

### A Champion's Cheering Section – Our View From the Race Pits

*All names and sail numbers have been omitted from this story – to protect the guilty.*

Snow-capped mountains in the distance, shoreline grasses swaying in the gentle breeze, a silvery surface of frozen water welcoming the World Champions. We are on beautiful Lake Champlain in the winter heartland of the Adirondacks. It's late afternoon and the background is filled with lovely little sailboats. There is a lone sailor in the foreground, approaching a bright orange triangle. The scene looked surrealistic, like paint being applied to an artist's canvas. Non-sailors would say, "This is like watching paint dry."

*"Is that the Bronze Fleet behind Ronnie?"* The lead boat was so far apart from those in the background that it seemed out of place. Ron makes his first mark rounding – smooth, effortless, gracefully, and points up to windward on a single-minded mission with a special wind only for sail number US44.

There was 4.4 mph of wind at the start of the Gold Fleet Race #3. Ron had a port start in position number 5 from his previous finish. His pit crew silently eyed his equipment, while his brake, pit goggles, warming boots and jacket were removed and handed off. He had a clean start with no interference from the boats above and below. A relief to us after witnessing his first race in lottery-drawn position 16 and the boat below had turned up to windward so severely that Ron had to sit up and drag his spikes to avoid a collision. Counting from the leeward mark, Ron made up lost ground to round the first lap in position 12. He gained four more spots to 8<sup>th</sup> on the second lap and finally a 5<sup>th</sup> place finish in brisk wind. An impressive feat in this World Class level of competition and exciting to watch. But today was a different race and a different set of conditions, a different type of excitement and tension.

*"Where is he?"*

*"He's just to the left of that island. See the boat moving quickly ... way out there!"*

The fleet has made their way downwind and are rounding the leeward mark to complete their first lap. They are now the foreground of our picturesque canvas painting, and our attention is on the background – so far into the distance that the black stick-of-a-mast is discernable only because its relative speed and apparent direction differs from all the rest of the boats.

*"Why has he gone so far out?"*

*"Because that's where the good air is!"*

*"He's got to clear the island and maintain speed to get downwind."*

*"Man, this is tough."*

*"What's the wind speed now?"*

The sailor's outstretched arm drops down and the wind meter reads 2.2 mph. *"What's the time limit?"* Reference the IDN/YRA Standard Sailing Instructions, VI. TIME LIMIT – The lap time limit is 6-1/2 minutes per mile (1 mile between marks = 13 minute lap time limit). No one responds to the question because no one in our peanut gallery had set a stopwatch at the start of the race. The minutes ticked off so far had seemed like hours. We quietly wish for the best.

The word 'tough' doesn't describe what the Gold Fleet was going through. Several of the best sailors in the world had to get out of their boats and run after rounding the leeward mark. Some surprises (moving relatively fast in this super light air) include Jeff Kent, US3535, Leon LeBeau, US2000, and Peter Woodruff, US406.

*"Look at the gap. Ron is so far down into his boat that you can't see anything between the top of the hull and the bottom of the boom. It's all air."*

*"Yeah, he's become one with his 'agricultural' pocket-rocket of a boat."*

*"Wow. We were lucky to have 6 mph for our Silver Fleet Race."*

The drop in wind speed during this race allowed some of the sailors in the background to catch up and reduce our Champion's large lead. By the second lap, Karol Jablonski, P36, was closing in. A year-round professional sailor, 'Ketchup' has often said, "Ron is fast but I sail smart."

*"Oh no! Ron, don't go there -- you're too deep. It's time to jibe for the mark!"*

US44 was to our right, moving further right, in what appeared to be much too far to our right relative to the leeward mark, the orange triangle in front of and immediately to our left. P36 is closing in quickly. We fear that he's going to jibe soon and beat US44 across the finish line.

Finally, Ron jibes. *"Thank you! He's gone over. I thought I was gonna have a heart attack!"*

*"Come on, Ronnie, get down there!"*

*"What's the time?"*

*"I don't know. The black flag isn't up yet. It's got to be close!"* With 12 seconds remaining, Ron Sherry, US44, crosses the finish line to the whoops and cheers of everyone.

Thank you to Stephen Madden, US4512, and his entire Race Committee for getting off a World Championship in some very difficult and changing conditions, and to the lovely ladies on our scoring team - Maria LeBeau, Loretta Sherry Rehe, and Jane Sherry. Thank you, Ron, for demonstrating just how fast these boats can move in so little wind. Sail safe and sail fast at the 2003 European Championship. Your 'Cheering Section' may not physically be "on the other side of the pond", but our hearts and our good wishes are with you on the ice.

Best regards and respectfully submitted by Rosemary Hamill, US4066, February 23, 2003.