



For Anna Tunnicliffe, Molly Vandemoer, and Debbie Capozzi, the key to Olympic gold may lie in how well they treat each other.

# THRICE AS

**The split-second nature** of a match race rarely leaves much room for civility. When something needs to happen, it must be in very short order. If it doesn't, the opportunity will likely pass, the race possibly lost. Pleasantries, more often than not, just get in the way.

It's also not the place for sensitive types with thin skin. Mistakes come fast and furious, and there is rarely enough downtime between races for an extended debrief. Acknowledge,

learn, and move on.

Yet when Dave Dellenbaugh, former America's Cup skipper, was asked about the successful attributes of his charges, the women's match racing trio of Anna Tunnicliffe, Molly Vandemoer, and Debbie Capozzi, he didn't pick their tactical skill, match racing savvy, physical conditioning, or polished maneuvers.

"I think a key thing, to be honest, is that the three of them are really good with each other," he says. "They're all

very serious, but they have a lot of fun. If there's any issue on the boat, they always call each other out, and they talk it through and make sure that they're all contributing 100 percent almost all of the time."

It's hard to argue with the results. Starting with the ISAF World Championships in Perth, Australia, last December, Team Maclaren, as Tunnicliffe's team is known, has been on an unprecedented tear, winning 87 percent of its matches, and claiming





Story by Stuart Streuli  
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along the way the 2011 ISAF Women's Match Racing World Championship, two Grade 1 ISAF World Cups, and the second stage of the U.S. Trials. In August, Tunncliffe will be going for her second Olympic gold medal. Anyone who thinks her team isn't the favorite hasn't been paying attention.

The business end of the two-stage selection for the U.S. Women's Match Racing Olympic berth played out on the same course where the Olympic medal will be contested in August. By

virtue of their victory in the first half of the Trials last October off Key Biscayne, Fla., Tunncliffe's team was able to pick its opponent for the semifinals. Stephanie Roble's team—the fourth qualifier and the only one of the four not ranked in the top 10 in ISAF's world rankings—was the obvious choice. But, like every step of the Team Maclaren campaign, the decision was properly vetted by the three sailors.

"We talked about a couple different options," says Capozzi. "What we

went back to was at any other event, if we were first, we would choose to sail against fourth. You can get two days of 30 knots, and really cold conditions in Weymouth. Racing Sally [Bar-kow] or Genny [Tulloch], you had the possibility of being really tired going into the final. We knew we had an advantage being able to pick our competitor. We would take two days of a little easier racing."

The concern regarding the weather proved prophetic. During the first





In August, Tunncliffe (far left) will hope to add to the gold she won in the Radial in Qingdao. Capozzi (in green), will try to atone for a disappointing showing in the Yngling in 2008. This will be Vandemoer's first trip to the Olympics.

two days of the Trials, there was a lot of rain, plenty of wind, and precious little sun. The temperature—both water and air—never broke the mid-50s, and often seemed at least 10 degrees colder.

The potential for the other two teams to have a really strong series also came true. While Tunncliffe, Vandemoer, and Capozzi dispatched Roble 6-0, and were really only pressed in one race, Barkow and Tulloch battled through an epic 10-race semifinal series that had as many twists and turns as a good roller coaster. Twice Tulloch had her opponent on the ropes, leading 3-1 and 4-2. Then Barkow reeled off four straight wins to earn a spot in the finals. Momentum plays a bigger role in match racing than in other sailing disciplines. One or two bad races, or meeting a confident competitor at the wrong time, can bring a promising med-

al run to a screeching halt. And unlike in fleet racing, there are no throwouts.

Team Maclaren's approach for the first race of the finals was simple: Focus internally, and stick to the routine.

"We can't go into the competition worried about somebody getting on a hot streak," says Capozzi. "We're just concerned about ourselves. We just make sure we have everything ready for that day."

In a light easterly breeze that seemed to keep Barkow's team off balance all day, Tunncliffe, Vandemoer, and Capozzi clinically won Race 1 by a comfortable margin. Barkow—sailing with Elizabeth Kratzig Burnham and Alana O'Reilly—evened the score at one apiece. In Race 3, Tunncliffe grabbed the early lead, but gave it up on the first run. On the second run, Tunncliffe made the pass, but Barkow then repaid the favor as the boats closed in on the finish line. Tunncliffe used her leeward rights to force both boats to the wrong side of the committee boat, where Barkow forced the issue by jibing to starboard. But the umpires deemed it too close and awarded a penalty, giving the race to Team Maclaren. Tunncliffe, Vandemoer, and Capozzi then won the next three races to take a 4-1 lead into

Day 2 of the finals.

As they had in the semifinals, Barkow, Burnham, and O'Reilly responded positively with their backs to the wall. In Race 6, they pulled off a remarkable pass to leeward on the final run and were then able to shed two penalties within a few boatlengths of the finish line to win. It was the sort of stirring comeback that could've ignited a run, especially since it was followed by a second win that was, thanks to a Team Maclaren time-and-distance error in the prestart, perhaps Barkow's easiest of the Trials.

But Tunncliffe and her team didn't get rattled. They led all the way around the track for a win in Race 8, and then clinched the Olympic berth by winning Race 9.

On the dock after racing, Tunncliffe had a hearty laugh at her own expense regarding the finish of Race 8. "I made a massive mistake, and it cost us," Tunncliffe said. "We kind of had that race in the bag, and I got a little excited trying to go for the finish rather than just waiting. She did a really good job of teeing us up, sailing circles around us, and getting rid of two penalties."

After the fact, it's easy to laugh about a mistake that doesn't prove fatal. But Capozzi says that even at it's most intense; the team is always able to have fun. "We're really serious about [sailing], but we enjoy each other's company and we enjoy being around each other on and off the water," she says. "Sometimes I feel like we're not supposed to be able to do what we do."