

Interview with MC Masters National Champion Scott Harestad

Article courtesy of Eric Hood.

EH- We are visiting with our 2015 MC Masters National Champion Scott Harestad. Hey, Scott congratulations on a rock solid victory down at Privateer Yacht Club just outside Chattanooga, TN on the Tennessee River. Can you give the readers a snapshot of your sailing career. Where you started, mentors, lakes you sailed and any milestone moments in your sailing career.

SH – My family moved to Spring Lake, Michigan in 1976. I was 13 before my parents bought my first Butterfly #192. After 3 last place finishes I quit a race and my dad said if I ever quit a race again, I'd never get another boat, so that never happened again. Happy Fox, Gary Verplank and Carl Reuterdaahl from the Spring Lake Yacht Club were big promoters of the MC Scow, and so when I turned 18 my parents purchased my first MC (#562). I sailed in the MC Nationals from 1981 - 1986 and finished in the top 5 but never won, finishing 3rd behind Harry Melges at age 19 on Lake Lanier in GA and also traveling to Lake Granby in CO was beautiful. Growing up sailing against people like Paul Eggert, Happy Fox, Larry Price, Brett Hatton, Todd Bosgraaf, Jamie Kimball and Cam McNeil was great on the water training. I asked a lot of questions about how to sail fast and this has given me plenty of opportunities to compete against some great sailors.

EH- We know you were sailing just to the west of the 1000 year rains in Charleston and all with the hurricane rumbling up the east coast. What were the weather conditions like and better yet tell us about the river, size, current, courses, bluffs and all.

SH- The weather outlook almost made me decide not to travel south, but I committed back in August and I wanted to see some old friends. The call for cold wind from the North at 8 - 12 knots actually made me believe that I had an advantage because we sail in this type of weather all the time in MI. I've sailed here twice before when I lived in Knoxville, TN so I was not concerned about the current, it wasn't strong enough to make a difference. The bluffs are very similar to the sand dunes we deal with along the Lake Michigan in west Michigan. The key was to get out early before the race, check out both sides of the course and be confident in your choices.

EH- You had some big guns there that have won all the majors before in the MC Class. This is your first Major Championship. What was that moment like when you first realized that you actually had won the whole event?

SH- Surreal. Honestly I've been out of the regatta circuit for so long I had never heard of Bill Draheim. I really didn't know how many points Ron Baerwitz was behind me. After he won the last race, I was sailing to the clubhouse and thinking ...damn, did I tie Ron and lose in a tiebreaker? I was sitting at lunch with Mark Tesar and he saw Steve Sherman post the scores and I couldn't move, then he said "go check out the scores champ". I had to look at it about 5 times before I realized there wasn't a scoring error, then I just smiled and said to myself, you didn't choke this time.

EH- Looking at the scores, you were incredibly consistent against many of the big guns and there were at least 5 former national champs and one world champ, who you beat who were all over the map and the course. Was there any one thing or many small things you can contribute to that consistent finishing?

SH- Once I got on the race course and they set the starting line, I really felt the left side of the course was favored not with more wind pressure, but with bigger lifts. The committee boat end was good if you could tack right away and go all the way to the shore, but that would only work if you were the first boat to port. Weighing 240 lbs, it's important to me to get clear air ASAP and I felt the pin end gave me a better opportunity to succeed. Even when they dropped the line back, I kept going to the same place because the wind was the same every day and I felt that if I could be the pin end boat I'd be in the top 10 at the first mark and avoid that 2nd larger pack of boats during rounding.

EH – So back to the conditions for the series, was there anything special you did with your rig and setup where you said to yourself “I know this is right and I am going with it”? That is, sail trim, rig setup, body motion?

SH- There were a few things that helped. First I checked all my equipment and found a few broken strands on the right stay, thankfully Jim Gluek had an extra one. I wet sanded my rudder since it seemed a bit rough. I didn't feel fast in the practice race so I re-measured and pulled the rig forward a bit. I used my new North Z Max Sail and felt it was better than my back-up in any wind condition. Charlie Harrett Jr. told me after a race at this year's Western's that I needed to move my weight forward both upwind and downwind, so I think that really helped me keep the bow down and driving especially when the river got choppy.

EH- We just talked about the rig. How about starting and tactics? Did anything stand out to you where you said I am doing this well and this is a key to my sailing right now?

SH- My sister Beth Windemuller is my crew on my C boat and she is always telling me to "sail my own race" so that always sticks in my head. I really just wanted to show up, sail competitively, meet a few new people and have a good time and if I happen to come home with some hardware all the better. I've heard of people saying they were in a zone, this was as close to being in the zone as I can remember. I had one bad start, the 4th race, I went for the mid-line sag and got buried, I was patient and stayed in phase when the shifts happened instead of taking a flyer, this contributed to having consistent races and not panicking as I have in the past.

EH- For new sailors and also even veteran sailors who find themselves in the back half and they are trying to improve 10% or more each season, what advice would you give us to focus on for this next season?

SH- Never quit a race, smile and stay positive during the worst situations. Talk to people after their race and ask them questions about what they did well or not so well. Plan out your season, commit to sailing more races and take good care of your boat, mine is 10 years old and feeling like new. I took 10 years off to raise kids before I purchased my current MC, I went to Zenda U to get some tips and that really has helped me sharpen my boat handling skills, I can still hear Ted, Eric, and Andy coaching me.

EH - OK now for a little tradition with the champ. You have the floor and can close this interview out with anything that is important to you and our sport.

SH- Sailing has been a blessing in my life. I've played many sports, but none of them have given me the same happiness and freedom I get from sailing. I love traveling to sailing regatta's because they are full of fun people enjoying life and encouraging sportsmanship in a competitive situation. I like the preparation of packing up the boat, driving to a new destination, seeing old faces and meeting new people. The Spring Lake Yacht Club has been my sailing family for 39 years and so I dedicate this win to them. Special thanks to everyone who was at the Privateer Yacht Club and shared this moment with me!

EH – Again, from all of us congratulations Scott!!! It was a great win!!!