

## **Much Ado About Nothing Throwing the Races in The America's Cup**

By Bill Koch  
Skipper of America3 and  
Winner Of The 1992 America's Cup

Did Paul Cayard throw the race? Did he show a lack of sportsmanship? Thursday, Cayard's boat AmericaOne, from San Francisco, lost a race with Stars and Stripes, from San Diego, in the semifinals of the Louis Vuitton Cup to select the challenger for the America's Cup in February 2000. AmericaOne had already earned her place in the Louis Vuitton finals, but the race was a do-or-die one for Stars and Stripes. If Stars and Stripes beats America True on Friday, she will face Prada in a sudden death race off. The winner will compete against Cayard for the second spot in the finals. As Prada is the favorite and the strongest team in the Louis Vuitton series, the media has accused Cayard of deliberately throwing the race to eliminate his toughest competitor.

This is not a new accusation in this America's Cup. Dawn Riley, head of America True, was accused of foul play and poor sportsmanship when she withdrew from the last race of the third round robin after securing a spot in the semifinals, even though her logic of not risking damage to their only boat was rational and sound. She gave points to another competitor and thereby eliminated Young America, the New York Yacht Club's entry, from the competition.

I have a unique perspective on the issue. First, I know a little bit about Cayard's character, having competed against him in over 100 races in the Maxi class. He has one world

Maxi Championship; I have two. I was also fortunate enough to defeat him in the 1992 America's Cup and he defeated my women's team in the 1995 America's Cup defender trials. We have been fierce and antagonistic competitors. But I rode as the 17th man on AmericaOne in its race against Nippon on Wednesday, where Cayard secured his spot in the finals. I also rode as the 17th man on Stars and Stripes Thursday, when she beat Cayard to stay alive. If this were a trial, I would be the first witness called to take the stand. Nothing escaped my view.

The race against Nippon was in severe sailing conditions of high winds and rough seas. Paul devised a conservative start of ducking under Nippon and tacking and running away instead of the usual dial up (luffing into the wind at the line) to avoid any penalties or damage. Nippon was both aggressive and desperate. AmericaOne wanted the right side of the line but Nippon forced it to the left. On the first beat the boat speeds were even and the wind shifted from right to left and right again, giving Nippon a seven second lead at the first mark. At the windward mark Nippon did a bareaway set and Paul did a jibe set. After a number of attacking jibes in which the boats came within three feet of one another and being in phase with the wind, Paul rolled over Nippon to establish a narrow lead of eight seconds. He fought off Nippon over the next four legs, winning by only 17 seconds. It was a tough race with boats taking on water. Paul was calm and collected.

On the tow in, Cayard debriefed his crew about the standings. He said, "Guys we are in the finals. You did a great job. I will decide tomorrow morning if we race. We got to protect our assets. We only have two masts. It will be a big deal with this press if we do not race. Look at all the flack True got when they decided not to race. That was minor compared to where we are. You do not have to worry about that but I do. My guess is that if we don't race, Stars and

Stripes will beat True and Prada will beat Stars and Stripes in the race off. We will probably race Prada in any event. If we race tomorrow it will be good practice”.

On Thursday, AmericaOne showed up at the starting line. There was a lot of tension on Stars and Stripes as this was another do-or-die race. During the prestart, the afterguard agonized over which side of the course was favored. They finally decided on the left. Ken Reed, the skipper aggressively entered from port and headed straight for AmericaOne. Surprisingly, Cayard ducked Stars and Stripes and tacked to follow. In the circling that followed, Cayard maneuvered to obtain the left hand side. With less than 90 seconds to go Peter Isler on Stars and Stripes said, “the right hand side of the line is favored by 12 degrees”. Ken Reed said “let’s go for it” and started with a four second lead. The wind did go left on the first beat but not enough to offset the start and then swing back right. Stars and Stripes in the 13 knots of breezes showed very good upwind speed, and rounded the top mark with a 45 second lead. On all the downwind legs AmericaOne showed better speed and gained and tried every possible move to overtake Stars and Stripes but Peter Isler and Tom Widden worked very hard to fight him off. Stars & Strips won by 22 seconds. This was a very close, hard fought race, considering the average winning margin has been one minute 10 seconds. The crew was exhausted and delighted to be still alive and slept on the tow in.

There is no question Paul Cayard used this race as practice. He had made a small under water change, and had rotated 2 crew members. He fought hard to win the side of the course he wanted, a mistake that cost him the race. When he realized his error, he fought hard to get back into the race. He was conservative at the start, but he needed to protect his equipment for the finals. The America’s Cup is a tough event and requires tough decisions. It is not a popularity

contest. Anyone who views it as such will lose. Paul made a decision that was in his long term best interest even though there were costs and risks. He learned what it will take to beat Stars and Stripes if they get into the finals, and he refined his weather forecasting. The risks were he could have broken some equipment and hurt some crew members. The costs were a day of modification, wear and tear on the sails, and the media flack. Stars & Stripes made it's decision for the short term, to fight hard to stay alive. Both decisions were correct. Although Paul and I have had a lot of hostility in the past, I believe he made the correct decision and he most definitely did not throw the race. He was no different than a professional football coach who has already secured a playoff spot, but still has one more game to play. He used it as training for the playoffs.

There is another facet that people missed on Thursday. If they had looked closely, they would have realized that Cayard's wife was on board AmericaOne, serving as the 17th person. From my own experience, a man of his pride and competence does not want to lose with his wife on board, especially in light of the sacrifice she has made to Paul's commitment to this event

Stars and Stripes won the race with hard work and excellent sailing. The competition here has been outstanding. This is one of the most exciting America's Cup. There has been less dirty tricks than any Cup of modern history. Petty accusations of throwing races detracts from all the good of this event.

I find it personally offensive to accuse someone at this level of throwing a race. It is better not to race and suffer the resulting heat than the innuendo from racing and losing. In the 92 Cup we were accused of planning to throw a race between our two boats, Kanza and America3, (we had entered two boats) to eliminate Stars & Stripes from the defender series. We debated it

internally at some length. The San Diego Yacht Club and press badgered and accused us in advance of plotting to throw the race. Buddy Melges refused to throw any race and I decided not to replace him at the helm. America3 with Buddy as helmsman won the race and Kanza was eliminated. Stars and Stripes stayed alive, and to our chagrin almost eliminated America3. However, that was one of our best decisions as the competition from Stars and Stripes forced us to improve our boat and create a bond between our afterguard and crew.

The challenger, to be effective against New Zealand needs the best competition possible, whether it is Prada, AmericaOne or Stars and Stripes.