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Sailing in Marin: Belvedere's Pastalka among an elite group racing in America's Cup Youth Series

By Michelle Slade
IJ correspondent

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Marin county sailor Tommy Pastalka, 22, of Belvedere, looks out from the San Francisco Yacht Club in Belvedere, Calif. on Tuesday, Jan. 21, 2013. Pastalka, a 2008 Redwood High graduate is a member of the American Force Youth Sailing team, was recently selected by Oracle Racing USA to represent S.F. in the Red Bull Youth America's Cup. The race will take place between the Louis Vuitton Challenger Series and the America's Cup in August. (Special to the IJ/Sherry LaVars) Sherry LaVars

JUST PUSHING the Oracle Racing AC45 out of the shed for the first time was the moment it clicked for Tommy Pastalka. The 22-year-old had been selected to race in the first Red Bull America's Cup Youth Series and it was at this minute that he had to pinch himself.

"I'm here, this is going to happen, I'm going sailing," Pastalka said to himself.

Pastalka of Belvedere is a crew member of the recently formed American Youth Sailing Force team (AYSF), which has been selected by Oracle Racing to represent San Francisco in the Red Bull Series. The event will take place this summer between the Louis Vuitton Challenger Series and the America's Cup on the bay.

He grew up on the



Belvedere's Tommy Pastalka competes during the Youth America's Cup team trials. (Erik Simonson photo). erik s

waters of the Belvedere Lagoon where his mom, Christie, taught him and his sister how to sail. The pair's first boat was a Sunfish and together they ripped around enjoying the freedom to sail where they pleased and exploring everywhere they could. It was at the junior program at San Francisco Yacht Club, where he learned to sail and then at Redwood High where Pastalka sailed competitively for the first time on a team.

The lure of bigger boats called toward the end of high school when he began racing on the Marin-

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Belvedere's Tommy Pastalka competes during the Youth America's Cup team trials. (Erik Simonson...)

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based Melges 24 Full Throttle. Working at SFYC as an instructor made it easy to catch a ride on some

of the bigger keel boats and at UC Santa Cruz where he's now a senior studying economics and environmental studies, he's

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continued mixing it up on as many different boats and types of sailing.

"I think the mixed experience helped me be selected for the AC youth trials," Pastalka explained. "Sailing dinghies teaches you fundamental points in sailing also tactics. Skiff sailing was a fresh breath for me as it's a lot more about boat speed and going fast so that kept me interested. The bigger boats particularly the Melges 24s and then J125s, taught me about the importance of teamwork."

David Joyner, skipper of the Marin-based Melges 24 Relentless, has been impressed with Pastalka's progress.

"Tommy has been racing on my Melges 24 for the past few years," said Joyner, who is a

member at the SFYC. "When he started he was new to the boat and learning the complexities of handling a high performance sport boat. He quickly jumped up the learning curve and quickly became an invaluable member of the team."

Pastalka recalls hearing about the Youth America's Cup for the first time.

"I think every youth sailor in the U.S. in the age-group was excited and wanting to start a team," Pastalka said. "I know I did — as soon as I saw that news brief I called my buddy Scott Lynch in the Bay Area and said, 'Hey man, we need to get a team



Belvedere's Tommy Pastalka competes during the Youth America's Cup team trials. (Erik Simonson photo). erik.s.simonson

together."

But, it's not so easy to get a team together so Pastalka was lucky to get a call from Mikey Radziejowski, a friend who was forming the AYSF team.

"I didn't give it a second thought; I was committed as soon as he called me," Pastalka said.

According to John Craig, Principal Race Officer for the America's Cup, the qualification and training for the Youth America's Cup has been a breakthrough for all youth sailing and is now providing a direct path to the America's Cup itself.

"This past year we have seen the physical demands of the AC45 and AC72 crack the door open for a few select younger athletes, but the Red Bull Youth America's Cup will blow that door wide open," said Craig, who lives in San Rafael.

Pastalka is learning firsthand just how physically demanding the AC45 is.

"It's going to be a challenge as the strength and endurance required to keep the AC45 going 100 percent on the course around the bay two or three times a day for a week is exhausting," he said.

So far he's finding everything around the AC45 was interesting and exciting. "Just being around the Oracle compound is thrilling, and as far as sailing the boat, it's set up as simply as it can be for the short course racing that they're going to have for the America's Cup," Pastalka said.

Learning the systems and the lay of the boat wasn't complicated thanks to other multihull experience he'd had on the Lightspeed 32 and the Extreme 40. Additionally, he and his crew mates spent a lot of time looking at the AC45s and watching video footage to see what the guys do so they were generally prepared to go sailing.

And sailing the AC45?

"There's nothing like doing 26 downwind in 10 knots of wind. Even just leaving the dock and feeling the acceleration was exciting," he said.

Youth teams who have qualified for the Red Bull Youth America's Cup are being given access to the world's best sailors and fastest boats and by working in this environment are being provide a direct link to current and future America's Cup teams, Craig said.

"The opportunity for these young sailors to fleet race the AC45 in San Francisco this summer on the world stage is the chance of a lifetime to showcase their skills."

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For the first time in the history of the America's Cup, talented young sailors have a clear pathway toward competing for one of the most prestigious trophies in sailing. Racing will take place in the same high performance, wing-sailed AC45 catamarans that are used in the AC World Series.

What: Red Bull America's Cup Youth Series is open to national teams of six sailors, ages 19 to 24, in 2013. Equipment, including the AC45 platform and wing, will be supplied to accepted teams.

When: Sept. 1 to 4

Where: On San Francisco Bay

Information: www.americascup.com/events/red-bull-youth-americas-cup

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