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Dennis Walter Conner



September 16, 1942 -
Birthplace: San Diego, California

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“Competition is life's blood, and I'm a vampire.”

Dennis Conner won four America's Cups, counting the 1974 match when he was starting helmsman for skipper Ted Hood on *Courageous*.

That was Conner's first Cup venture as a new kid from California entering an event dominated by East Coast tradition. He learned fast. Conner is credited with turning the Cup professional in 1980, paying crewmembers and practicing 300 days a year with a stable of three boats. Before retiring after the 2003 match, Conner would compete in 9 America's Cup campaigns.

In 1983, Conner gained infamy for becoming the first American skipper to lose the Cup since the yacht *America's* seminal victory in 1851. His well-documented struggle to win it back in the next cycle (Perth, Australia, 1987), is the stuff of legend. His face appeared on the covers of *TIME* and *Sports Illustrated* (with President Ronald Reagan). He became known as "Mr. America's Cup."

His defense of the rogue challenge presented by New Zealand's 90-foot mono hull the following year with a catamaran, and the protracted legal wrangle that ensued, enhanced the fame of this controversial, ferocious competitor. One of Conner's books is called, *No Excuse to Lose*. He once said, "There has never been any sportsmanship in the America's Cup. Anyone who thinks so is kidding himself." An article about Conner in *LIFE* magazine (September 1988) was titled, "Obsessed: Dennis Conner puts winning the Cup above friendship, religion, and sex."

Dennis Conner has won 28 world championships, a bronze medal in the 1976 Olympics, and was named Rolex Yachtsman of the Year three times.

- Roger Vaughan

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[Feb. 9, 1987 Article in TIME Magazine](#)

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