olympics it is one of ten medals. And at least it has been given a try. And the other thing is because it will happen 24 hours a day, for the first time in Olympic history when all the sports stop at the end of the local daytime, then this



will still be Olympic sport going on. You can have 24 hours of a day coverage going on outside of the arena. My point is it is going on 24/7 all around the world. **Sailing in the Olympics is definitely niche and definitely not the most popular and is a terrible sport for TV.** Now it can occupy a different space which no other event can. And I think that will increase the profile tremendously.

#### **Do you have concerns?**

There is mileage I am sure, provided World Sailing choose the right boat, the right equipment and the right set of rules. **And there I am worried.** They have a working party that is assembling ideas. But Stan Honey is the only person I can see with any sizeable offshore experience but he has no shorthanded experience. I am a little concerned about some things. They were talking about engines. **I am saying you don't want to take a diesel engine to the Olympics.** For any sake ! We are in the 21<sup>st</sup> century ! Discussions like that irritate me. I can see that going wrong. Same with autopilots. You need autopilots or the race is not long enough. **A 24 hour race is no good.** It has to be long enough that you have to sleep. You have to rest. It has to be an offshore race, like a [Figaro](#), nothing more nothing less.

#### **What do you think of the equipment choice?**

World Sailing should be commissioning a design. I think **World Sailing should build and buy 20 of these designs which are not then commercially available.** Those boats should be maintained as a unit for training and racing, a closed fleet for the Olympic and World Championship events only, so then Zimbabwe would have as much access to these boats as the UK. Or there could be 40 at different international hubs but the idea is you prevent the rich nations getting ahead. You are charged to use the boats and access is limited and equalised. I think there is a workable system. What you don't do is have a [Figaro 3](#), you don't have foils, you don't have complexities. You have a very simple boat. The boat they have chosen the [L30](#) has a lift keel with a trim tab. You don't want all that stuff. **You don't need it and complexity is divisive on the water.** Teams who know how to use a trim tab would do better than teams that don't. You want a real simple boat. I think it needs to look cool.

#### **What should the age range be, should it be limited?**

I am thinking about this. Part of me thinks this should be limited to Under 30s. I don't know. I am torn. **If the event is in France they are going to want to bring in François Gabart to step in to win a medal.** But a big part of me thinks this should be a development structure for younger sailors coming up rather than older sailors taking a step backwards. But I am not sure that matters right now. Is the Olympic medal always going to always be won by a Figarist and right now the way it looks the answer is yes. **It would not be good enough for the Olympics if the next decade was dominated by Figaro sailors.** That is not a fair, open medal. That is why I think it should be for younger sailors, that would give you a platform into professional sailing. And it can also work to a broad weight range, yes you have maybe lost the Finn, and I hear people talking of the under 65 kilos and the over 80 kilos and I was on the verge of introducing each other and saying 'team up. Here you are.' It could work for some Paralympic sailors too. I do think it is an exciting development but **I do worry it will get screwed up.** This is such a great opportunity. 2024 is in France and people there will love it. It will do sailing a power of good. It is a big deal for sailing. It has gone well. **But this is a Brexit like decision. It is dividing people and you are in one camp or the other.** That is unfortunate. But this is still only ten per cent of Olympic medals and yet offshore sailing probably represents more than 50 per cent of the sailors worldwide. **We are not represented in the Olympics.**

#### **You have been watching the Route du Rhum?**

The Rhum has been amazing. It transcends sport. It is not a niche sport. It is a public sport. In the UK it is not. And I am not saying there the Rhum and Olympic offshore are close but with good PR and good build up France really could deliver a big audience in Marseille. **Sailing can be a peoples sport like it is France.** We screwed it up in the anglo saxon world. My belief is that World Sailing has been so focused on the Olympics it drags attention away from other areas of the sport. I went through my entire sailing career, other than getting the rules and regulations, **I had no contact with ISAF or World Sailing.** I had a very successful offshore career, employing people and putting millions of pounds through the UK economy, making news and I had no contact with World Sailing and very little with the Royal Yachting Association. That is not right. Would it not have been better if people like myself, Dee Caffari, Alex Thomson, had had some help, some coaching – whatever – when we were younger. We could all have benefited from some collaboration, like Sam Goodchild today, Phil



Sharp is not getting any help from the governing body and yet they are all making stories. The difference is in France there is an infrastructure and you are national authority supported. There is a career path. There is Port La Foret, there is Lorient. **We focus so much on the Olympics.** It is not all about just getting money for the Olympics. Some of it should be about making our sport better and more accessible.

#### **Can sailing really become a peoples sport ?**

People look at what we do and say 'that is the most inaccessible area of the sport', that participating in the Route du Rhum or the Vendée Globe is the most inaccessible event because it is only for the super top professionals who have great sponsorship. But Alex Thomson worked in a factory. I was a fireman. I come from Lancashire and I lived in a bloody container and Dee was a teacher. **The reality could not be further from the truth and the two million people who trundle through the race village in Saint Malo are evidence that sailing in France is a people's sport.** They come to Saint Malo on public transport, they are not turning up in BMWs or Mercedes and walking the docks. **It is a true peoples sport.**

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