

12 METRE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP 2019



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12 Metre Worlds Will Harken Back to America's Cup Days in Newport

NEWPORT, RI (March 21, 2019) – When the [12 Metre World Championship](#) comes to Newport, R.I. this summer (July 8-13), the significance of the venue will not be lost on sailing buffs, or for that matter, on sports historians in general.

The America's Cup, one of the most famous competitions between countries, was held here in Newport 12 times from 1930 to 1983, and for nine of those times, from 1958 to 1983, the sailboat used to determine the winners was the 12 Metre, a single-masted sloop of approximately 68 feet (21 metres) in length.



Scenes from the docks after *Australia II* won the 1983 America's Cup (Photos by Gilles Martin-Raget)

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During the 12 Metre Cup years, thousands of sailors, support teams, families and spectators from around the world swarmed lower Thames Street and wharves such as Bannister's where the 12 Metres and their teams headquartered during races that determined a final defender and challenger destined to spar one-on-one for the coveted silver ewer that was "The Cup". The most memorable Cup in Newport was unfortunately its last; 1983 marked the first winning challenge to the New York Yacht Club, which had

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successfully defended the Cup over a period of 132 years. An Australian syndicate representing the Royal Perth Yacht Club wrested the precious trophy from its decades-old resting place, breaking a winning streak that was the longest on record in any sport.

For July's 12 Metre Worlds, teams from around the world again will flock to Newport. They will sail a series of fleet races, held over five racing days, to determine winners in four Divisions: Grand Prix, Modern, Traditional, and Vintage. And they will sail the same America's Cup courses – 24 miles or so in length and plotted beyond the mouth of Narragansett Bay and off Brenton Reef in the Atlantic Ocean – that long ago brought notoriety to scenic Newport and its surrounding waters.

A Look Back from the Sailors

With the Cup's historical ties to Newport, it's no surprise that many of the sailors planning to compete at the Worlds are veterans of 12 Metre America's Cup campaigns.

Lexi Gahagan (Wilmington, Del.) started his America's Cup career in 1980 when he successfully defended the Cup as bow man on Dennis Connors' *Freedom* (US-30). At the 12 Metre Worlds he will sail in the Afterguard of *New Zealand* (KZ-3), entered in the four-boat Grand Prix Division and owned and driven by Gunther Buerman (Highland Beach, Fla./Newport, R.I.).



Lexi Gahagan and the current team of New Zealand (KZ-3); Brad Read (far left), Lexi Gahagan (third from left), and Gunther Buerman (fourth from left)

(Photo courtesy Lexi Gahagan and KZ-3) **Click photo to download**

"In 1980, it was like we were all on college football teams," said Gahagan, who would go on to sail for Cup campaigns in 1987, 1992 and 2000. "No one got paid, but we were working hard while also having a really good time. By '87 it had ramped up; it was more like going to work as professional athletes; people were hired and fired for their performances."

Gahagan said no one on KZ-3 is paid, although all are veteran sailors, including locals Duncan Skinner and Chris Fischer, who have America's Cup credentials as well. "The team has sailed together now for five years and feels good about knowing the boat," he said, adding that local knowledge, which Afterguard member Brad Read and other area sailors contribute, also is a plus. "We haven't had many other Grand Prix 12 Metres to sail against, and it's time to mix it up with some of the good competition coming in."

Grand Prix teams coming to America to compete at the Worlds are Patrizio Bertelli's Italian entrant *Kookaburra II* (KA-12), Jesper Bank's Danish entrant *Legacy* (KZ-5), and Johan Blach Petersen's Danish entry *Kiwi Magic* (KZ-7).

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“The others won’t know the boats as well, perhaps, but they’ll pick it up in a hurry,” said Gahagan, referencing the fact that some of the teams have only recently formulated, specifically for competing at the 2019 Worlds and the Pre-Worlds, also to be held in Newport (July 6-7).

As for 1983, when the world watched as John Bertrand’s *Australia II* (KA-5) beat Dennis Conners’ *Liberty* (US-40) and afterward revealed its secret weapon winged-keel to thousands of race fans on the Newport waterfront, Gahagan said he was watching, too, from a TV in Vermont.

“I wasn’t there for that one, but I’ve been all over the world sailing, and having all the boats on Thames Street the way it was, how close we all were...it can’t be replicated,” said Gahagan. “Newport to me is a special place...it’s why I still sail with Gunther and his team; it’s where the Cup should be if America can win it back next time.”

Mike Toppa (Ft. Lauderdale, Fla./Newport, R.I.) will sail on the newly confirmed Modern Division entry *Enterprise* (US-27), chartered from the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA) Sailing Foundation by Clay and Nancy Deutsch (Newport, R.I.). Toppa sailed on the same boat in 1980 when she served as a Trial Horse for Dennis Conners’ successful *Freedom* campaign.

Enterprise was discovered in France, in disrepair, a few years back, and brought back to racing form by two different owners before she was donated to the Foundation.

“Her interior was taken out by the second owner, who was getting it ready for the Worlds,” said Toppa, who also sailed on and designed sails for *Defender* (US-33) in 1983 and *Eagle* (US-60) in 1986. “A lot of design work has been done, and everything has been changed, including the deck hydraulics, the mast, the keel, the trim tab and sail plan.”

The best things about the old Newport Cup days for Toppa was learning as much as he did, sailing with the best sailors at the time, and soaking it all up. “I mean, I was sailing for the America’s Cup in my hometown; it was the biggest sailing regatta in the world!”



Clockwise from left: *Challenge XII* (KA-10) under sail, *Freedom* (US-30) at Pilots Point Marina in 2017; *Intrepid* (US-22) under sail.

(Photos Stephen Cloutier and courtesy of *Freedom*) [Click photo to download](#)

The Modern Division is yielding the deepest fleet, with seven entries that include three successful Cup defenders: *Freedom* (US-30) (1980), skippered by owner Charles Robertson (Guilford,

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Conn.); *Intrepid* (US-22) (1967 & 1970), skippered by Jack Curtin (Toronto, Canada/New York, N.Y.); and *Courageous* (US-26) (1974 & 1977), skippered by Arthur Santry (Arlington, Va./Newport, R.I.), another America's Cup 12 Metre veteran. As well, it includes Jack Lefort's (Winter Park, Fla./Jamestown, R.I.) *Challenge XII (KA-10)*, which two years ago was returned to racing trim specifically for the Worlds; Dennis Williams' (Hobe Sound, Fla./Newport, R.I.) *Victory '83* (K-22), which was the 2009 12 Metre World Champion (Modern Division); and Harry Graves' (Grand Isle, Vt.) *Lionheart* (K-18).

The 12 Metre World Championship is hosted by [Ida Lewis Yacht Club](#), the [International Twelve Metre Association](#) (ITMA) America's Fleet and the [12 Metre Yacht Club](#). The 2019 12 Metre World Championship is sponsored by [Château d'Esclans/Whispering Angel](#), [Grand Banks Yachts](#), [Gurney's Newport Resort](#), [MJM Yachts](#) and [North Sails](#). Official suppliers include [Bacardi Limited](#), [Helly Hansen Newport](#), [Sevenstar Yacht Transport](#), and [Stella Artois](#). Event venue partners are [Clarke Cooke House](#), [Ida Lewis Yacht Club](#), [International Yacht Restoration School](#), [Newport Shipyard](#) and [Sail Newport](#). For more information please visit: <https://12mrworlds.com/partners/> A full list of competitors is here: <https://12mrworlds.com/2019-competitors/> For more information visit <https://12mrworlds.com/> or contact Peter Gerard at pgerard53@gmail.com. Follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#). 12mRWorldChampionship, @12mRWorldChampionship

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The 112 year-old International 12 Metre Class encompasses a living history of racing yacht design by the world's foremost naval architects including Olin Stephens, Clinton Crane, William Fife III, Philip Rhodes, Johan Anker, Ben Lexcen and more who pushed their designs to the very limits of innovation. The resulting boats represented the pinnacle of yacht development from 1907-1987 for the highest levels of international sailing competition-- the Olympic Games (1908-1920) and the America's Cup (1958-1987). www.12mrclass.com

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