THE 1990 WESTERN HEMISPHERE CHAMPIONSHIPS
CLUB NAUTICO OLIVOS, BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA

By Pete Fenner

Twelve teams from six countries gathered at Club Nautico Olivos in Buenos Aires, Argentina for the opening ceremony of the 21st Snipe Western Hemisphere Championship. Warm easterly breezes from eight to twelve knots allowed most of the races to start a short distance out from the club on the Rio La Platta. This river, which is almost 25 miles wide at this point, is more like a large shallow bay with a constant current running downstream to the south and the South Atlantic 50 miles away.

Even moderate breezes would develop a noticeable short chop as the day went on. Following a front which caused major flooding the night after the first races, the wind went to the west. During races 3 and 4 this west wind became quite shifty as it blew off the Buenos Aires shoreline. By the time the lay day had passed and races 5 and 6 were run, the wind had returned to the prevailing north-easterly direction and velocity.

The Club Nautico Olivos is a fine facility for this event, with a big lawn and swimming pool overlooking the sailing area. Pedro Sisti and his race committee were the most low-key and efficient I have ever experienced. Lines were great, with only one recall in the whole event. Mark setting and moving were handled with little fuss or bother. Off the water, Johnny McCall did a great job organizing the event including housing, transportation, and boats for the competition. To insure access to good boats, Johnny required every competitor in the Argentine trials to agree to make his boat available for the Western Hemisphere Championship. As a result, some of Argentina’s best wood and plastic boats were used in the event. In fact, the boat with the best record was a 26000-series wood boat built in Brazil.

Overall, the conditions provided a good test of the competitors’ sailing skill. The competition was tight, with four teams having a chance to win the championship going into the last race. There is always a bit of luck in this type of championship where borrowed boats are used and the sailors use a different boat in each race. However, World Champions Ricardo Fabini and Harold Meerhoff of Uruguay won the last race to win the championship over the 1988 Champions Ivan Pimentel and Sergio Araujo. The two Argentine teams of Parada/Martinez and Borgstrom/Revora finished third and fourth.

Following the opening ceremony and a great cocktail party the previous evening, the Championship started with two races on Monday, November 19, 1990. As many competitors were getting adjusted to the conditions, Fabini and Meerhoff won the first race of the series, followed by Leme/Feltrim team from Brazil and Parada/Alves of Argentina. The second race was won by Torkel Borgstrom and Raul Re-
vora of Argentina followed by Parada/Alves and Leme/Feltrim. The first day’s results left the Borgstrom/Revora team with a slim quarter point lead over the Parada/Alves.

Monday night a strong front blew into Buenos Aires with 4 inches of rain which caused extensive flooding. As a result, Tuesday provided some of the most interesting Snipe racing to watch. Race three started in a southwest breeze of 12 knots off the city. As the racers approached the first mark toward shore, they were challenged by wind streaks and quick shifts. The Parada team lead at the first mark, followed by the teams of Leme, Borgstrom, and Fabini. Each team held its position for the next three legs. On the run, the Borgstrom team passed Leme/Feltrim and closed on Parada. However, Parada held on during the last beat to win followed by the Borgstrom, Leme, and Fabini teams.

In the fourth race, Ivan Pimentel showed the boys how to sail off the wind. As the storm clouds cleared, the wind picked up to 18 knots off the land with shifts and wind streaks. Leme and Fabini were the leaders at the first weather mark. Ivan started the first reach in eighth place. Going low on a planning pole reach, Ivan had moved up to fourth at the jibe mark. After a clean jibe with the pole up, Ivan went...
high. Jumping on a plane with the next puff, he quickly passed the next two boats
and began to close on the leader Leme. About 200 yards from the leeward mark Ivan
took the lead, rounding the mark 10 yards ahead of Leme. Through the shifts
and wind streaks of the second weather leg he held the lead. As Ivan rounded
the second weather mark with about a 30-yard lead, his main halyard shackle broke
and his main sank slowly onto the deck.

The Leme team went on to win the race, with the American team of Bart Hackworth
and Chuck Sinks getting second and Torkel and Raul taking third. Ivan requested
redress and was awarded first place points for his breakdown, a result that most com-
petitors seemed to feel was fair given his total dominance of the first half of the race.

After a lay day on Wednesday, Thursday’s weather was back to a light 6- to
8-knot northeasterly breeze with scattered clouds for the fifth race. The Parada/
Martinez team won, leading the race from the first mark. Most of the race Fabini/
Meerhoff battled with the Japanese team of Yaguchi and Ogowa for second while
Ivan and Sergio were fourth. On the last beat Ivan and Hackworth went right while
the leaders went left. At the finish Ivan had moved to second with the Yaguchi
third, Fabini fourth, and Hackworth fifth.

As the clouds cleared, the wind picked up to 10 knots from the northeast for the
sixth race. At the first mark the Yaguchi team lead the race followed by Ivan, the
Japanese team of Sugiyama and Sugimoto, Fabini, and Parada. By the second mark
Fabini had moved to third. During the second weather leg Fabini broke the cover
of the two ahead of him and went right to gain a slim lead at the fourth mark. Fa-
bini opened his lead on the next two legs to finish ahead of Yaguchi and Ivan. At
the end of six races with their worst race thrown out, Parada led Fabini by one point
with Ivan and Torkel tied, three and one quarter points out of the lead.

The seventh and final race was sailed in the usual 10-knot breeze from the north-
east. At the first mark Ivan had the lead with Fabini second, Borgstrom fifth and
Parada eighth. A second behind Ivan would have given the victory to Fabini.

However, on the second weather leg, Fabini passed Ivan and went on to win both
the race and the Championship. Certainly, Fabini and Meerhoff have demonstrated
their mastery of Snipe Class competition as both the current World and Western He-

A COMPETITOR’S VIEW

By Hal Gilreath

Close racing typified this event, as did excellent regatta support, high-caliber
competition, and a beautiful sailing venue off of picturesque Buenos Aires. From the
time of each team’s arrival until their departure, all transportation, housing, social
and sailing requirements were immediately met.

The Race Committee displayed a keen awareness of condition as two hour races
were sailed in a variety of winds and seas. Punctuality, proper starting and finishing
lines and accurate course adjustments characterized the commitee’s efforts. The top
five teams clearly showed the results of their extensive training efforts. They were
superior to the other seven teams with slight edges in speed, boat handling, and
tactics. These small advances were magnified over the course of the two hour ra-
ces. The result was consistently high finishes, a paucity of tactical mistakes, and
the ability to overcome small errors.

The following are some observations of the top five teams that differ from the
standards that I have noticed in North America:

The boats were local Argentine Alax (glass) and wooden Brazilian and Argenti-
ne hulls. The rigs were U.S. and South American Cobra and Bruder spars. The
boats were rigged for the prevalent local heavy air conditions. Traveller controls
were placed behind the skipper rather than in front as is the norm in the U.S. Also,
increased purchase on the boom-vang and aft-puller were used for greater reliance
on vang sheeting and increased use of the aft puller.

Boathandling observed noted a more forceful employment of upwind kinetics. The kinetics appeared to be used to aid in upwind steering and working the boat
through the short and steep chop. The sailing area, fifty miles wide and six feet deep,
encouraged the use of these body movements. Additionally, the top five teams, with the exception of Fabini, sailed upwind sitting very far aft.

Crew placement was latitudinally cen-
tered six inches aft of the daggerboard
trunk. Fabini and Meerhoff placed their weight in the more conventional forward
position. No major weight placement differen-