

# "PSYCHE"

by Greg Fisher

Any person who has ever played a competitive sport with a true desire to win learns the importance of "psyche". Even to the sailboat race, psyche is of major importance; and to those who win, psyche comprises at least 90% of the ingredients of their winning effort.

Most winners call "psyche" a state of mind, a mental readiness that enables them to win. Maybe they call it a total concentration or dedication to their goal. On the water nothing slows this desire whether it's their family their business, their problems ....there are no problems for a winner when he begins his race. Most important of all, they do not tolerate losing - to accept losing is to accept failure. They know they will win.

But how do we gain this "psyche"? For those of us who lose, it sounds as though we must have some sort of operation or receive shock treatments to condition our heads to think like winners. Maybe attend some clinics on winning...

Let's go back to our earlier definition of "psyche" and make a slight alteration. Replace 'state of mind' with 'state of being'. There is a reason why the winner is "psyched". Something that gives him the feeling that he will win. Something that not only gives him the mental desire but the actual physical ability to put away the rest of his competition not just at the start, not just after the first shift, not just after hitting a series of waves, but in every situation; something that not only gives him, but also forces upon him, confidence: Preparation.

Sometime back in his past, the winner spent some time as a loser. There is no such thing as a "born winner" in sailboat racing. Beginner's luck is only a temporary gift for the beginner. The winner lost as the rest of us until he grew tired of being at the rear of the fleet. Along with his change of attitude and new desire came the newest, most important development - his practice. Either our winner has been sailing a long time and thereby gained a great deal of experience, or if he is a new racer, his practice has been so intense Ted Turner would be impressed. We are always amazed by the successes in college racing of some brand new sailor. In some situations he had been sailing only one season and won with a string of firsts. However, this guy usually has a coach and a required five day practice schedule. He probably spends close to 20 hours a week on the water while in school.

Upon reaching the ranks of winners, the winner is tempted to relax as though he's just picked up his diploma. This is common and many times we see this person dominate a regatta one weekend only to become an obstruction on the race course the next. The consistent winner's record, I believe, is proportional to the time spent in some type of preparation. The winners ranks fluctuate widely as time rolls on not because of age as some contend, but because of a change in desire. Although Bill Shore sailed practically every weekend this past summer, he and his crew got out sailing and practiced the basics the week before the North American Championships. Regattas that we want to win we must prepare for. The "We'll get by" attitude just won't cut it.

This past summer we attended a regatta which my crew and I labeled "practice" for a very important regatta we were to sail the following weekend. At our "practice" regatta, things completely fell apart. We had somehow decided that this regatta, with 5 races and only 10 boats, was going to be an easy win.

Obviously, an attitude such as this leaves you wide open for disaster. At the first start we were over the line early, then hit the leeward pin as we restarted. As we hoisted the spinnaker at the weather mark the halyard cleat let go and we ran over the chute. Our speed was terrible, especially confusing since we were sailing in a condition we had felt particularly fast in before. We were trying to sail fast boat tactics which led to even more hopeless finishes. Needless to say, we were totally discouraged. Normally, we might have thought of taking a weekend off from sailing after such a disaster. However, we still had to sail the next regatta and it meant a great deal to finish well. Patti and I on the drive home first tried to evaluate our mistakes and where we could immediately improve. The first category was the boat and most important was the speed. Since we weren't sure what the problems actually were, we approached it with a basic "stem to stern". Although the bottom had been sanded before, we resanded the boat looking for scratches, unfairness and dirt. The board and rudder were filled and sanded. Even the alignment of the rudder to the centerline was checked and the gudgeons retightened. We flipped the boat back over confident that under water it was as best as we could make it. Next, the mast was stepped and retuned. We checked things such as rake, sideways alignment, shroud tightness and finally the ability of the mast to bend. Everything was retaped and the mast dropped. We were confident that our rig was tuned to the best of our needs. This part of our preparation was finished before we left for the regatta. When we arrived at the regatta (in the afternoon, not at night as usual), we stepped the mast and began another part of boat preparation - making sure everything worked and would not fail. Fittings such as hiking strap mounts and spinnaker blocks were removed and then epoxied into place. Cleats that were old were replaced. All the rudder and tiller fittings we retightened and checked for broken welds. When we finished, at 10 o'clock that night, we were confident that our boat would not breakdown.

Over dinner we discussed our crew work right down to the basics. Even though John, Patti and I had sailed the entire previous season together, we went over everything. We felt our starts had been poor early in the season so we discussed our procedure again, making sure everyone was clear as to what their jobs were. John was to tell me placement of other boats - to windward and to leeward - especially those that were approaching fast to leeward and could be dangerous. Patti read the time and the most important job of all - continually placed us on the line. Basically she was the timing of the start. My job was to listen to their information and put the boat where I was told. We went to bed that night confident that everyone knew their job on the boat. The next morning we were the first ones in the water and out sailing. Although the

race didn't start until 12 o'clock we were sailing at 9 o'clock. First, we sailed upwind for practically an hour just getting "the feel" back. John read the compass the entire time for practice. On the sail back downwind, we gybed so many times we felt we could gybe with our eyes closed. Our practice reaches were long so Patti and I could re-coordinate ourselves with the spinnaker and tiller. We chose a mark and repeated the entire process twice more. Finally, another boat came out and we joined them in an informal brush and found ourselves very equal in speed except in the puffs where we seemed to work to weather a tad. We felt confident with our speed and later learned that our partner was one of the faster boats in the regatta. We returned to the dock for the skipper's

meeting, confident we were ready. The start of the first race found us leeward boat next to the pin. We were moving very well as we had hoped and soon found the 10<sup>o</sup> header John predicted. Our regatta sort of continued this way, our luck appeared to be good for once. Funny how one never has bad luck when he is truly prepared.

Much more was achieved this weekend than just a goal. This type of win, preceded by this type of preparation, sets a standard. We can almost build our confidence to any level we want and "psyche" ourselves to the high we need. Obviously, we can't be psyched for every regatta, but for the ones that are important to us, preparation is the key to our goal.



*Watch that Line*

Photo Credit — John Weber

# APPROACHING THE WEATHER MARK

by Tom Allen

Do not commit yourself to the lay line early unless you're sure the right or the left side is favored or you are in a gambling position. If you are on the line and get a lift you can't use it or you overstand. If you get a knock you lose distance to all ahead and to leeward on either tack.

In the absence of many boats, I would recommend tacking short of the lay line (the one on the side of the course you feel is favored). Here you can benefit from the lift or current you expect. When the wind is oscillating in direction you will be governed by the compass. When you add other boats to the picture (which is usually the case to all of us in the middle of the pack) the problems become more complex.

When you tack on the line early (usually starboard) it seems everyone else sits on your air unless you over stand. The other option is to tack short and approach on port, but now you have the problem of finding a large enough hole to tack in and of finding enough clear air between spinnakers of the boats that have already rounded. The tighter the next leg is the less disturbance you will get. If it is a run then one must find a way through the starboard tackers.

You can see from this that there are only a few rules (guides) to follow and many complications or variables which you must put in your computer as they develop and come up with the correct answer. Good Luck.

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# TOM ALLEN — PROFILE OF A CHAMPION

by Kevin Doherty

*Editor's Note: Reprinted from The Buffalo Evening News, Buffalo, N.Y. with permission of the author and of Murry Light, Managing Editor.*

Writing a story about World Champion sailor Tom Allen is like writing one about the weather. Somehow, deep inside, you know it's all been said before.

The library's file on him must be two inches thick. It stretches back more than a quarter-century, and includes such tidbits as: youngest man ever to win the North American Lightning class championship (in 1954; he was 23); first to win the World Championship (in 1961); only man to win the Worlds four times (1961, '63, '65, and '77); only man to win the North Americans eight times; four-time Canadian Open champ; winner of the Pan American games; Olympic sailor in Flying Dutchmen; U.S. Albacore champ; North American Flying Dutchman champ. And the list goes on.

"Just to call him good isn't enough," says Bruce Goldsmith of Chicago, two-time World Lightning champ. "Allen's got the ability to sniff out the wind, and react to adversity better than any guy I know," he says.

"I don't know how he does it," says Bill Shore of Newport, R.I., another World champ. "He's better in light airs now than he's ever been." Last year, at the World Championships in Switzerland, "Tom did the best job (in light airs) I've ever seen," Shore said, "I'm convinced I'll never again witness anything like what he was able to do there."

What he did simply, was win four of six races against the best sailors in the world.

The championship series was sailed on Lake Thun, a tiny body of water nestled like a diamond among the towering Alps.

Those mountains produced "tremendous swirls and eddies in the wind- wild shifts that were just impossible to predict,"



*World Champion T. Allen at Rehoboth*

Photo Credit — Tom Bierman

Shore says.

Impossible for most, perhaps, but not for Allen.

"After the first couple of times — he won two or three — I was muttering to myself, 'He's just incredibly lucky,'" Shore says, "But then he went out and did it two or three more times, and you just can't do it for that many races and say it's luck."

Well, then, what is it?

People disagree, including Allen himself, but when asked to list his assets as a sailor, they all include his attitude, experience, hard work, determination and a certain instinct — a "feel" for the boat that somehow goes beyond simple boat speed.

Almost anyone, given enough time in the boat, can develop a feel for speed but most "Allen-watchers" agree that there's something more in him that makes him the sailor he is.

"He's got this tremendous ability to immediately recognize, from the seat of his pants, the slightest change in conditions. He can sense in an instant whenever his boat isn't going as well as it should," says Stu Anderson a local champion who's probably been watching Allen as long as anyone.

Stu remembers racing against "this kid" in the early '50s. "He must've been in high school. I didn't even know his name. But there he was, all right, and you could see even then . . ."

Anderson recalled the days of team racing on Abino Bay:

"Tom would always be selected team captain," he said, "and his head would be on a swivel. He'd be directing the team, and positioning the boats, checking out the conditions and everything, all while sailing his own boat. He never looked where he was or where he was going. He didn't have to. He just knew it. Even then, he had the ability to sense how the boat was going, and where, without even looking."

"He's a much better improviser than he is a planner," Goldsmith says. "He's very good at scrapping plans — scrapping what's not working and going to what does."

"He learns by trial and error," Goldsmith says, "but he learns very quickly. And he doesn't forget."

If Allen has a weakness, it's his starts. Both Shore and Goldsmith think they're better starters than Allen.

"But the thing is," says Shore, "he can take a bad start, and sniff out the air, go to the right spot, pass boats on the weather leg, and beat them to the mark."

"I don't think he knows how he does it," Shore said, "but it's not a calculated thing. It's subconscious."

Allen debunks much of the "feel" theory, but after some prodding, even he admits he's not sure.

"Maybe it's perspective or something," he says. "Maybe I'm able to see the sail shape a little better, or feel if the boat is tipped to the right degree. I don't know. I'm just guessing."

Determination and attitude play a big part.

"He never gives up. He's always trying to win," Goldsmith says. "Even when things look bleakest — when he's 20th in the pack — he'll keep pluggin' away and come up to ninth (or more often first) just like that."

"His determination to win has always been amazing to see, and he's still got that determination. And as long as he's got that and his health, he'll keep winning."

"He was behind me once," Anderson recalled. "It was the Canadian Open and I wanted to get a boat between me and him. But I couldn't — and there was nobody between us — and I looked back and saw the look in his eye — like a caged tiger coming at me — and I wound up second in that race."

Allen says he approaches racing like a mathematician. "It's a science," he says. "I suppose all sports are. You have a standard in a given (one-design) boat, but there are still so many variables. It's very scientific — maybe above us all, really. And you can't do it perfect all the time — maybe any of the time."

"It's simply the guy who does it better more often that generally succeeds."

That generally is him, of course, but he'd never mention it.

"That's another thing about him," Anderson says. "He's a super skipper, sure, but he's also a super person."

"He could've just won a championship one day, like the Canadian Open, and you'd go out sailing with him the next, and he wouldn't even mention it. 'Where ya been?' you'd ask him, and he'd say, 'Oh, up in Canada.' You've got to pry stuff like that out of him."

Allen is a low-key guy — soft-spoken, reserved, almost reticent to talk about himself. But even in the dark shadows of a summer night, sitting on the unlit porch of his summer home, you can see those piercing eyes flash and can practically feel the wheels turning as a thousand thoughts race through his mind when a subject perks his interest.

It's a feeling of intensity — or command — that he projects, and his crew must get that same feeling in a race.



*How did that fox get up the mast?*

Photo Credit — John Dees

Allen is rather awesome looking – deceptively tall, well-proportioned, with broad shoulders and solid legs – all great assets in sailing. He looks as hard as a hunk of molded iron.

Allen, despite his reluctance to talk about them, takes a lot of pride in his accomplishments, and his work.

He owns the Allen Boat Co. on Fuhrmann Boulevard and his goal is, simply, to build a better boat.

In the early '60's, Allen says in a typical understatement, "I was winning as much as anyone else, (he was winning everything) but I just felt the boat could be better."

So he built his own, and it was. He won the world championship in '61 and '63 in that boat, then came back in a new boat in '65 to take the worlds again.

With a record like that, business picked up and what was once a night-and-weekends-only sideline became a full-fledged operation.

And, just as he follows his instincts on the race course, and goes his own way, he's going his own way as a boat builder too. While many of his colleagues – like Shore and Goldsmith, Jim Carson of Philadelphia, Lowell North and others concentrate on one aspect of sailing – either the hull or the spars or the sails – Allen does the whole bit, right from the skeg to the masthead.

"Here's a guy with no formal training (in marine engineering or boat design)" Anderson says, "who conjures up in his mind what looks like a fast boat, or a fast sail, and then goes

and builds it."

And his conjectures usually pay off.

Does all the intensity, the search for perfection, the 60-hour weeks in the shop, the pressure to win affect his family?

"He's got a wonderful family – four wonderful kids," one friend said. "I remeber when he and Annie were just going around (they were married in '56) and I really wondered what kind of a father such a low-key guy would be. But when Jane and Brenda and Tom came along, and now Jimmy, well, it's something to see. He's just a different person with them around."

What's the future hold for Allen? More races, more victories, more championships, undoubtedly. Ten or 15 years from now, semi-retirement from the business ("I never could completely walk away from it," he says), a little sailing for fun, perhaps, more time with his family and, for the present, "maybe just a day off."

Tom Allen is a champion – a winner on the race course, in the business world, and at home.

He's got a record in sailing that many say will never be equaled. He's got a business that's prospering. He's got a family that anyone would envy.

Chances are we'll not see a man of his caliber on the water, or on land for that matter, ever again.

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