



Olympic Sailing Stories

by Mark Lammens



Los Angeles 1984

40 years ago was very exciting time for me. In 1982, I qualified for the National Team and World Championships in Holland as a keen and naive 20 year old. I finished 4th in a race with 139 boats. I also finished 4th again in another WC race in 1983. I spent the winter in Florida training for the 1984 Olympic trials. I learned a lot and eventually finished 2nd at the final trials regatta hosted at the Royal Canadian Yacht Club. I thought my Finn Sailing was done and I would be back coaching at the Ontario Sailing Centre until CORK, but then Terry Neilson asked me to travel with him that summer and be his training partner in LA.

From the 1952 to the 1996 Olympics the Finn boats were provided by the host country. These new boats need to be tuned up to work with the mast and sail that are brought by the individual sailor. I was honoured but also a bit nervous, I did not want to be a liability to his preparation. Terry was a Pan Am Games Gold Medalist and World champion in the Laser and just finished 2nd at the Finn Gold Cup. He also won the Laser Nationals and Pan Am Trials at Sail West at Elbow, Saskatchewan.

Our training group was Lasse Hjortnaes from DEN and his training partner, Jorgen Lindhardtson, Bill O'hara, IRL and Juan Maglei, GUA. Lasse, Terry and Jorgen finished 1,2,3 at the World's and I was using Larry Lemieux's boat that finished 4th. Larry jumped into the Star and won those trials after it was impossible to beat Terry.

Long Beach, CA is a windy venue and I was directed to keep the sail and mast rake the same to ensure a good speed reference. The old rules allowed sailors to wear heavy jackets and clothing to a maximum of 20 kilograms, my heavy jacket was 15 kilograms. It was very physical work. We would do a rabbit start to line up and after 5-10 minutes tack and line up again if need be. Sometimes Terry had to make an adjustment and we would go again. Almost all of the speed work was exclusively done upwind. Olympic Races in 1984 were Triangle, Windward, Leeward, Windward, 3 long upwind legs and an upwind finish. As we got closer to the Olympics we would have bigger groups checking speed. We had at times 35 boats doing a Rabbit start then racing full speed. It was a bit overwhelming and exciting because I was very fast and, on some days, the fastest.

Terry made it very clear that I was to block for him or drive over or pinch off any of the top guys when possible.



Canadian Yachting Magazine

The other thing was to never wait for anyone but Terry. Once boats were dropped they were out. One memory was sailing for a while and realizing it was just Terry and I way out front. Coach boats were taking pictures of our leach, boom position and boom heights. Our focus was having the mast raked more forward and the boom more inboard. It meant pointing higher up wind and faster downwind. Terry was very happy with his preparation work and determined what masts and sails to measure and their settings for the Olympics.

On shore was a bit crazy, the beach at Long Beach was the sailing venue and the site was made with football astro turf and air conditioned Atco trailers, tents. There were unlimited Diet Cokes and snickers bars at the food stations everywhere. We were in an area close to the Queen Mary and the Spruce Goose and many off shore Oil Rigs hidden behind modern art structures. This was my first Games so I did not have much

to go from. The whole thing reminded me of a big high school track meet, everyone wearing colours from your school and basically interacting with the athletes in your event.

We got to the sail site on motorcycles. I was a bike rookie and had burned my leg on the exhaust pipe so was regularly visiting the medical tent for wound dressing. The medical team said the best thing was to keep it dry and keep it off of the side of the boat. Each day we had the same discussion while getting new dressings. I do recall it hurt, especially with the salt water. Also in California motorcycle helmets were not required, just eye glasses. So sunglasses at night but no helmet. My parents never heard about this.

The Olympic team received these nice red and white Danish brand life jackets with Canadian Sailing Team patches. I left mine in the boat with the deck cover on and a few days later it was stolen. I managed to secure another one, but it would come later with the support team staff from Toronto. I sailed many days without a life jacket which, in hindsight, was silly. I should have spent money on one at West Marine but I was buying the popular Olympic gear, including pink shirts. It was the 80s.

Our residence was Brooks college in Long Beach. The reason the team stayed there was to ensure no delays with the famous LA traffic jams. The big athlete village was farther north at University of California, USC. We went there once and Vidal Sassoon was giving out free haircuts, but the line was too long.

In the end Terry, won a Bronze medal.



Terry Neilson, 1984 Olympic Bronze & World Championship Silver

Russell Coutts, NZL won Gold and the American John Bertrand won Silver. Interesting that they never joined any of the big fleet activities. NZL had a closed training group of 3 boats, the Americans had a group of 4.



Toronto Star, July 24, 1984

I was also very fortunate to see first-hand the preparation work by the other 2 Canadian boats that won medals, Terry McLaughlin and Evert Bastett, Silver in Flying Dutchman and Hans Fogh, John Kerr and Steve Calder, Bronze in the Soling. They were very meticulous and professional in their work on and off the water.

After the Olympics, the Finn boats went on sale. Ontario Sailing bought 2 of them. One of the boats was sailed by Joaquin Blanco, ESP, who finished 4th. We called him Johnny White. His boat was later purchased by Morris Markentin.

I was fortunate to replace John Kerr on the Soling with Fogh and Calder in 1987. The highlight was winning Hyeres Olympic week and a Silver Medal at the Pan Am Games. I also went to the 1992 Olympics as my brother Hank's training partner/coach. Hank won the World Championships in 1990 and 1991. I also coached his girl friend at the time Julia Trottmann who won a Bronze medal for the US. I was very grateful that SK Sailing supported my coaching effort and allowed me to go to Barcelona.



Barcelona, 1992. Richard Clarke KC-11, Hank in the middle and I am to windward

I also went to the 1996 Olympics as the Sail Canada Laser and Europe Dinghy coach; Men's and Women's singlehanded- Rod Davies and Tine Moberg-Parker.

With local sailors headed to CORK next week, here's a photo and news clipping from previous CORK regattas.



My Ontario Sailing Association Team boat which was used at the 1976 Olympics in Kingston. I finished 4th here at CORK 1981, (Canadian Olympic Regatta, Kingston) a 6 day regatta and never saw the sun



Qualifying for the CST and 1982 World championships, (Globe and Mail)

One last thing, back in 1984 the team clothing was poor quality track suits and cotton shirts that almost did not last the 2 weeks. Today you can go to the Mall and buy some of it at Lululemon and before that The Bay, Roots, Sears and even Zellers.

Sincerely,

Mark