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GENERAL OFFICES: USYRU, Box 209, Newport, RI 02840
(401)849-5200.

ADVERTISING SALES/PUBLISHING OFFICE: Freeman Publishing Company, P.O. Box 843, Freeman Bldg., First and Main, Franklin, TN 37064 (615)791-1780.

REGIONAL SALES OFFICE: Spike Wilson, 1012 Alton Way, Smyrna, GA 30080 (404)432-8383.

CHANGE OF ADDRESS: Send to AMERICAN SAILOR, Box 209, Newport, RI 02840.

From The Executive Director Philosophy

A couple of months ago, I was contacted by *SOUNDINGS* to participate in a dialogue in print. Dennis Conner had been asked to write on "Winning Is Everything." I was to take the opposite perspective, "Winning Isn't Everything." Needless to say, I was intrigued and jumped at the chance. In the end, Dennis didn't participate in the exercise and *SOUNDINGS* used my material but titled it something about Sponsorship, which is only one of the points. Because I feel strongly about this subject and suspect that most of you share that intensity of conviction, we're running my side again here as a statement of philosophy about the sport. As always, your comments and counterpoint are most welcome.

WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

Like most competitors, I appreciate Vince Lombardi's precept that winning isn't the most important thing... it's the only thing! In the business of professional football, his observation is undeniable. It is probably applicable in professional sailing, a category in which I would include America's Cup competition these days. But I don't think that

winning is the only worthwhile objective in amateur sport.

Amateur sport is about something else. It is a microcosm of life itself, and through sport we learn how to live better in our society. We all know this intuitively. It's the reason we encourage our youngsters to participate in T-Ball Leagues, in Pop Warner football, in junior sailing programs. Learning to work as a team member is an important socialization technique. Beyond this, sport provides an environment in which leadership tools can be developed, where extraordinary talents can emerge and flourish. Managed

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John Bonds
Executive Director

correctly, everyone wins in amateur sport regardless of the outcome of the particular event. In modern parlance, amateur sport is a win-win proposition.

To accomplish this goal, all of us must keep in mind the real purpose of sport-- providing healthy activity for the participants. When other objectives begin to displace this purpose either through the siren's song of sponsorship or advertising, or through a transformation by which the outcome of the event is more important than the activity itself, amateur sport begins to lose its meaning and justification for being. Again, we all know this intuitively-- and condemn college coaches who condone illegal activity to ensure winning teams. Playing by the rules, observing

the norms of fair play, being a good sport are still expected by most of us. Winning is important, to be sure. But it isn't everything. Losing is preferable to cheating, to beating the rules. Winning by an unfair advantage is not preferable to losing in amateur sport.

This is one of the paramount differences between amateur and professional sport. Amateur sport must remain centered on the participant, his well-being and his welfare. Purity of competition is a central element in the equation. Within the boundaries of the rules established for the competition, may the best man win. Professional sport has become something entirely different. Winning IS everything, as coaches discover every year in the NFL, NBA, and NHL. Winning is profit, and professional sport is a business—not really a sport at all. Maximizing the event for the spectator and for the media builds profits. If the welfare of the player must be compromised, that is a necessary price which will be paid—if necessary in increased salaries for the players.

All this is terribly important in our sport as we explore ways to use commercial sponsorship of our amateur events to help offset their costs of operation and enhance them for our participants. We must resist erosion of the central purpose for amateur sport, and keep it focused on the participant from whom it derives its reason for being.

What's more important than winning? Participating in a common activity with friends, doing your dead-level best with the equipment and talent you have, congratulating a newcomer to the fleet who has moved out of DFL and finished ahead of you, sharing your secrets with others, cheering for the winner who worked harder at the game than you did. And in sailing, there is much more besides: The primeval communication between you and the porpoise who surfaces beside you and keeps pace alongside while you race; the beauty of a sunrise after a night of racing under the stars; the exaltation of a perfect spinnaker set or takedown; the pride of watching a son or daughter take the helm in light air and steer better than you. Oh yeah, there's a lot more to racing sailboats than winning... ■