

3 Big Dogs wins it in light winds

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Pat Toole says that his crew on board 3 Big Dogs can sail the relatively small J24 class boat extremely well in blustery conditions. Apparently, it doesn't do so badly with weaker conditions either.

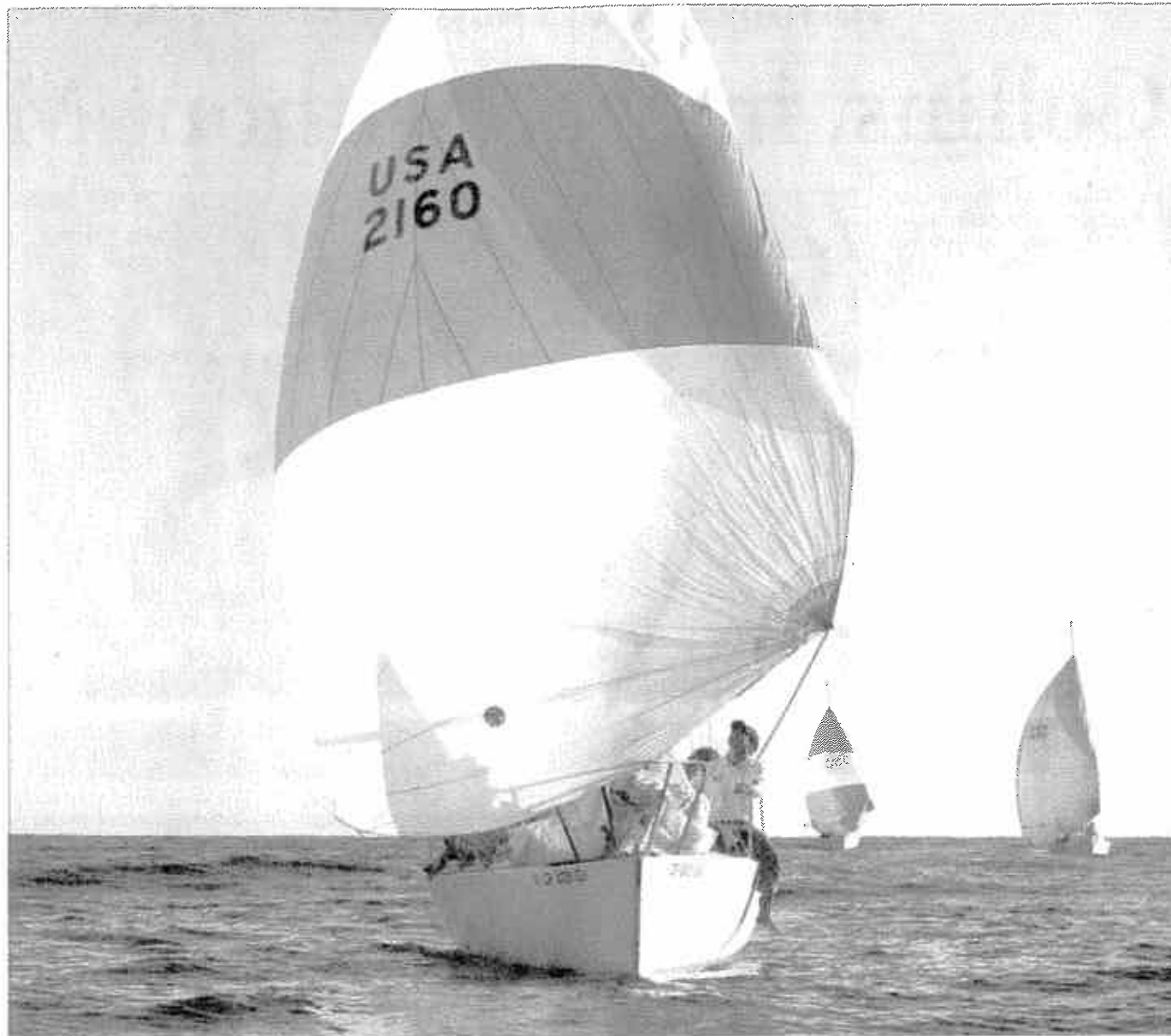
With just a gentle breeze around two knots, Toole skippered 3 Big Dogs to a first-place finish in the Wet Wednesdays race out of the Santa Barbara Yacht Club. The key was the crew's ability to find the most wind pressure on its way out to the first weather mark.

"It was one of those nights where there was a little more pressure outside, even though there was a little more unfavorable current," Toole said. "Oftentimes in sailing you're playing this game of what's more important, the angle or the pressure. As the wind dies down like that pressure becomes the more important thing. If you've got a little more pressure you can go twice as fast and twice the distance. As the wind caved there was a little more pressure outside, but oftentimes when the wind dies out here in Santa Barbara there's a shift to the left, so we wanted to stay to the left of the fleet but still out in the pressure."

By taking an outside route and making some well-timed tacks, Toole was able to reach the weather mark first and get his white and blue spinnaker flying fast. There wasn't too much wind to fill it, but enough that 3 Big Dog's sizeable lead over runner up Electric Pumpkin was good enough to earn first prize.

The strong finish was remarkable, considering the fact that the crew botched the always critical start.

"At the start, just before our start there were big shifts (in the wind)," Toole said. "There were lefties and big righties. We



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3 Big Dogs, skippered by Pat Toole, was the first to finish on Wednesday despite weak conditions during the race.

concentrated really hard to get it right, and we got it wrong. Namely, when it started it was in a big right shift and the boats that were near the right got a big push."

The tricky start forced 3 Big Dogs to make some big decisions, and those decisions ended up working out for the best. That is not surprising, as the crew — which consists of trimmer Dale Turley, tactician George Witter, Keiron Ka-

vanaugh on the mast and Les Wolff at the bow — has been sailing together for 25 years.

"We know each other really well, we work together and we've been trying to get better for 25 years, and that's a lot of it," Toole said. "We do a fair bit of travel — typically a couple of races a year.

"It's a core three or four and then we tend to rotate in a few others depending on their availability. To be success-

ful at campaigning, you sail with five but you need about seven trained and ready to go."

The victory helped 3 Big Dogs gain ground in the overall series standings behind first-place Svenja. Svenja finished in third on Wednesday behind Electric Pumpkin, which is second in the series standings.

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