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Volume 4, April 2003



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Herman Whiton - by Bob Merrick

Herman 'Swede' Whiton was from the first generation of US Olympic sailors in an era when only amateurs were allowed to compete and the yachtsmen had to pay their own way. He sailed his first Olympic regatta at the 1928 Games in Amsterdam, the first Olympics at which the United States had a full team in the Yachting event, as it was then known. The first modern Olympics in 1896 had included sailing but the event was canceled due to poor weather. Only one other American sailing team had been to the Olympics -- for the first sailing competition in 1900. In 1928 Whiton was the at the helm in the 6-Meter class sailing *Frieda* with teammates C. Olmsted, W. Outerbridge, J. Thompson and F. Morris.



-- the best American sailing performance at the 1928 Olympic Regatta.

The scoring of the seven race series at the '28 games was very different from the present day method. After four races all contestants that had not scored a first, second, or a third at least once were forced to drop out of the regatta. The remaining races were sailed and the team that finished first in the most races won the event. Whiton and his team sailed *Frieda* to a third in the first race ensuring that they would not be eliminated after four races. They continued the series scoring 4-ret-5-5-5-2, to finish sixth out of 13 teams

More important than the result was the fact that the USA had begun to show an interest in Olympic sailing. From 1928 to the present, with the exception of the boycotted 1980 Games, the US has sent a full sailing team to the Olympics.

In 1936 Whiton sailed *Indian Scout*, a boat of his own design, to victory at the Scandinavian Gold Cup in Hanko, Norway, an event he had also won in 1926 sailing *Lanai*. At the time this regatta was the equivalent of the 6-Meter World Cup.

Early in the summer of 1936 he also won what he described as a "huge trophy." Made of solid gold, it was called the Adolph Hitler Cup. Whiton, however, refused to perform the "Hiel Hitler" and to have

dinner with the man. As a result the cup was kept by the Nazis, Whiton was denied use of a letter of credit in Germany, and was flown out of the country. It is believed that he would have been a favorite to represent the USA at the 1936 Olympics in Germany were it not for the fact that he was such an outspoken critic of the Nazis and may not have been allowed into the country.

By the Opening Ceremonies in Berlin, Adolf Hitler had violated the Treaty of Versailles, German Jews had been stripped of their rights by the Nuremberg Race Laws, the Gestapo had been placed above the law, German troops had occupied the Rhineland and Mussolini's Italian forces had taken Ethiopia. The start of World War II broke the Olympic cycle for two quadrenniums canceling both the 1940 Tokyo Games, and the 1944 London Games.

After the end of the war, the 1948 Olympic Games were held in London with the sailing events held in Torquay. That year the US Olympic Trials were held at Whiton's home club of Seawanhaka in Western Long Island Sound. Sewanahka had a great history of 6-Meter sailing which no doubt was a great help in Whiton's development into one of the greatest sailors in the class. (He twice won the Sewanahka International Challenge Cup while it was sailed in 6-Meters.) The first American 6-Meters were built by Sewanahka sailors for the 1921 British-American team race series. The 6-Meter is a development class and it's likely that the development of American design know-how in the class gave the Americans a competitive boat in 1948.

Herman Whiton and Alfred L. Loomis Jr. built a new Sparkman & Stephens 6-Meter, *Llanoria*, for the '48 Trials. She was the only new 6-Meter to be built in the US since 1938 as many sailors thought that 6-Meter design had basically peaked and that new designs were not any faster. According to designer Olin Stephens *Llanoria* was "almost, not precisely, a duplicate of *Goose*," a 1938 Sparkman & Stephens design.

George Nichol's *Goose* was notably absent from the trials. *Goose* won her fourth straight Scandinavian Gold Cup on Long Island sound that September. This regatta may have been the reason for her absence as it would not have been possible to sail in both events due to their proximity on the calendar. Whiton and Loomis won the trials, beating *Star Wagon* owned by James Sheldon.

At the 1948 Olympic Regatta in Torquay, Herman Whiton, Alfred Loomis, James Weeks, James Smith and Michael Mooney were the USA's 6-Meter team. Though all the boats were close in performance, the Americans had a slight edge and sailed to a convincing victory. They won races two, three and six in light and fluky winds. In the windy final race the Americans placed second to win the regatta, earning Whiton his first Olympic Gold medal -- 20 years after his first attempt.

After the '48 Olympics, Whiton sold *Llanoria* to Magnus Konow on the condition that Konow let Whiton charter it in 1952. In 1951 Whiton as crew, with Eric Ridder on the helm, won the One Ton Cup. Whiton was ready to defend his Olympic title at the 1952 Games in Helsinki.

The 1952 US Olympic Team Trials were basically a match between *Goose*, owned by a Seawanhaka syndicate and helmed by Eric Ridder, and Whiton's *Llanoria*. *Goose* fouled out of a race and broke a spreader in another. *Llanoria* won the series handily.

Herman Whiton, Eric Ridder, Julian Roosevelt, John Morgan, and Everard Endt, aboard *Llanoria* in Helsinki, were off to a good start with a fourth-place finish in race one of the Olympic Regatta. Then something went wrong and they were incredibly late for the start of race two, managing only to pass one boat and finish ninth.

On the third day it was windy. The Americans were in a battle with the Canadian team aboard *Trickson*.

The Canadians had taken the lead at the end of the second beat but they retired, possibly for hitting the mark, and *Llanoria* took the win. The Americans won their second race of the series on day four, again in good breeze, although not as windy as the previous day.

After two lay days, racing resumed under light winds with the Americans placing eighth in race five. In a good steady wind, Norway moved into the overall lead with a first-place finish in race six. The American's placed third.

In the final, and deciding race, the Americans rounded the first weather mark in third. They took the lead during the second beat for the win and the Gold. Whiton became the first American sailor to win two Olympic medals.

When the 6-Meter class was dropped from the Olympic program for the 1956 Games in Melbourne, Whiton continued his Olympic class sailing in the 5.5-Meter.

In 1960 Whiton established the Sailboat Training Facility on Long Island Sound to promote success in international sailing events and specifically the Olympics. The champions of the time were instructors: Bus Mosbacher, Corny Shields, Stan Ogilvy, Skip Etchells, Ted Hood, Arthur Knapp, Bill Cox, Olin Stevens, Colin Ratsey, Bill Luders, and George O'Day. The facility held clinics in its 10 Olympic 5.5-Meters and eight IODs and then provided charter boats for the 5.5-Meter Olympic Trials to the outstanding sailors from the clinics.

Among the many events hosted at the Sailing Facility, the Regatta of Champions was notable for giving an I.O.D. to the winner for a season of sailing. In addition, the Facility paid for the plugs of the Lindsay Flying Dutchman, and the original plugs of the Etchells.

Herman Whiton Jr. got involved in the development of the US Sailing Center in Miami to further the goals of his father, who "believed in small boat sailors and wanted to give back some of the joy and pleasure he had received from sailing small boats in competition." Designated an official Olympic Training Center by the U.S. Olympic Committee, the newly dedicated US Sailing Center bears a plaque recognizing the Whiton family's commitment to furthering elite-level sailing in the United States.



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