

Sailor eyes Canada Cup

By Rich Swenson
staff writer

The yacht *Signature* didn't win her opening round series against highly favored *Stare* and *Stripes* to determine America's entry in the prestigious Canada's Cup, but crew member Richard Birdsell isn't ready to take down the sails just yet.

Birdsell, 27, a Livonia Stevenson graduate who lives in Farmington, has gotten a taste of big-time sailing on Lake St. Clair, and his optimistic *Signature* will give *Stripes* quite a battle before the summer-long series is over.

"The first series was a good shakedown for us," Birdsell said. "We lost, but we've seen a lot of improvement. We're finally starting to get some of the bugs out."

Stripes, skippered by Bayview Yacht Club's Bill Martin, won six of the eight races in the first of five round-robin series.

THE TOLEDO-BASED *Signature*, whose crew is made up of a conglomerate of Detroit and Toledo area sailors, meets *Stripes* in round No. 2 when the

series resumes Wednesday.

The third boat — New York's *Virginia Leigh* — still hasn't been launched.

With a formal match like the America's Cup trials, the three boats (all newly constructed) will fight it out in head-to-head competition on Lake St. Clair. The top two boats will then meet on Lake Ontario for the final selection series starting Aug. 19.

The victor earns the right to challenge the Canadian defender on Lake Ontario starting Sept. 16 for the Cup.

Crewing on the 42-foot *Signature* is a thrill of a lifetime for Birdsell, who has been racing on big boats since he was a teen-ager.

"THE COMPETITION is fabulous — it's extremely competitive," he said. "There's no time for procrastination or hesitation because the pace is unbelievably fast. We're very aggressive. You need the total effort of 10 people. If you're a day-dreamer you don't belong here."

A member of the cockpit crew, Birdsell's job is to grind and trim sails. And, at 8-feet-3, 220 pounds, he has the physical attributes to get the job done.



Jim Hughes

Twin Towers tall order for Rice

SOMETIMES THE toughest part of coaching isn't the obvious. Sure, it's a task to mold athletes into players, teach the Xs and Os, scout the opposition and repeatedly review game films.

But one phase of the job which is a task is handling personalities — not only players, fans and parents, but us guys. You know all about the media stereotypes. Anything to get a story, right?

I've been sitting on a story for quite some time now, and it's a big one — 171 inches, to be exact. Mike and Jim Lanier, 7-foot-14½ twin brothers from Troy Larson Middle School, have enrolled at Brother Rice High School and will put their frames on the basketball floor.

That's the story I've concerned myself with. Stories already have been written about the towering twosome, from an article in a Detroit daily to another in the National Enquirer.

The novelty of their size has long worn off, and nothing I could have put together would be any different. Besides, I figured two 14-year-old kids with that kind of basketball potential will have their day in the sun. It's been too early to fill their eyes with press clippings when there's so much yet to be proven on their part.

AS FAR AS I'm concerned, the only story that needs to be written — until they play their first game — is the one telling whether they'll go to Brother Rice, or stay in the public school system and go to Troy Athens.

Well, they're going to Brother Rice, so says father Emil Lanier, who, understandably so, would not allow me or any other sports writer to talk to the kids about their decision. Pop Lanier simply said they've had enough of all the media attention.

Now that the Laniers have named their school, the writers and broadcasters can direct their questions elsewhere — Rice varsity basketball coach Nick Conti. Conti faces the task I mentioned at the beginning of this piece. He's the guy who will try to

keep this whole matter in perspective.

This is probably the last thing Conti needs, not that he would try to turn the twins away. Catholic schools, Brother Rice in particular, have the rap against them because of, oh, what's that word again? Oh yeah, recruiting. Whether parochial schools recruit, attract, or get people in the community to pay tuition, it is not what I care to deal with here.

THE MATTER at hand is how a coach handles a situation when two 7-footers walk into his locker room. "Needless to say, I'm excited about the prospect of having two youngsters already over 7-foot tall," said Conti, whose 1984 Warriors advanced to the semifinals of the Class A state playoffs. "But with respect to the kids and family, we will proceed along the line of thinking to play this as low key as humanly possible."

"Needless to say, there is great interest on the part of the media to get involved, and that is understandable. But as basketball players at the high school level, they (the twins) have not accomplished anything yet. We want to make life as comfortable as possible for them and not turn this into a circus."

The numbers alone probably have made life anything but normal for the Laniers. And, even though they're probably used to double-takes and goofs, "How's the weather up there?" jokes, it still must be hard to lead a normal life.

"When you're 14 years old, 7-14½, weigh 225 pounds and happen to be twins, it's difficult to lead a normal life," Conti said. "I think it will be a little easier for them in an all-boys environment (at Brother Rice). Plus, the kids at Brother Rice are used to big guys walking down the hall."

"Within a reasonable time, maybe things will be normal. They may scrape their heads on the ceiling from time to time."

IN THE MEANTIME, Conti will have to try to keep everybody happy, including us tough-to-please media types.

Vardar brings home crown

Livonia's Vardar 111 soccer club sent two teams to the Buckeye Tournament recently in Cincinnati, coming home with a championship and a third-place finish to show for their efforts.

"The boys played extremely hard," team spokesman Gene Boday said. "The last day's games were played in two inches of water. It was all stamina and conditioning."

"Our team is a new team — we've been in existence for less than a year. Some of our players are rejects from other teams. We've really come a long way."

The under-13 boys, coached by Wally Barrett, defeated the Centerville, Ohio, Sonics 4-1 in the championship final to capture the title.

The team won five out of six games in its division, scoring 24 goals in six games against some of the toughest teams in the Midwest.

The offensive attack was led by Joe Bogdan, Jr., David Dingle, Jim Hawkins, Scott Seabolt, Bill Stoyanovich and Kurt Will.

VARDAR'S TOUGH defense, made up of Jeremy Boday, T.J. Flowers, Rob Keller and Paul Rice, also played well, allowing just one goal per game. Brian Durkin played well in goal, making three spectacular saves in the tournament.

Midfielders John Bailey, Erik Booker, Joe Crow and Derek Willford did a commendable job controlling the play.

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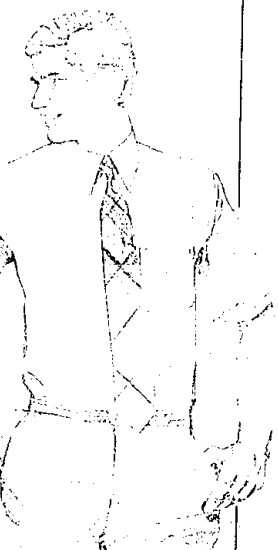
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