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Runyon "Runnie" Colie Jr.



May 22, 1916 - June 26, 2014
Birthplace: New York, New York

"Do not EVER over trim the jib."

The Dinghy Sailor

Dennis Conner says his first boat was a Penguin. That was in 1955. "Runnie Colie was already a legend in the class," Conner says. "I dreamed of beating him but it never happened." Conner wasn't the only one who failed. Colie won seven international titles between 1947 and 1962 in the Penguin, the hottest dinghy class at the time.

Colie was also sailing E-Scows on Barnegat Bay. "He wasn't a footer," says Buddy Melges, who knows a thing or two about sailing scows (eight championships in E and A Scows). "Runnie sailed close to the wind and went faster than anyone else. That technique made him perfect for scows, where the angle of heel is critical because a scow is really a catamaran in a monohull's body. Upwind, you wet the rail, get the bilge board vertical, and `fly a hull.' He was a damn good helmsman and a damn good tactician." Proof is Colie's seven Eastern E-Scow Championships. He missed an eighth title at age 78. After placing second in 1959 and 1961 at the E Scow Nationals, he won the regatta in 1966 – the first Easterner to do so.

Two years before that, Colie had gotten into a 5.5-Metre and lost to George O'Day in the Olympic trials by one point. It was a light air series, and Colie was sailing a boat Britton Chance Jr. had designed for heavy air that Chance's father had rejected. Chance Sr. was among those Colie beat in the trials.

Colie started young, crewing for his mother. He won two Barnegat Bay Championships in the classic Sneakboxes in the 1930s. A three-time winning skipper in the College Nationals for MIT, he was later elected to the ICYRA Hall of Fame. "He had a sixth sense of how to make a boat go fast all the time," Melges says. Colie was also a natural teacher of the sport. Words like "inspiring", "entertaining," and "dedicated" are used by those fortunate enough to have been his students. "The Holy Grail back then was an opportunity to crew for Colie," says Peter Commette, a Barnegat Bay Olympian (Finn) in the 1980s. "Now when he sees me out of shape he says, `Didn't you used to be Peter Commette?'"

Asked to provide tips in the *Penguin Class Yearbook* of 1956, Colie politely covered the dinghy essentials: "Sail with a minimum of rudder....sail the boat flat upwind, heeled slightly to windward downwind....gently sail through tacks with a light hand on the helm....practice sailing without a rudder...keep as still in the boat as possible...."

It was on the water where Colie's advice was more pointed: "Ease for a lift, then tell me you are eased. I like to sail up into it," one former crew recalls being instructed.

- Roger Vaughan

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