

The History of Sailing in the Olympics

While yachting was not one of the original sports of the Olympics in Ancient Greece, it was probably there that the competitive aspect of the past time of sailing started to develop.

In more Recent times, the first of the Modern Olympics was held in Greece in 1896, the planned Olympic Yachting regatta was cancelled due to very rough weather. So Paris hosted the very first Olympic Sailing regatta during the second games in the modern era. Since then, sailing has been held at all but the 1904 Games in the inland city of St. Louis USA.

Fiercely competed for, Olympic medals are an indication of a skill level and mental dedication demanded in no other Olympic discipline. No other sport demands 15 hours of concentration combined with physical exertion during one Olympic competition. Only in sailing, can 1 minute's loss of concentration over 7 days of racing be the difference between Gold and 4th.

Competitors from France and Sweden have competed in all but one of the Olympic Regattas. The USA and Norway have each won 16 Gold medals followed Great Britain with 14 , France with 12, Denmark with 10 and Sweden and Spain with 9 each.

Of the ten Danish Gold medals, 4 have been won by the One athlete - Paul Elvstrom. In a feat that will surely never be beaten, Elvstrom sailed in 8 Olympics, his last in the Tornado Catamaran class in Seoul Korea at the age of 80.

Australia has a proud record in Olympic yachting competition with ...

- 5 Gold
- 3 Silver
- 8 Bronze

Australian Sailors at the Games

1948

You never forget your first

Australia's first Olympic Yachting Team attended the Games in London that were sailed off Torbay. The whole team of 3 came from Victoria and raised the entire cost of competing by themselves. Bob French, it is said, had never seen the Firefly class prior to arriving at the games. The single-handed Firefly carried a jib and main and proved a handful for French who finished 18th.

AS(Jock) Sturrock sailed the Star class with L. Fenton Jnr. and with a 1st in the last heat finished 7th in a fleet of 17. Sturrock led the push on his return for the establishment of a body that became the AYF in later years.

A young Dane, Paul Elvstrom, took the Gold in the Firefly class

1952

Where the hell is Helsinki?

3 Australian boats attended Helsinki in Finland.

Five Victorians and a Tasmanian represented Australia.

Jock Sturrock, Puffy Buxton and Bevan Worcester sailed their chartered Dragon to 12th.

Bart Harvey and Kevin Wilson where 18th in the Star and Tassie boy, Peter Attrill saw Elvstrom win his second Gold medal, this time in the Finn class, but the Australian managed only 21st.

The Finns had to endure a 5 mile tow to the race area each day!

The USSR made it's Olympic Debut

1956

Our first home Games and our first Medal

Australian officials set a standard of race management in Melbourne that is still today the benchmark. 148 competitors from 28 nations had nothing but praise for the event. (compare that with the 400+ competitors and 85+ Countries that will compete in Sydney 2000 regatta)

Rolly Tasker and Huck Scott of Western Australia sailing Falcan IV took, Australia's first medal in the 12m Sharpie (the forerunner of today's Lightweight).- Their Silver medal set Australia's Yachties alight!

Tasker was to later become Flying Dutchman World Champion.

Sturrock and Buxton teamed up again this time with Dev Mytton in the 5.5 class and despite being hot favourites, took out the Bronze and became Victoria's first yachting medallist.

A young Paul Elvstrom made it 3 Gold in a row and the number of classes sailed remained at 5

1960

Getting Closer

138 boats from 28 nations sailed on the fickle bay of Naples during the Rome Games.

Sturrock was back with Wagstaff and Bingham in the 5.5 and had a 10th. Queenslander Ron Jenyns finished 4th in the Finn class in a fleet of 35. Bob French making his 3rd Olympic appearance this time in the Star Class placed 8th.

As was still the case until recently, Australians suffered in the light conditions and were missing the development going on in Europe and the USA.

Victorians Mick Brooke, Alan Cain and John Coon in the Dragon class were nobbled by a measurement upset one day before the first heat after showing real potential for a medal. It was Royalty that took the Medal the Vics looked like winning.

Crown Prince Constantin of Greece won and a Postage stamp was issued in his Honour.

Again Elvstrom beat 35 entrants to the Gold Medal and became the most decorated Athlete in all Olympic Competition at the time.

1964

What a Golden Feeling

Australia's yachties needed a win at these games to rekindle the interest of the Melbourne Games.

In unmistakable style, a 60 year old gave Australia that win. In what was his very first international regatta, Bill Northam won our first Gold Medal and such a gentleman was he, he didn't even point out to his Japanese hosts that they had spelt 'YOTCHING' incorrectly on his medal.

The Australian chairman of the Johnson and Johnson Corporation and later 'Sir Bill' had started the campaign as a sort of joke.

But with America's Cup crew Pod O'Donnell and Dick Sargeant won a closely fought trials and survived a political battle to make it to the Games. As all good crews do, Sargeant would tell Northam to 'Shut up and steer' if he ventured an opinion on tactics.

But Sargeant made sure there was a cold beer ready for Grand-Pa Northam after crossing the line for Gold.

Radios were banned on-board and a man by the name of MUSTO took the Silver in the FD's.

1968

The World Sneaks Away

Cuneo, Fergie(son) and Anderson of RQYS finished 5th in the Dragon, Ron Jenyns scored a fourth in the Finns, Forbes and Williamson in the Star were 6th and the controversial 5.5 entry of Solomons had trouble finishing at all.

Ryves and Sargeant in the Flying Dutchman took the Leather Medal(4th) in the fleet that Sailing Hall of Fame's Rod Pattison of the UK won.

Mexico's games saw Australian yachties start to realise that we were going to have to get more professional about our sailing or give up.

This time a man by the name of NORTH took gold in the Star Class and Elvstrom crashed to fourth in the same fleet.

1972

The Twins bring two Home !!

More professional we did get . In the infamous fickle and unpredictable Kiel conditions we banged our head against the wall so hard we knocked it down while others, including the world's best, just managed to knock themselves out.

Queensland's games veteran John Cuneo , Tom Anderson and John Shaw grabbed the Gold in the Dragons while Toms twin, John Anderson and skipper Dave Forbes of Sydney took the Gold in the Star in a chartered boat. The all-Sydney crews in the Tempest and Soling, among them Ben Lexcen had a hard time of the light airs.

Victorian David Linacre as Team Manager and the AYF had successfully led Australian Olympic Yachting into a new era. Funding was available to ensure crews trained in Europe or the US prior to the Games and expertise like Mike Fletcher's was employed with resounding results.

Mark Bethwaite and Tim Anderson in the FD,managed 8th and a young John Bertrand missed a Silver medal by registering a DNF in a race where only 4 boats finished. Bertrand was just metres from the line when time ran out. This gave him 4th instead of 2nd.

A visitor to Kiel Olympic Harbour today can find a Bronze Plaque with the names of the Australian and other Medal winners on a wall of the Harbour Control Tower. It is a moving experience to find it and read the names.

Rodney Pattison (UK) won his second Gold in the FD's and Elvstrom went home early after incidents on the water.

1976

The Boy From Taree takes Bronze

Kingston on Lake Ontario was to see Australians take Bronze in two of the Classes, Finn and 470. It was the first Olympics for the 470 and the Tornado.

They had replaced the two classes Australia had won Gold in in the previous games. John Bertrand made sure of the Bronze with some covering in the last heat. His hold on the Gold loosened after an untimely capsize earlier.

Sydney sailor Ian Brown and the boy from Taree, Ian Ruff, combined in a 10 month campaign to take Bronze.

Lewis and Rock from WA took 4th in the Tornado.

Silver for Pattison this time in the FD

1980

Canberra Invades Sport

Our darkest ever year.

Some say Australia's Olympic Yachting was put back 20 years in this one year.

252 sailors took part in the Selection Regatta and the winners decided - Ensuing parties were held and plans made. Only later was it decided that in line with government wishes that the AYF would boycott the games in Moscow due to the CCCP's invasion of Afghanistan.

Let the record show that the following team was chosen ... SOLING-Bertrand,Sheard,Dorning(Vic) FD.Brown,Bourke (NSW) TORNADO-Lewis,Robson(WA) STAR-O'Donnell,Coxon(NSW) 470-Gietz, Johns(NSW) FINN- Davidson(NSW) MANAGER- Parington

1984

The Re-Build Starts

How any sailor had the courage to sail in the 1983-84 trials in Adelaide was quite amazing. But in a well run event Australia picked a very talented team for Los Angeles.

But despite good funding the Olympic regatta in Long Beach was to prove to be 'One of THOSE Regattas'.

Our Tornado Team of Cairns and Anderson were hot favourites after winning the World Title for the two years prior to the Games. Gary Sheard in the Soling was on top of a terrific campaign and Chris Pratt of SA registered a good result going into the games.

We came away with one Bronze. Cairns and Anderson, in the Tornado Class registered 4th,16th,3rd,RTD,2nd,6nd and 1st -for 3rd overall.

Sheard, Dorning and Gordon held 7th, 6th for Pratt in the Finns and Greg Hyde in the WindGlider placed 6th among 38.

So Close and yet so far.

A Kiwi, Russell Coutts took Gold in the and Finn and the host USA won medals in all 7 classes

1988

The Women make their Debut and Elvstrom Bows out

The razor gang knocked at the door of all Olympic Sports prior to the Seoul 1988 Games. Only competitors with top performances prior to qualifying trials would go to the games.

Trialists didn't know how serious the AYF was on this matter until Chris Tillet & Brett Young, after having appeared to win selection to the team were excluded on the grounds of not having competed in Europe the previous year.

The look of the yachting venue was improved with the inclusion of the 470 ALL-WOMEN Fleet. Pusan's US\$65M Harbour had never seen anything like the Olympic fleet of 88.

In the Stars, Col Beashel & Dave Giles clinched 6th. The same result for our first Womens pair of Nichola Bethwaite and Gojnich.

Australia's team was still suffering from the lost ground of the 1980 Boycott. Pusan was different to say the least...20-30 knots of Breeze and 2-4 knots of tide.

Tiny Frenchman Theirry Pepponet won the 470's with huge Luc Pilot on the wire. With a budget of US\$7m to spend on yachting the French won 2 Gold.

Elvstrom competed in his last games again with his daughter on the Tornado at the age of 80.

1992

Sailing takes centre stage

Barcelona was the first time in 20 years that the Yachties were housed and competed in the Host city. The Sailing was just off the coast run from an \$80M Marina now a the centre of a whole boating community in Barcelona and a fantastic legacy for all Catalanian's.

Despite a good start , Beashel and Giles just failed at the end and managed 9th in the Stars.

Victorian Pair Lidgett and Bucek in their first Games suffered a disputed PMS in the 1st heat and climbed back to 9th Overall in the 470 Womens. Womens Singlehanded Sailor Christine Bridge (QLD) managed only 20th. Victorian Fiona Taylor in the Womens Board finished 11th.

Glenn Bourke (NSW) a survivor from the 1980 Boycott was 20th in the Finn. (Glenn was the Sailing Competition Manager for SOCOG and In Charge of the entire Olympic Regatta in Sydney.)

It was a cliff hanger in the Final heat of the Tornado's with Double World Champs Mitch Booth and John Forbes able to win Gold if the US and French team finished just a couple of places behind them. In the end a Bronze medal was their's. Lars Kleppich of (NSW) took Bronze as well in the Mens Lechner Board.

John Bertrand of America's Cup Fame was a commentator for the Australian broadcaster and ran into the water on Booth's return to get his first words back to Australia.

Spain spent \$US8M on getting 5 Gold Medals in the regatta, the US Soling Crew spent \$US.75M on getting to the Final Match Race only to make one small mistake and loose the Gold that they felt was their's.

1996

The Foundation is Laid

From Barcelona it was clear that Australia had built a Foothold to make an assault on the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Regatta held some 5 hours drive south/east of Atlanta at the famous Civil war town of Savannah.

Sailors endured a 30 minutes bus ride and a 40 minute ferry ride out to the huge floating marina constructed to hold the Savannah regatta competitors. In the heat and humidity of the deep south of America, hurricane's belted the area just weeks before the games that saw 440 sailing Athletes from 80 countries compete in terrifying thunder storm conditions.

Led by John Harrison as team Manager for the second time , the Australian's were as prepared as never before for this regatta. Coach Mike Fletcher was back for his 5th Olympics with the Star and Tornado classes.

The team finished with 2 Medals, a Bronze and a Silver, continuing our 20% 'Medalling' strike rate since 1972. In the Laser Class Michael Blackburn of Sydney had a forth just 1 place better in three races from a Bronze. In 7 of the Ten Classes our sailing Athletes finished in the top 10 places. This feat was only equalled by Team USA Our best overall record Ever.

No less than 22 nations shared the 30 available medals, Brazil winning 3 Medals and 6 other countries 2 each.

After the split of Tornado Bronze combination Booth and Forbes and the costly court battle they were involved in over selection, Booth teamed with another Sydney-sider Andrew Landenberger for 1996. Again it came down to the last heat and in a tight finish Mitch Booth became Australia's only Sailing Multi-Medallist.

In the Star Class, Col Beashel and David Giles of Sydney led the regatta until the end...ALMOST. After being forced across the start line before the gun in the last race Beashel and Giles gave Gold up for Bronze and Colin's face said it all at the Medal Ceremony. He will demand a return match in the late included Star event for Sydney.

After a 2nd in the 470 Class European Championships just weeks before the games, Jeni Lidgett and Addy Bucek looked in contention. The 12 time Australian Champions from Melbourne took 7th.

Colac's Paul McKenzie sailing the Finn in his first games won a heat of the games and finished 6th overall. Brendan Todd (ACT) sailing the Mistral board Finished 8th, while Queensland's only team sailor , Christine Bridge was 11th in the Europe Dinghy.

Tom King and Owen McMahon were 23rd out of 34 in the Men's 470. The Sydney Soling crew failed to make the cut of top 6 through to the Match Racing medal round and World Youth Champion Natasha Sturges was inside the top ten on the Mistral board.

Across the classes less than 2 places better in each counting race and Australia would have had 6 medals.

Great Britain's John Merricks helmed his 470 to a Silver Medal and tragically 14 months later in 1997 he died in a Car accident while competing in Italy.

1997 also saw the death of one of Australia's first Sailing Olympians, Jock Sturrock.

SYDNEY 2000

It doesn't get any better than this!

Competing in all eleven disciplines, Australia's 2000 Olympic Sailing Team bagged a record four medals. Gold Medals were won in both the 470 Mens and Womens Classes. Tom King and Mark Turnbull, the reigning World Champions, had a tough battle in the final race, but finished far enough ahead of the USA to take the Gold. In the women's event, it was slightly easier for Jenny Armstrong and Belinda Stowell. Whilst it came down to the final race, the girls cruised through in style, winning the final heat and taking the Gold Medal easily.

1992 Olympic Bronze Medallist, John Forbes, teamed up with Darren Bundock to take Silver in the Tornado Class. Sailing in light weather conditions, the pair secured the Silver with a race remaining, whilst the Gold went to the Austrian Team.

In the Lasers, Australia's Michael Blackburn did one better than 1996. With the battle for Gold and Silver taking place between Great Britain and Brazil, Blackburn fought and won his own battle to hold onto the Bronze Medal.

Other results included:

- Lars Kleppich, Mistral Men, 4th
- Jessica Crisp, Mistral Women, 5th
- Melanie Dennison, Europe, 15th
- Anthony Nossiter, Finn, 13th
- Chris Nicholson and Daniel Phillips, 49er, 6th
- Colin Beashel and David Giles, Star, 7th
- Neville Wittey, Joshua Grace and David Edwards, Soling, 6th

Whilst it was a great result for the Aussies, they finished just behind Great Britain on the overall medal tally for sailing.

Athens 2004

High Expectations

With high expectations from performances at major international events in 2003 and 2004, the sailing results at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens were disappointing for all those directly involved and the broader sailing community.

A major review of the programs was underway prior to the 2004 Olympic Games. This took on a new significance in the light of the results. The review involved written and verbal input from Athletes and Coaches and an independently facilitated meeting with the majority of the members of the 2004 Olympic Sailing Teams.

Results:

Jessica Crisp	Skipper	Mistral One-Design	6th
Lars Kleppich	Skipper	Mistral One-Design	8th
Anthony Nossiter	Skipper	Finn	6th
Michael Blackburn	Skipper	Laser	9th
Sarah Blanck	Skipper	Europe	4th
Jenny Armstrong Belinda Stowell	Skipper Crew	470	14th
Nathan Wilmot	Skipper	470	12th

Malcolm Page	Crew		
Christopher Nicholson	Skipper	49er	7th
Gary Boyd	Crew		
Darren Bundock	Skipper	Tornado	6th
John Forbes	Crew		
Nicky Bethwaite	Skipper	Yngling	13th
Karyn Gojnich	Crew		
Kristen Kosmala	Crew		
Colin Beashel	Skipper	Star	15th
David Giles	Crew		