



Race Week News

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The Heartbreaker Team

A Champion Shares the Secrets to His Success

By Rebecca Burg

How does a racing sailor rise to the top in one of the most challenging sports around? What does it take to excel and be successful on the race course? Everyone who gets involved in the sport works hard to discover and apply a winning formula in the racing equation. One way to learn what works best is to ask someone who's been there.

Robert L. Hughes and his *Heartbreaker* crew are a well known and formidable force on the water. A two-time Farr 40 North American Champion, multiple Chicago NOOD Farr 40 winner, LMSRF 1D35 and Farr 40 Offshore Champion and 1D35 Key West Race Week Boat Of The Week and SORC Boat Of The Week *Heartbreaker* has earned many accolades. Also a Great Lakes Boat of the Year many times over, Bob and his solid gold team earned top wins in SORC (in the Melges 24 class as well as the 1D 35 class), high honors in the Chicago to Mackinac Race and has stirred up the status quo in the San Francisco Big Boat Series.

Growing up on the shores of Lake Michigan, Bob discovered the joys of sailing as a youth and was drawn to the level playing field of one-design racing. Throughout his sailing career, he campaigned a variety of boats from a J35 and a Melges 24, the 1D35 to his current thoroughbred, a Farr 40. Bob's approach to life is similar to his racing character. Motivated and results oriented, he has created a successful employee benefits company. When he is not racing sailboats, he's out racing bicycles throughout the country and his company sponsors the fifth ranked professional cycling team in the country. This is the kind of guy who's not about to let life just pass him by. He makes things happen.

It's clear that Bob is passionate about what he does. He shares his thoughts on sailing and on the intense action of a regatta. "The part that I like about sailing the most is the team, the challenge, the elements, making the boat fast and strategy. It's a sport that combines different skill sets. One is a physical skill set, two is the strategy and third is the team building. Lastly, there are not too many sports where you can go and get a chance to sail with and against the best people in the field." Competitors in Key West Race Week get to race against the top sailors in the world, from America's Cup winners and Olympic medalists to future superstars. Bob is thrilled by this fact. "When you look at the quality of people that you're racing against and if you beat them, that is the ultimate feeling," he says.

The secret is out when Bob reveals *Heartbreaker's* racing philosophy and game plan. "Attitude is the number one denominator. Preparation of the boat and attitude of the team dictates a lot of how you're going to do in a regatta." The crew is a vital factor in the racing equation. After several generations of crews and many years of team building, Bob discovered that it's better to have a crew with a combination of a "whatever it takes" attitude and talent. He's found that the best attitudes will stick it out through the good and the bad times and win out over just talent about 90-percent of the time. "Racing in the Farr 40 fleet, you're going to have good and bad days. A positive attitude is vital."

Bob explains what that best attitude is. "We have one ego, and that's the boat. It's all for one and one for all. If we loose, it's everybody's loss. If we win, it's not one person. It's the team." Every crewmember shares a common desire to win. Part of Bob's success is the abil-

ity to focus this natural desire and get his team working together as one harmonious unit. When Bob talks about *Heartbreaker's* sailing successes, he credits the team.

Naturally, a winning team takes time to build and develop. "We've just been fortunate enough to put a great group of guys and girls together over the years. We've all sailed together now for a long time and we're a little bit like a family." Onboard *Heartbreaker*, everyone is willing to help their team mates out. If there's a mistake, there's no finger pointing or blame. Instead, Bob directs the attention on one question. "How can we do better as a team?"

Everything happens so quickly on a Farr 40. There are ten people sailing *Heartbreaker* and one wonders how a large crew communicates during the heat of a race. Finely tuned, Bob's team has had plenty of practice together and is willing to work hard. "Everybody has a certain role.



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They know their position and what needs to happen." Bob explains that communication is extremely important and when it's done in an organized manner, as opposed to everyone yelling over each other, the boat is much better off. "A low-keyed boat is a faster boat," he assures.

Preparation of the boat is also plays a role in *Heartbreaker's* success. Well-groomed and fair of hull, the Farr 40 and her hardware must be working perfectly and well maintained. She's always well dressed for the


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occasion and having a good set of sails is an essential part of the racing equation. Currently, *Heartbreaker's* racing attire comes from Quantum Sail Design Group.

In summary, Bob's winning formula involves a number of factors. Having the right attitude, building a strong team, good preparation, a true passion for the sport and experience are all part of the secrets to *Heartbreaker's* success. It works. Bob's racing philosophy has turned the *Heartbreaker* team into champions.

Who's who in the *Heartbreaker* crew: Mike Hill-bow, Matt Noren-Pit, Wally Cross-mainsail trim, Brad Rodijib trim, John Schumaker-mast, Bill Bennett-spinnaker trim, Bill Hardesty-tactician, John Upton-offside trimmer, Amanda Callahan-floater, Bob Hughes-Helm.

ADVENTURE



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