

Bermuda International Race Week

April 22-27, 2012



by Peter McCausland

After having won the qualifier last August, the Golf syndicate traveled to Bermuda to race against some of the best IOD sailors in the world in the 6-day IOD Regatta which is part of Bermuda International Race Week. Great Sound just outside of Hamilton Harbor is the perfect sailing venue. The racing ground is a large circle surrounded by land through almost 300 degrees and open to the Atlantic Ocean on the north. It can be very breezy in Bermuda, but rarely does one encounter waves higher than two feet. The conditions are generally perfect for an IOD. The sailors entered in this regatta were, on the whole, the best we have ever seen.

Accompanying me were Fritz McClure and Graham Kilvert, Golf regulars. Our crew also included Charlie McGill, a new NYC Member, and Geoff Verney, an import from the People's syndicate. Steve Mead, on the Golf injured reserve list, also traveled to Bermuda with his wife, Tish, to watch the racing and celebrate their 35th wedding anniversary. We had a great group in Bermuda and had a wonderful time off the water.

Come to think of it, we had a pretty good time on the water as well, but our results would indicate otherwise. Those results were not attributable to crew work

or boat speed, which were very good most of the time. Sailing against some very strong competitors, we had two 3rds, a 4th and a DSQ which would have been at least a 3rd, but in most of the races we beat ourselves. The difference between the top competitors in IODs and the rest of the fleet is pretty simple: the best sailors always give themselves a chance to win.

When our Fleet Captain, Ian McNeice, asked me to write an article for the Soundings, I initially balked but eventually relented on the theory that it would be helpful to reduce my mistakes to writing for future reference. Those mistakes, which were many, but not uncommon, were pretty simple. I violated the following cardinal rules of competitive sailing:

1. Don't overanalyze.
2. Commit to a strategy and don't waiver.
3. Stay away from other boats at all costs, even at the expense of your strategy, for brief periods of time.
4. Sail your own race.

Things began to go wrong for us even before we arrived in Bermuda. Bob Constable, a People, was kind enough to send us a copy of *Wind & Strategy* by Stuart Walker because it had a chapter on racing in the Great Sound. Upon receipt of the

book, I dutifully made copies of the chapter and sent them to my crew. When we got to Bermuda and compared notes, none of us were quite sure what Stuart Walker was advising. The only thing that was clear in Mr. Walker's dissertation was his advice that racers go "right" after the start. We followed the Etchells' start every day, and we watched their first start knowing that they would crowd the Committee Boat and immediately tack onto port. When the entire fleet started at the pin and stayed left almost all the way to the port tack layline, we were dazed and confused (and also convinced that this was another People's conspiracy in retaliation for Golf's many People trouncings during the regular sailing season). And, it was all downhill from there. We overanalyzed. The smallest wind shifts and encounters with other boats caused us to waiver in our commitment to our strategy. Our strategy almost always put us right into the middle of a large pack of boats at the start, and we sailed our own race only after we got so sick of violating the cardinal rules and paying dearly for those violations. Even with our strategic and tactical errors, we would have finished right in the middle of the pack overall instead of the bottom third, had we not been fouled and subsequently disqualified after rounding the last windward mark in third place in the 2nd Race on Day 2.