

Match Racing is a Great Bridge from Youth Sailing to Adult Sailing
by Dave Perry, Chairman US Sailing Match Racing Committee

In a recent interview with Radio New Zealand National, recent America's Cup winning skipper Jimmy Spithill was asked the following question: how did you get onto the path towards professional sailing and ultimately the America's Cup?

“We started doing youth match racing around the age of 16, and the reason for that was we couldn't really afford a boat to do the Olympics or to take it too seriously, but with this match racing route the boats are provided and they are all the same, and when you did the circuit all the boats were provided again. So you just had to really come up with the money for the flights.”

“The match racing circuit was a great way to get out there with a young team and learn how to compete as a team. You're on the road. You have to learn to deal with the different personalities; the pressures. It's tough. But it's so rewarding when you get it right and you can do it with a bunch of people that you really enjoy spending time with. It's the ultimate, and that feeling is very addictive, especially when you begin to get it on a bigger scale.”

Match racing, which is typically done in keelboats (though not always!), provides a great bridge for the older youth sailors out of dinghy sailing and into keelboat racing where most will race as adults. It is forgiving to kids as they gain weight, it is very tactical which is exciting, the close racing puts a premium on learning expert boat handling skills, including working with the spinnaker, and boat speed techniques, and typically the boats are supplied by the host clubs and centers/associations. It provides all sailors a chance to drive if they want, and also to sail with adult sailors which is one of the most effective ways to learn more about the sport.

The US Sailing Match Racing Committee has put together a list of the 2014 youth match racing opportunities around the U.S. Many are clinics, or clinics attached to a regatta, with a very low cost thanks to the support of North U and a generous and passionate supporter of match racing. There is also a clear pathway from an introductory clinic to regional regattas, national and international youth events called the Rose and Governor's Cup, the intercollegiate match racing program culminating in the ICSA National Match Racing Championship, and ending at the ISAF Youth Match Racing World Championship. [<click here to see the list>](#)

I strongly encourage sailors, especially in the 16-22 year old range, to participate in a clinic and/or regatta this year and give match racing a try. For more information on youth match racing opportunities and match racing in general, go to:

<http://www.ussailing.org/racing/small-boat-racing/match/>