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David Adams Curtis



June 22, 1946

Birthplace: Marblehead, Massachusetts

“Keep your eyes out of the boat – take advantage of what you see.”

Winner

When it comes to the appreciation of athletic achievement, the record book is the tip of the iceberg. The story is always in the details. But when the record book is as lengthy and stunning as that of Dave Curtis, it requires full attention. Curtis has won the 110 Nationals twice, the College Team Race Nationals, five 210 National Championships, and the Jolly Boat Worlds (he won every race). In Solings, he has won five North American, four National, one World, one European, and one North American Match Race Championships. In Etchells, Curtis has won

two National, nine North American, and seven World Championships (he placed second six times in the Worlds). He won one World and four J/24 North American Championships. He won a Lightning North American, two Interclub National Championships, two gold medals at the Pan Am Games (Solings and J/24s), and gold at the Pre-Olympic Games in 1984 (Solings). He is two-time Rolex Yachtsman of the Year, no surprise, and runner up four times.

Dave Curtis is a lifelong sailmaker who has mastered the art of boat speed from prepping the hull – “I wet sand with 320 grit, then 400 and 600 to finish....step two is buffing followed by (several applications of) Teflon polish” – to rig tuning and sail shape. After that, as Curtis told Dave Dellenbaugh in an interview, he keeps it simple: “When a boat is in the groove it’s like you are driving on a smooth highway....all you have to do is guide it....just nudge the tiller a little....Many sailors worry too much about going fast.”

It’s easier to keep something simple once knowledge of the subject is comprehensive, and Curtis has the equivalent of several doctorates in racing sailboats. Add to that his passion for the sport, and “a seemingly endless reserve of talent and skill,” according to daughter Gretchen, his long- time crew, and one begins to comprehend the record he has established.

“I was really lucky as a teenager because I went to the 110 Nationals in 1964,” Curtis says. “I was 18. I had read about all the hot sailors, and I thought oh my gosh this is going to be unbelievable. My goal was to make the top ten. Lo and behold we won. Easily. What I learned from that regatta has stuck with me ever since. All these guys I looked up to made mistakes, took themselves out of races by fouling out or doing dumb things. I learned the big one is just another regatta. You can’t sail differently. You have to sail your game. Don’t put pressure on yourself, minimize mistakes, and keep your head out of the boat because the big picture is all important.”

- Roger Vaughan

Links of Interest:

[Interview with Dave Curtis on going fast upwind \(David Dellenbaugh, Speed and Smarts, from Cavalier 28 Association\)](#)

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