

The 2008 World Championships

A Winner's Perspective

On paper we felt we had a team capable of winning, with Roger Gilbert as tactician backing up Geoff with myself and Roz Allen at the front. However, translating that into a win in a highly competitive competition is another thing. Craig Burlton, had been sailing extremely well all year and demonstrated his dominance in lighter winds in 2006 when he won the Europeans and winning the Irish Nationals 2008. Mike Budd with the support of Nick Craig was back to have a crack at the new title. Then there were a few new faces in the fleet including, David Lenz a professional sailor and Peter O'Leary fresh back from the Olympics. With a forecast of light winds combined with the tricky conditions of Dublin Bay we knew we had our work cut out.

Our game plan was to try to sail a consistent regatta, keep out of trouble and avoid high scores. Roger's tactical view was to start conservatively but with a clean lane, play the shifts, aiming to arrive at the top mark at least in the top ten and work forward. However, with the moderate conditions and virtually identical boat speed we found through out the event that it was exceptionally hard to pull through the fleet.

Our group on the first day appeared to be heavily weighted with lion's share of top British boats. In two of the three races we rounded the top mark in first position only to end up with a 2nd and a 3rd. In race two Mark Richards and Aussie Dan gybed off, which looked like tactical suicide, but they arrived at the leeward mark 10 lengths ahead, a distance we could not claw back. In race three we were unfortunately rolled by boats at the windward mark whilst in 10th and gybed off in the hope that the tactics would pay, only to find ourselves in the thirties by the bottom mark. We managed to claw back to 16th. Lying in 9th overall on day one we did not feel like champions in the waiting.

On day two we moved to the blue course. On the first race we were taken aback by the fact that the start got off first time (probably a result of the many z flag penalties on day one) and with a poor start we had to climb our way back up the fleet managing an eighth. With such a hard first race we were less jubilant about our first and second positions in the next two races. These results pulled us up the fleet to 4th over all. However, on the other course Mike Budd won two races. In one of those he had been called over the line, but had his position reinstated following a successful protest. Craig Burlton on the Orange course moved to the top of the leader board. We felt we had our work cut out if we were going to beat these two.



The last day of the qualifying series felt awful. Our results were counters but not results we felt would win an event. David Lenz was starting to show form and beat us in two races; Craig was again sailing consistently, always pulling himself back through the fleet. A difficult and long day was even more stressful when the measuring committee order a full reweigh (entailing stripping the boat) because our all up weight on the crane was marginally light. They found out that we were close to bang on but the added stress was unnecessary.

At the end of all of that it was an absolute shock to us that at we had moved into the lead; although, with the narrowest of margins from Craig. Indeed, at the end of the qualifying series any one of about 8 boats could have won the event. Nevertheless, it was the first sign that our strategy of playing safe might be paying.

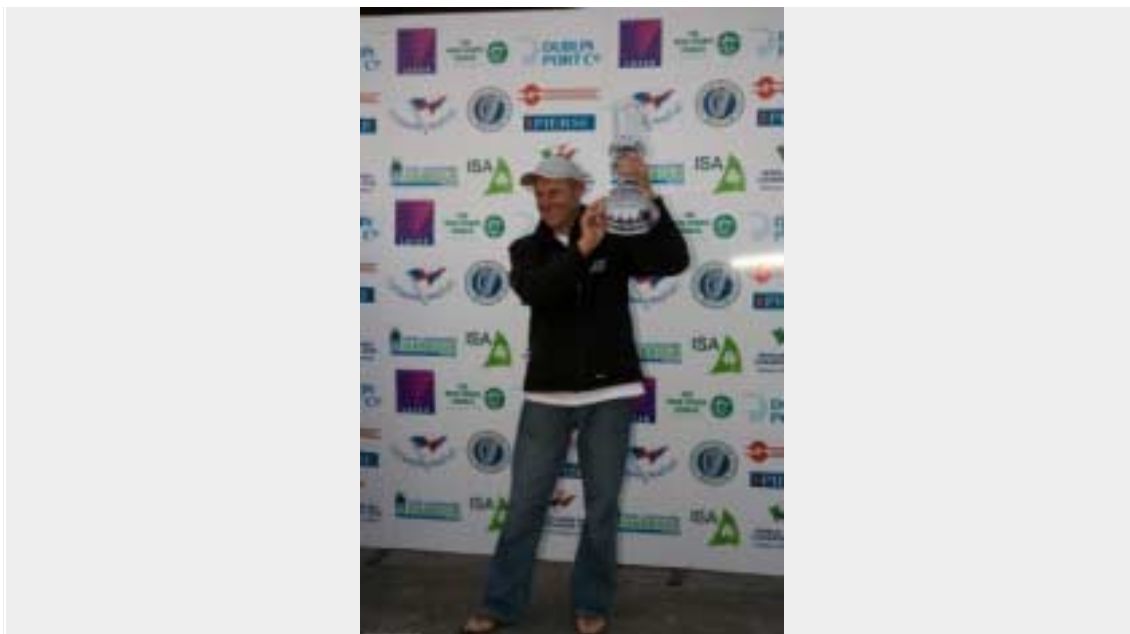
The forecast for the Gold series was for exceptionally light winds. We woke up to thick fog on Thursday morning and not a breath of wind. However, by about 3pm the sun had broken through and a gentle thermal breeze was blowing; we were sent out sailing. We knew the racing would be extremely tough. With a light patchy breeze it is very easy to make mistakes and very hard to come back. In the first race we managed a ninth. We were not too disappointed because it was a counter and Buddy and Craig were behind us. However, race 2 turned out to be a horror. A random boat infringed us on the start line, which meant we were slow off the start line. The plan was to go right as the wind was forecast to veer. First Craig tacked on us and at our second chance to get over Baloo tacked on us. We ended up almost hard left. The expected right shift came in and we rounded the top mark with only a few boats behind us. Thankfully with persistence and good tactics we managed to fight our way back to 14th. Not really a day to be proud of but actually about the third best score of the day! Jerry Hill had posted a first and a sixth and was back in contention. Craig leapt into the lead again by 5 points over us, but his 25th in the first race meant he had used his second discard. This was to be the first sign of a weakness in his series.



Some say you make your own luck. However, there is an element of good fortune as to how things unfold which can make a difference. Through out the week everything seemed to unfold against us. Thankfully the tide appeared to turn on Friday. The first good factor was a steady breeze blowing in the morning. The first race got underway at the earlier time of 10am. In race 1 we put in a solid race and Craig was no where to be seen. It turned out he had caught weed on his keel in that race. However, Dave Lenz and David Hudson both sailed solid races bringing them into very close contention. Performances which they both repeated in the penultimate race, making it a three way battle for the top three positions.

The tactics were going to be tricky going into the last race. David Lenz's team, with a 1 and 2 that morning, were within 2 points of us. However, his weakness was a discard of 35th from the previous day. David Hudson was 11 points off which meant he had to get a top three with us worse than 14th. Realistically David Lenz was the greatest threat, but we could not simply take him out because David Hudson might pull off a top three position.

During the first attempt at a start we had a tussle with David Lenz and managed to come out on top. However, that start was recalled. In the second attempt the next series of fortunate events unfolded. Both Davids decided to start close to the committee boat, which made the tactics a bit easier. This time Dave Lenz decided to hang back on the committee boat, but we figured he misjudged the distance to the line and he would be late. David Hudson was lining up high on the line at the committee boat gunning for the best start. We therefore came in underneath him, hooking him and holding him stalled on the line. Desperately we both tried not to cross. David Lenz then came in on the attack to try and push us both over, but the tactic failed as there was no room. Craig then also decided to join in the foray. As a result we all four limped over the line, but David Lenz was the worst off as he was going backwards following an incident with the other David. However, the drama had really only just begun for us. In peeling off onto port another boat claimed we infringed them and for safety sake we did a 360 penalty letting David Hudson sail off, but at least not close to a top three position.



We felt we had at least done sufficient damage to make it difficult for our competition to come back. We then set our minds on making our own comeback, something which we had practiced a lot during the week. At the first mark we were at best in the thirties. However, we spotted fresh pressure on the right and arched the boat up until planning down the newly forming waves. We romped off to the furthest right hand corner of the course blasting past those below us. This is the only corner we were allowed to hit all week and we hit it hard. We gybed back to the fleet at a hot angle and remarkably we sailed around and to leeward of the majority of the fleet. We found ourselves in about 6th at the bottom mark! Ahead of both the Davids! As the rest of the fleet appeared to converge at the bottom mark simultaneously - chaos ensued close behind us. We were then free to sail our own tactics for the rest of the race and in conditions which we love we were second!

To be honest after the race we were not confident that we had won because we were so close to the line at the start. However, our result was shortly confirmed by JC in a rib and the celebrations started. The feeling for the team was surprisingly simply utter relief after a very intense week of close racing. Shortly after arriving at the dock we were met by James, our sponsor and organiser of the Sail, Power and Watersport's show at Earl's Court this November. Having heard about how well we were doing he decided to hop on a plane. However, I cannot help but think what a disaster it would have been if we had not won. Indeed things could so easily have turned out different. We therefore have to assume he was also part of the Friday good fortune.



In winning an event there are also other people outside the boat whose support has contributed to our success, namely Gill and the Sail, Power and Watersport's Show. Gill have supported us over the last two years providing us with excellent team sailing kit, which was not only great in all the conditions that the weather has thrown at us over the year, but makes us look like a competitive team on the water.