



WINNER'S DEBRIEF BY CAROL CRONIN

Women's 470 Crew, Isabelle Kinsolving

ISABELLE KINSOLVING, 27, IS A NATURAL on the trapeze of the 470. She's light-footed, intensely focused, and a veteran of the hard-knock Olympic campaign lifestyle. She finished fifth at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, crewing for Katie McDowell, but now the New York City native and Yale graduate is teamed up with Erin Maxwell, of Stonington, Conn. At the ISAF World Sailing Games in Caiscais, Portugal, this summer they were the top American team (10th), and must now earn a berth at the upcoming U.S. Olympic Trials in October.

What's motivating you to work toward the next Olympics?

I love striving for excellence. Sailing gives unlimited possibilities for improvement: teamwork, physical fitness, boat-speed, maneuvers, tactics, and strategy. This is also my last opportunity to go to the Olympics because I'll be attending law school in 2009 and will no longer have the time to dedicate to sailing.

What's your strength?

Perseverance. I am extremely stubborn and will not give up. In terms of sailing skills, I would say that my biggest strength is light air spinnaker flying, but that really involves the qualities mentioned previously: you just have to be able to stare at the spinnaker longer than other crews without ever looking elsewhere.

After the 2004 Olympics, you sailed with a variety of skippers before settling in with Erin Maxwell last fall. In 2001 to

2004 you sailed with one skipper; how are the two approaches different?

Last quadrennium I was learning how to crew, and it would have been difficult to learn boathandling while switching skippers. Now that I know how to sail a 470, I have really enjoyed sailing with different people because everyone has different strengths and weaknesses, as well as different approaches to sailing. But ultimately to get to the top of your game you have to refine your teamwork with one individual.

How do you and Erin divide responsibilities on the water and ashore?

Before the start, we discuss where we would like to be on the racecourse and where we should start in order to get there. Upwind, I focus on tactics and Erin focuses on boatspeed; I have a better view from the trapeze so I feed her information on lifts and headers and where boats are, and influence the big picture decisions. Throughout the beat our decision-making is collaborative. As we get closer to the windward mark, Erin takes over, but I generally call where we'll tack onto layline. If one of us feels strongly about something, the other will go along.

Downwind, the roles are reversed. I concentrate on boatspeed because all I can do is look at the spinnaker, and Erin does everything else.

On land, it is important to do the parts of the campaign that you enjoy doing. We both enjoy boat work, so we do that together. When planning trips, we each

Isabelle Kinsolving and Erin Maxwell were the top U.S. Women's 470 team at the 2007 ISAF World Sailing Games.

take charge of all the logistics for a specific trip. Erin is great at finding cheap plane tickets, so she does that.

In any two-person dinghy the foundation of a successful team is respect and trust. I respect Erin as a talented sailor and trust the decisions that she makes. Both of us make mistakes but we apologize, move forward, and learn.

What's the biggest difference between this quadrennium and 2001-2004?

The U.S. Sailing Team spirit. Generally, athletes are more willing to work together and support each other more. Part of this is that many athletes started campaigning last quad, so by now we just know each other better.

What would you like to see the U.S. Olympic program do in the future?

I would like to see more support for developing athletes. It's wonderful that resources are being directed to sailors that produce results, but those sailors had to come from somewhere.

What sets you apart from other members of the sailing team?

The U.S. Sailing Team has so many talented members I don't think there is one single quality that sets me apart from everyone else. Sailing with many different teammates has taught me a tremendous amount; working full-time at a desk job also taught me to appreciate every moment spent on the water. ♦