



FAST-TRACKED

WILLIE MCBRIDE COACHED 29er sailors at the St. Francis Sailing Foundation Performance Clinic in June, and he asserts that those four days on San Francisco Bay contributed to “the most competitive youth championships in my memory” three weeks later in Bristol. Attending the clinic were 43 of America’s best youth sailors, “the cream of the cream,” as McBride puts it, “with plenty of support on the water, so as coaches, we could push and push.” Three weeks later, the cream rose at Bristol.

US Sailing’s Olympic Development Program accepted an invitation to partner with the St. Francis Sailing Foundation to create the clinic, which US Sailing called “an unprecedented gathering” of talent. Think of it this way: When you’re umpteen years young and you’ve sweated to keep

HIGH-LEVEL, INTENSIVE CLINICS ARE ELEVATING AMERICA’S YOUTH DINGHY TALENT.

up with Olympian Anna Tunnicliffe in morning calisthenics, you’ve experienced her training diet, and your time to self-direct includes an opportunity to sit down one on one with Olympian Zach Railey to talk tacking angles and how to keep your head straight when things go screwy on the racecourse, or with your family, and you’ve proved to yourself that you really can jibe in 25 knots — sometimes — suddenly you’re not

that same kid anymore. Laser coach Brendan Casey says: “This was about bringing the next generation together collectively in a training environment, not a competitive environment, at a time when they’re just starting their journey. They’ve probably never worked that hard before. Their eyes were wide open.”

Sailors at the St. Francis Sailing Foundation Performance Clinic were given the opportunity for instruction from some of the country’s top sailing coaches. The clinic reflects US Sailing’s renewed dedication to its youth-sailing development programs.

Photo: Chris Ray

Speakers included Paul Cayard, Dee Smith and sports psychologist Dr. Jerry May. Attendance was by invitation and free, with a maximum student-to-coach ratio of 5-to-1. Nothing slipped by.

Bill Dana, a St. Francis director and the spark plug behind the event, says: "One theme was how to keep racing, not just surviving, when the wind picks up. Kids who can sail confidently in winds above 20 knots will finish at the top. Our point was to do something that would have an impact. We have the resources. We have the venue. And even though this was aimed at elite sailors, we invited our local kids to participate in the briefings, presentations, meals and workouts, and when we could, we took them out on coach boats to see firsthand what high-level sailing really means."

The sea breeze delivered in the teens for two days, allowing time for coaching to take hold before upping the ante to 25 knots over an ebbing countercurrent. As the natives say, welcome to San Francisco Bay. One product was a 29er-class YouTube posting called "(LOL) Wipe-out Camp." McBride says: "We pushed beyond boathandling to high-stakes tactical situations like ducking to tack or ducking to jibe — to pin an opponent. We got the kids thinking about more than straight-line speed."

The results? Improvements, Casey says, were "dramatic."

"This was the next level," McBride says. "It was cool to be part of something I had never seen before. I think we all left with a sense that this was a new beginning." ◆

A FAST-TRACK DRILL

"Simple, productive, subtly challenging," says coach Willie McBride of this cross-tacking drill to improve boathandling. Its simplest version begins with either a lineup or a rabbit start, positioning two or more boats on the same ladder rung. The leeward boat (red) then tacks, and either ducks or crosses to windward, always ducking the final boat (Position 3) and tacking into a pinning position no more than three lengths to windward of the final boat (Position 4). To successfully pin the opponent, the maneuvering boat must be expertly handled, so feedback is immediate.

When the first maneuvering boat returns to starboard, the new leeward boat tacks and repeats the drill. Whether in keelboats or dinghies, the highly skilled should tack into the pinning position and hold the spot long enough to force the leeward boat to duck when that turn comes. The less practiced will slip back, leaving room for leeward to tack and cross.

