

Sharing The Same Wind

There's plenty of cross-over between Olympic and non-Olympic boats and sailors

Peaceful co-existence is how James Bunn describes it. He is talking about two sailing disciplines that have different status in the world of sailing, and the television market. One, the 18-footer class, is not an Olympic category. The other, the 49ers class (for 4.9 meters), will make its debut as a medal event in Sydney, where Bunn's company TPL Sports has its main operations (he recently set up in London too). Sailors jump back and forth between the two classes, and so does TPL. The 18-footers are three-man boats and they are expensive, costing upwards of \$50,000. In the mid-90s, the 49er was introduced as a more affordable option, costing about 80% less with a two-man crew. "We run 18-footer competitions for television. The events are set up to run the cameras," Bunn says. "The 49er calendar has more of a life of its own, with pre-Olympic events, for example."

TPL produces and sells a weekly half-hour called Extreme Sail Racing, which features 18-footers prominently. That show is



Bunn: co-operation wins

aired on BSkyB in Britain, Speedvision in North America and Fox Sports Latin America, among others. During the run-up to the Sydney Games, TPL is also producing coverage of qualifying, including the 49er class. TPL even sponsors a 49er team.

The key to being able to operate across the whole sport appears to be keeping separate the things that need to be kept

that way. "We were happily doing 18-footers about ten years ago. We owned the boats, paid the participants and flew the teams all over. When the 49er started to emerge, there was an attempt by another company to do the television in a similar way and it didn't work," Bunn recalls. "That's because they were answerable to the federation but they didn't want to be and that led to trouble and a breakdown."

While the role of the established federations remains sacrosanct, the climate has changed somewhat in the television business with the explosion of new media options. "I think people are more willing to work with

others that they would've considered rivals. Instead of wanting to control everything, which ultimately kills competition, companies want to see what the other guy has got because it might work for them. Also, people are less litigious than they used to be."

The cross-over between Olympic and non-Olympic events is also evident in the latest project Bunn is involved with, a new beach volleyball league gearing up for launch in Australia, hoping to catch the wave of momentum from the Sydney Games.

Investors in the Beach Volleyball League of Australia include Steve Anderson, the coach of the Australian Olympic beach volleyball team, and former distance runner Ron Clarke, a 1964 Olympic medal-winner. A showcase event, the Champions Cup, is scheduled to debut this November at Clarke's Runaway Bay resort in Queensland. TPL has just come aboard as television producer-distributor. The new league is signing up top players from around the world. With the International Volleyball Federation (FIVB) running its own beach volleyball league, here's one case where co-existence might not be quite so peaceful.