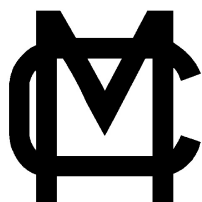

Subject: MCSA Tell-Tale

From: Bob Wynkoop (communications@mcscow.org)

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MC Sailing Association

Tell-Tale

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MCSA National Champion Interview



Kenny Wolfe and Virginia Hannon just after winning the 2013 MC National Championship

By Eric hood

Interview with 2013 MC Scow National Champion Kenny Wolfe

EH

This year's MC National Championship at Clear Lake, Iowa will be remembered as a tough one and a championship for the record books for sure when it comes to big winds. No doubt we were at one of the best sailing venues you could ever want to race MC Scows. Plus we had the luxury of Clear Lake Yacht Club hosting and all attending can testify that they know how to host a major championship.

I have had the pleasure of getting to know class newcomer and our new National Champ Kenny Wolfe from Rush Creek Yacht Club, Rockwell TX, this year. I have also had the pleasure of getting to know his great

crew Virginia Hannan. We are interviewing Kenny today on his whole experience that he has had in his first year as a MC Skipper, boat owner and newcomer to the class. So enjoy this time as we hear from Kenny.

EH - Kenny tell us about yourself and how/where you started sailing.

Kenny - My family moved to Ft. Myers, Florida (from New York) when I was eight. There were no soccer camps going on during the summer so they needed something for me to do and a way for me to meet other kids my age in our new town. My mom knew I loved the water and found a summer sailing program being taught out of Royal Palm Yacht Club. I learned to sail an Optimist Pram (predecessor to the Optimist Dinghy being sailed today). At the end of my two week session the instructor pulled my mom aside and told her that I caught on faster than the rest of the kids, and asked if I'd be interested in racing year-round. I finished third in my first race (green fleet) and was hooked from there. Fort Myers wasn't known as a power house for youth sailing, but we had a great program and we were sandwiched between St. Pete and Miami, where the best of the best sailed regularly. This organization operates as Edison Sailing Center and still teaches 300 young new sailors how to sail each summer. It is also one of the few sail training programs to be sanctioned by US Sailing. As a side note, here's a little tidbit that I recently learned that apparently Harry Sr. had a winter home in Fort Myers and was a member at Royal Palm too.

EH - If you had to name 5 people who were influential in your sailing career who would they be?

Kenny - First and foremost there are my parents. Although neither of them have a sailing background, their support allowed me to have opportunities to get on the water. Regarding sailing, there were two gentlemen who worked together to make the Junior program at Royal Palm (now known as Edison Sailing Center) happen, Steve Olive and Ross Webb. Together, Steve and Ross have made sailing possible for literally thousands of kids in Fort Myers. To this day they are both still very important people in my life.....to the point that they were both at the top of the list of people to contact after winning this event. Without these two I'm confident I wouldn't be where I am in life today, and I'm not speaking exclusively to sailing. As an Opti sailor, I was just "okay", but when I stepped into Lasers things seemed to "click" for me and I had a fairly successful pre-college sailing career, including most of the larger youth regatta's and Youth Champs. I feel my sailing skills really progressed in significant ways while sailing collegiately. While in my sophomore year at Kings Point (US Merchant Marine Academy) we had a new coach Doug Clark join the Kings Point sailing program. The timing was perfect and Doug was exactly what I needed in a coach. We had a lot of talent on the team while I was at KP but Doug knew how to take a good sailor who wasn't reaching his potential and make them great. KP was notorious for big breeze, and Doug had us focus on boat speed every day...speed rules. I continued to race with Doug on J24's and M24's after college for a few years, which helped me focus on managing big fleets, big starting lines, and the power of "leading back". And then there's Bill Hardesty. Anyone in the upper echelon of the sailing community knows Bill and what he's doing as a Pro sailor, but

having Bill to sail against on a daily basis during college pushed us all to new levels. We won a few Collegiate Championships while we were at KP, and I was an All-American too. Finally, we can't forget Jack Kern for what he's doing to grow the MC fleet at RCYC.

EH - At the awards you mentioned your championship crew Virginia Hannan. The only race you struggled this regatta was race 1 and you took a chance by going without Virginia. Give us some of your thoughts about the MC with a crew and without a crew. At the Midwinters you were solo and the Nationals you had Virginia; so two pretty different looks at how the boat sails. Here at the Nationals we had Mark Tesar going really fast solo at about 250 lbs., then Andy and Mya Burdick going fast at 250/260. How much did you and Virginia weigh? I know over the years we have always felt 270-290 lbs. was ideal.

Kenny - Yea, this weight thing still has me scratching my head a bit. First, Virginia and I weighed in about 300lbs. The two of us spent a fair amount of time at RCYC sailing with each other, many times in lighter than ideal breeze, simply to get time in the boat together. I'm sure it was due to wave conditions at the time, but I really felt like carrying a crew in lighter air (10 knots) wasn't too much of a handicap. Fast forward to Clear Lake, where we arrived a day early and got some practice time tuning with Jeff Grinnan who is in the 240lb range. When the breeze was above 14 or so, we held strong, but once it dropped off (on Clear Lake), Jeff killed us.....being fresh on my mind I was deeply concerned about being too heavy in the lesser breeze of race 1. Knowing the forecast predicted bigger breeze later in the morning, I knew I was taking a gamble by going solo in the first race. The gamble

was close to paying off as I worked my way to third, but then on the last leg rather than continuing to climb the ladder, the breeze picked up and I couldn't hang. The bigger guys and the duo teams ate me up and I dropped to eighth pretty quickly. Like I said, I'm still trying to figure out the weight, combined with lake conditions, to determine what is best for our team. I will say that I always like sailing with someone better than alone, and VH is great. When sailing with crew, I like to have them be responsible for Upwind: 1) the boards! 2) feeding compass headings 3) Providing feedback on the status of other boats....i.e. when xyz boat tacks, we're going to tack.....she keeps an eye on that boat. Downwind: 1) Weather Heel-We've learned these boats really need to be rocked up to weather in all breeze conditions and you can't really do this solo. Two people on the rail help make this possible. 2) The groove on the MC is huge, allowing you to heat up to a broad reach, press the bow down REALLY low by the lee (which is incredibly fast), and everywhere in between. Virginia was constantly providing information as to where the next puff was coming from and I worked hard to put the boat in front of the puff. I think this is where we made our biggest gains/extensions.

EH - Okay let's have fun here with this next question and teach us all. Give us a checklist on sailing the boat. Let's make this two questions. First, let's talk about heavy air sailing like we had the National Championship. Break it all down upwind and downwind.

Kenny - Simple, hike hard! No seriously, there are many styles and methods to be successful in big breeze. For the Nationals, we tightened the side-stays

considerably in an attempt to straighten the mast out and minimize the over-bend wrinkles that come with big breeze and sailing with a tight vang. On our boat, we had the graduations down to #1 on the Sta-Masters (almost bottomed out). I've always favored playing the vang a lot as I'm not afraid to really pull on it (I've been told that I play it more than most). In the biggest breeze, we had all control lines (Vang, Outhaul, and Cunningham) pulled on just about as hard as I could. The one exception to note regarding the vang was in the last race when the wind shifts came as really big puffs. We actually eased the vang as we worked our way towards the shore where the shifts became very big for safety reasons. As you all know, if the boom touches the water it's likely going to be a slow, yet deliberate death by capsize. When the "lifts" came as big puffs, sometimes it was difficult to dump the mainsheet quick enough to keep the boat upright. Easing the vang gave an added safety factor by allowing it to rise off the water, hopefully preventing a capsize. We sailed with the boards about 3-4" up from their full down position (don't focus on the 3-4", rather focus on eliminating weather helm). Lastly, and probably most importantly, to be successful sailing upwind in big breeze, you have to constantly play the mainsheet in/out. This will range from 3-4" to as much as two feet, depending upon the size of the shifts and the puffs.

As I mentioned earlier, I think our biggest gains were made downwind. Eric & Andy taught me at Zenda University that the boats really like to be sailed with some twist at the top of the sail, sailing by the lee, and heeled to weather. For stability/security, in big breeze, many people sail straight downwind, keep the vang tight (no twist), and keep the boat flat, however the boat actually sails much better, faster, and in more

control if you can keep it heeled significantly to weather. This combined with zig-zagging downwind to stay in front of the next puff really allowed us to extend. We very rarely took into account where the leeward mark was until we were 2/3rds the way downwind to the leeward mark. I can't stress this enough, push yourself in the breeze to get comfortable. Let the boom all the way out to the sidestay and use the vang to trim the main.

EH - Then if you will give us your thoughts on sailing in light-medium winds like we saw at the Midwinters (there was a little top end medium there too).

Kenny - Just as in big breeze, I find myself playing the mainsheet a lot in both light and medium breeze. Ease the main-sheet and heel the boat until it feels powered up, then trim and flatten the boat. This keeps a balance between speed and then trimming really tight to get extra height. Once you feel the boat stall, crack off a tiny bit for speed and repeat. Downwind in light to medium I have little advice other than sail it the same as above. Just as taught in Zenda U, let the Main out all the way and trim with the vang. I actually don't even hold on to the mainsheet, I only have the tiller and vang in my hand sailing downwind.

E Hood - Do you have any thoughts you would like to share on club sailing , practice, growing the sport?

Kenny - I like what the MC fleet has going, 67 boats is tough to get at a national event, so I'm excited to be a part of this fleet. You all have been so welcoming and I'd like to do anything that I can to help the fleet to continue to progress and grow. I really do think that a

study needs to be made on what Jack Kern has done for our fleet at Rush Creek. He's done a phenomenal job promoting our fleet and isn't prejudice to any talent level. We're now seeing relatively new beginner's finish in the middle of the fleet, which is super exciting. Peer pressure is an amazing thing, and it doesn't end when you become an adult.....use it, and your bar tab, to your advantage.....that's how Jack and Brian Morgan got me to sail the Midwinters.

E Hood - My last interview question is simple and really is not a question. You are the champ you have the floor.

Kenny - Wow, a blank sheet of paper! I'm not super creative, so I'll go with a few observations about our fleet from a tactical perspective. First, let's talk about starts. Don't give up when you have a bad one. SERIOUSLY, we got shot out the back of literally every start at the Nationals except the last race. The key here is an immediate and active plan to recover. If you get shot out, GET OUT, and NOW! The longer you wait, the more boats that are getting pinched off will be tacking and taking any potential clear lanes. Many times you may look over your shoulder and say to yourself that you can't tack due to a boat being there.....BS! Luff your main, take a big dip to leeward, you can make it happen. In the second race we won, we literally ducked the fourth row, but we did it immediately and focused on getting a clear lane.

Once we got the clear lane we were free to tack on the next shift, and quickly we were right back in the top 10. EH- Wow, that is a great word Kenny. I usually started well but struggled and I clearly remember hesitating on three starts for 5 seconds shortly after the starts and I never could get out. Thanks for that absolute

great TIP!! What else do you have for us?

Kenny - Well since we typically sail on lakes in the MC think about this thought. Unless there is a specific weather system causing a persistent shift, don't criss-cross the course on a lake. It may appear that one side is paying off big, so you may choose to go chase it only to find out that you sailed on a huge header, just to get to the other lay-line and have to sail on another header to get to the mark. The middle of the course on a lake is typically death, pick a side (an educated selection), and work it. Working the wrong side will typically still have you in the top 10%, where the middle will be death. Another thought is to work together as a skipper/crew team downwind to catch boats in front of you or extend your lead. Don't automatically sail high. Work hard to look upwind and focus on where the next puff is coming from, not what other boats are doing. Lastly, this comes without having any ties to "The Zenda Boys", go to Zenda University if you want to improve your sailing skills and boat handling. As adults we rarely get the opportunity to be coached, much less by guys who have been sailing these boats for so long. These two concentrated days in the boat easily made up for sixth months of me sailing by myself. I know for a fact that I would not have won the Mid-Winters without attending this session.

As Eric mentioned, and I stated earlier, I'd be more than happy to help in any way I can. Lastly, thank you to Virginia for her endless energy and smile. Also, to the Eric/Andy/Melges team for doing such a great job always sharing the wealth of information that they have among them.

E Hood - I would just like to say on behalf of our class, the Team at Melges Performance Sailboats and North Sails that your National Championship win was convincing and well deserved. We appreciate your time today Kenny . Thank you for giving back to the class in many ways both at the regattas and in this interview. Looking forward to lining up on the race course with you again soon.

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