

By Gary Jobson, President
National Sailing Hall of Fame

September 20, 2013



How would you like to have four-time British Olympic champion, Sir Ben Ainslie, calling tactics for you in the biggest race of your life? Adding to the collective wisdom of the Team Oracle USA afterguard is another Olympic champion, Australian Tom Slingsby. The USA team (with only one American on board) took another step closer to defending the America's Cup. They were very lucky when light winds prevented Emirates Team New Zealand from crossing the finish line, as NZL was well ahead but just missed finishing within the required 40 minutes. In the re-sail of Race 13, Ainslie's tactics were the difference. At 8-3, the score still favors New Zealand, but you get the feeling here in San Francisco that OTUSA's Australian skipper, James Spithill, along with Ainslie and their crew, are on a roll and just might pull off the biggest upset in the history of sailing. Is it destiny, or determination?

When Spithill came strutting down the promenade at Pier 27 for the post race press conference, he looked like Popeye just after eating his spinach. He knows he has the boat and team to go all the way now. New Zealand's skipper, Dean Barker, seems to be feeling the pressure. Outwardly, he remains calm and assured, but inside this event has got to be eating

away at his psyche. Barker only needs one more win on a ten-mile course to take the America's Cup back to New Zealand. Just-one-more-win! Getting it will not be easy, but is certainly possible.

Oracle Team USA started this regatta in disarray. Their starts, tactics, boat handling and speed were way off the pace set by the Kiwis. Something changed. Larry Ellison got engaged. He visited the Team base at least two times, and got his giant machine in gear. The America's Cup trophy mysteriously appeared in front of the boat when the crew arrived after losing two races on Day One. The message was clear.



The 32 (or so) designers went to work for Ellison's sailing team. Spithill kept saying they could win races. The speeds of the boats became even. Ainslie was substituted in as tactician replacing American, John Kosteki. The move has proven to be a good one. Ainslie is getting better with every race. Ainslie knows how to win. I witnessed his relentless pursuit for victory at the Olympic Games in Weymouth last summer. Ainslie had to beat Denmark's Jonas Høgh-Christensen in the final medal race to earn his record setting 4th Gold medal (Ainslie also won a silver medal in the Olympics at the age of 19 in 1996). Ainslie had been trailing throughout the Games last summer. It took a herculean effort for him to dig out of a deep hole, and then win it all by coming from behind to beat Høgh-Christensen in the final race.

On board USA 17, and around the waterfront, Ainslie looks like he is having a good time.

Being focused yet relaxed in the heat of battle is a good combination. Racing will continue with no lay days until one boat wins nine races. OTUSA still has to win six more in a row. New Zealand only needs one. Can they do it?

The Kiwis realize their boat is just about the same speed as USA 17. Both crews are handling the boats efficiently during maneuvers. In a long series like this one the pressure builds. The press, fans, supporters and even teammates get impatient. While the races are short, the nature of the Cup can take awhile to conclude. In 2003 it took Alinghi 16 days to defeat New Zealand. In 1983 *Australia II* finally defeated *Liberty* 4-3 after 13 days. Tomorrow's race will be Day 14. A review of Race 13 is in order.

