

American Youth Sailing Force in S.F.

Paul V. Oliva

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The AC45 racing catamaran, in Union Square for a May promotion, is the boat of choice for youth Cup. Photo: John Wildermuth, The Chronicle / SF

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Thanksgiving week was tough, but the holidays will be sweet for three young Bay Area sailors who survived grueling tryouts in November to become San Francisco's entry in the Red Bull Youth America's Cup in September.

The three are part of a crew called American Youth Sailing Force that made it through the team selection trials in which six teams competed - nearly 40 sailors ages 19 to 24. They furiously cranked winches, tripped through agility drills and were challenged on endurance, sailing and communication skills on an ultra-fast 45-foot racing catamaran - the type that will be used next year to try to win a new international America's Cup

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trophy for college-age sailors.

Then, the waiting.

Michael Radziejowski, 21, a Berkeley native and UC Santa Cruz senior, was a standout in the trials. But would his dream of America's Cup involvement as a sailor be realized? More importantly, how about a big step toward a professional sailing career during the months before graduation and what're-you-gonna-do-with-your-life-kid questions?

These thoughts swirled in Radziejowski's head through a long week that included five Thanksgiving celebrations with friends and family. He had retired to his Santa Cruz pad with his girlfriend over that weekend when an e-mail appeared on his iPhone from team manager **Ian Andrewes**: The team was in.

American Youth Sailing Force would be San Francisco's team in the contest, competing against one other U.S. team and an unknown number of foreign teams, all college age.

"It was quite surreal," Radziejowski said. "It started off as an idea just a year ago. I was absolutely thrilled. I got what I wanted for Christmas, and the official announcement was on my birthday, so it was a birthday present, too."

Six crew are allowed, and the team roster has seven. The extra person serves as a backup - and a bit of competition for who actually gets to race, and who gets to helm.

The team

Radziejowski is big and strong, so he'll probably stay the guy who bounces around the boat grinding winches and manhandling controls, and he was voted skipper by the crew. Joining him are San Francisco resident **David Liebenberg**, 21, who is attending **Tufts University** in Massachusetts, and fellow Banana Slug Tomas Pastalka, 22, from Tiburon.

Andrewes, 22, is from Seattle and a recent graduate of **Pacific Maritime Institute**. Also on the team are two guys Andrewes knows through school and sailing circles in Seattle: **Seattle University** student Evan Sjostedt, 19 (from Long Beach), and Matt Pistay, 22 (from Zenda, Wis.). Then there's **Michael Menninger**, 23. Originally from Newport Beach (Orange County), he attended **St. Mary's College of Maryland** and joined American Youth Sailing Force after his strong performance in the trials with another team.

They're all now facing the extraordinary endurance, strength and reaction demands of the boat. On a boat that generates maximum heart rates on the professional adult crews, endurance will be the toughest part.

Won't get easier

As Andrewes said after the announcement, "It's a huge weight lifted off our shoulders to be selected. But now, going into this next step, it doesn't mean it's going to get easier."

The Red Bull Youth America's Cup runs Sept. 1-4, sandwiched between the America's Cup challenger eliminations known as the **Louis Vuitton Cup** and the



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final two-week America's Cup showdown.

In the special rules developed for this new event to groom rising stars of sailing, the United States gets two teams as holder of the Cup. One - Radziejowski's team - represents the host city of San Francisco. The other, called Team America Racing, represents the nation as a whole and has team members from California, Florida and Virginia. Both teams will be supported and trained by current Cup holder [Oracle Team USA](#).

Other countries get to decide how they will choose and train teams. It is unknown how many will make the starting line, though interest is high.

"It's a massive steppingstone toward getting involved with the America's Cup," said Oracle Team USA coach [Darren Bundock](#).

American Youth Sailing Force is fundraising to supplement the training and facilities support from Oracle Team USA. They have partnered with the nonprofit [Skiff Sailing Foundation](#) to accept tax-deductible donations.

For more information: www.americanyouthsailingforce.com.

Gifts for your sailor

America's Cup gifts look like a hot ticket this year for those who want to turn out in style for the 34th America's Cup.

Beyond the requisite ball caps and T-shirts, there are branded chocolates, fine art, branded cases for iPads and other electronics, and soon you'll be seeing a line of premium bathrobes. Special promotions will be available online at shop.americascup.com and in the Official America's Cup [Team Store](#) in the next few weeks. The Pier 27-29 shop has in-store specials every Friday, Saturday and Sunday before Christmas. This weekend's promotion is 30 percent off all jackets, excluding team gear.

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