

Chapter 3 - Racing Begins

Once the organizational groundwork had been laid and a program for development established, the next task was to spread the gospel. Dealerships and builders were set up around the States, and the crew at Douglass and McLeod was kept hopping, barnstorming around the circuit, giving demonstrations and rides, appearing before club meetings, lecturing, etc. Sandy did much of this, but the McLeods — *pere et fils* — were also active at this end when they weren't tied up with production work.

Excitement ran high among everyone involved in the Thistle picture during 1946 and in the years following. Those who were fortunate enough to have already launched and sailed their boats were busy getting the feel of them, enjoying the thrill which comes only from sailing something new and wonderful, and showing off the new sensation to all the curious onlookers who inquired concerning this strange new craft. At the same time, aware of the speed potential of their boats, they were anxious to race them, especially against other Thistles. "Back at the ranch", builders were having a struggle trying to fill the demand; everyone was impatient to get out afloat and the manufacturing facilities were taxed to the utmost trying to satisfy everyone. As a result there was a considerable amount of running around, trying to amass Thistles at this regatta and that one so that the long-anticipated racing could get under way. There were, in any event, several significant regattas which started things off.

The first Thistle race ever staged, according to the records, was held by Toledo on May 30, 1946; unfortunately there is no information as to the number of entries or the winner. But it was Toledo's Frostbite Sweepstakes in June which was considered to be the first real racing in the Thistle Class. Seven boats, three of them put together practically the night before, sailed 8 races in one day. Sandy ticked a marker in one race, - dropping him to second overall, and the winners were the Bill Miller-Carl Seifert team sailing *Cantie Cog* (55). Bob Laughlin in *Svengali* (29) was third. Lovett in *Wee Lovett Too* (3) took fourth, having also hit a marker.

Another important event was the Inter-Lake Regatta at Put-in-Bay. It was reported that a "big" (for the time!) fleet was on hand and, as might be expected at that stage, Sandy took a clean sweep of 3 races. The Miller-Seifert duo took

second and third place went to Jack Snell in *This'll Do* (56).

There were ten Thistles at Vermilion's South Shore Regatta and this time, foreshadowing things to come, John Lovett won with a few seconds to spare over Sandy. Jud Spore in *Sesame* (15) took third. At the Sandusky Regatta, Lovett won in a 7-boat field over Bob Root and Miller-Seifert, while Dick Shaw took the Cleveland Regatta — the first to list Thistles as a class in the racing program.

Not all the racing was in Ohio. On Lake Michigan, the Thistles from Racine and Milwaukee got together and Ray Breidster topped a fleet of six entries, at the helm of *Sad Sac*, for the Milwaukee Journal Trophy.

While things were humming at Toledo, Rocky River, Sandusky, and Michigan's Watkins Lake, Thistles were beginning to appear out in the Pacific Northwest; the word was spreading. Hugh Brady and Ray Elliott showed *Bonny Boon* (16) off at such places as Seattle, Portland, Tacoma and Eugene, opening quite a few eyes in the process.

At the end of the summer, all eyes were on Toledo, with much thanks to great publicity by Al Mastics of the Cleveland Plain Dealer and Jerry Doyle of the Cleveland Press. The occasion was, of course, the long-awaited National Championships, which appropriately became the subject of the lead article in the first issue of *The Bagpipe* published late in the summer of 1946. We quote therefrom:

"OF THINGS TO COME"

"The first annual Thistle Class National Championship Series is approaching and it is time to make your plans for the event. From Carl Seifert we have assurances that Toledo Yacht Club committees are making extensive plans for the entertainment of visiting sailors. All of those who have attended such T.Y.C. events as the Frostbite Sweepstakes well know what that means, Carl himself is making arrangements for hotel reservations but it will be up to you to let him know that you are coming and of course, such other items of information as the number of people in your party, when you will arrive, and when you expect to leave. Try not to put him on the spot by waiting until the last moment before notifying him of your coming...

"There will be three races to determine the first Thistle Class Champion. All vessels of the class may enter. In future years it will be necessary to qualify in eliminations series racing in your local fleet but this year's series is an open event. We have no way of knowing just how many entries are going to hit the starting line but we will say that we haven't yet found a Thistle sailor who doesn't intend to be there.

"The schedule calls for:
Saturday, September 14 — one race — afternoon
Sunday, September 15 —two races —morning and afternoon
Saturday night—Dinner party
Sunday afternoon, following last race —prize awarding

"This schedule will permit you to arrive on Saturday morning (but not too late) and be on your way home on Sunday evening. The facilities for handling boats at Toledo Yacht Club are perfect. In no time at all, they can handle a whole fleet of Thistles. You will find good race courses, good starting lines, genuine hospitality and all of the other things that make a real championship event. The Toledo Yacht Club has already set aside a generous sum for daily and series prizes in addition to the National Trophy."

There were 19 entries for the regatta and, in ideal weather, the races were sailed on Maumee Bay over a 3-mile triangular course. We reprint herewith the account of this historic event as it appeared in the October 1946 *Bagpipe*.

FIRST RACE

Saturday, September 14, fifteen starting boats sailed twice around the course in a steady ten-mile-an-hour northeast breeze. Sandy Douglass, in *Paukie* No. 1, won this race, with Miller and Seifert in *Cantie Cog* (55), one minute and thirty seven seconds behind him. In third place was Bob Laughlin in *Svengali* (29), with its new spar and jib (without battens). Fourth place went to John Lovett in *Wee Lovett Too* (3).

Saturday evening a banquet and dance was held in the Toledo Yacht Club ballroom, and fifty-four honest-to-goodness Thistlers were on hand. A swell time was had by

all and everyone enjoyed the floor-show. Breakfast was served on Sunday.

SECOND RACE

Sunday morning, September 15, the same number of boats arrived via tow-boat at the starting line. There was not a breath of air, but after thirty minutes of postponement the race committee opened one small can of air and the race started at 10:00 o'clock, with a steady 4 mile-an-hour east wind. This was a thriller for the boys who like the light air. The course was shortened to once around, and the results showed Bassett and Snell in *This'll Do* (56) ahead of the master, Sandy Douglass, by forty-one seconds. In third place came Dick Shaw in *Terry Breeks* (2). Fourth place went to Bill Schwalbert in *Tw'imps* (40). After lunch the third race was sailed.

THIRD RACE

By Sunday afternoon the breeze had freshened to twelve miles-per-hour and all fifteen Thistles started what was to be the most thrilling race of the series. All the skippers were hot and some of the fellows who had played in tough luck in the morning race were up in front. After twice around the course, down on the finish line came Sandy Douglass and Miller-Seifert neck and neck. Douglass took this one also, but only by one second. The next three boats were a photo finish, with spinnakers adding to the thrill. John Lovett took third place spot, and Dick Shaw took fourth, with Bill Schwalbert in fifth place two seconds behind.

The regatta ended with the trophy distribution and a farewell party. The final results:

Name	Boat	Number	Fleet	Points
Douglass, G.K.	Paulkie	1	Vermillion	56 1/2
Miller & Seifert	Cantie Cog	55	Toledo	50
Bassett & Snell	This'll Do	56	Toledo	46 1/4
Lovett, John	Wee Lovett Too	3	Vermillion	46
Schwalbert, W.H.	Tw'imps	40	Toledo	46
Laughlin, R.K.	Svengali	29	Vermillion	39
Shaw, R.L.,	Tarry Breeks	2	Cleveland	39
Tischler, Nancy	Lassie	13	Cleveland	39
Root, R.H.	Thorny	25	Vermillion	32
Bohannon, J.D.	Lachlan Lass	8	Sandusky	29
Cline, D.C.	Ronlyn	6	Akron	29
Sweet, J.	Obja	9	Vermillion	28

Farmer, J.E.	Lucky Lassie	11	Cleveland	25
Rohan, W.J.	Tar Tar	46	Racine	21
Crappo, F.M.	Wee Willie	90	Muncie	7

Incidentally, Sandy's crew for the Nationals consisted of his wife, Mary, and Beulah Seifert (secret weapons?). The National Championship trophy was donated by jeweler I.L. Carron.

At the Annual Meeting held on that weekend, the big topics for debate centered around the use of battens in the jib, and the use of nylon for working sails, items which were referred to the Executive Committee for study. Officers elected were as follows:

President: C.B. Seifert

Vice-President: I.L. Carron

Commodore: Sandy Douglass

Sec'y-Treasurer: S.A. Bassett

Bagpipe Editor: J.O. Snell

The use of nylon for working sails was subsequently checked out on the water, with the more stable nylon sails proving to be faster than the best cotton which was put up against them, and the nylon sails were o.k.'d for use on Thistles.

Under the leadership of the redoubtable Norm Tischler, it was only appropriate that Cleveland should organize and be granted fleet charter No. 1; thus on Dec. 8, 1946 the famous Rocky River Thistle Fleet was born at Norm's house, starting off with ten Thistles already in the fleet and a bunch more on their way. At the end of the year, Howard Boston announced that he had acquired 111 so he could find out how to make Thistle sails. This spurred things on at Detroit, which obtained fleet charter No. 2, whilst action aplenty was stirring in Sandusky and Toledo also.

By vote of the members at the winter meeting in January, Cleveland was awarded the privilege of hosting the 2nd Annual Nationals, again open to all registered Thistles. Minutes of the meeting reveal that the Association had \$216.12 on hand at that date. Solvent—at least for the moment!

Sandy headed east for the Thistle's debut at the New York Boat Show (the

premier industry event at the time) where she attracted much attention; this and subsequent shows undoubtedly helped her on her way immeasurably.

Concurrently, a second fleet in the Cleveland area was forming at Edgewater Y.C., presaging some hot neighborhood fleet rivalries, and Willis Crumb let the Texans in on a good thing by moving his No. 22 from Sunbury, Ohio to Waco, Texas. The people at the Leatherlips Y.C., to which Mr. Crumb had belonged, responded by picking up some more Thistles, the first two going to Dr. Robert Trippy (124) and Tom Barlow (125). Later these boats were bought by Drs. Clyde Gump and Harry Spangenberg, who made the name Leatherlips one to be feared on the racing circuit. Bernie Wahl became the first Thistler at the Rochester, N.Y. Yacht Club, and Hans Hjermsstad sold his Star and got a Thistle at Jackson Park, Chicago. By early 1947, there were 3 Thistles in the Los Angeles area and 5 in the New York City area.

A new high of 22 boats appeared for the Cleveland Lake Front Regatta in 1947, held to one race by high winds; Ken Glor beat out John Lovett for the honors. In August, 19 Thistles assembled at Put-in-Bay for the I.L.Y.A. Regatta. Five fleets were represented in this event; included among the entries was the highly colorful *Carduus* (233), sailed by Ray McLeod Sr., and smartly arrayed in the tartan of Clan McLeod as her topside motif. The series itself was sailed in very light airs. Race No. 1 went to Howard Boston in *Manawaca* (111), Webb Brumbaugh won the second race, and J. Caldwell aboard *Vauntie* (112) took the third. Snell and Bassett sailed most consistently, however, to capture the series, ahead of Caldwell and Brumbaugh. The winners used 6.8 oz. nylon working sails, Caldwell used 5.3 oz. nylon and Brumbaugh used light-weight duck, all made by Boston.

At the Ohio Interclub Regatta, Ottawa River, Ohio, Sandy won over Del Cline for the trophy put up by Parker Beach. Thistles also made their debut at Larchmont Race Week in 1947 with two Norwalk, Conn, skippers — Jack Sheldon and one-time World Star Class champion Bill McHugh — taking the honors, whilst George Bridgman sailed *Clio* (197) to victory in the Central N.Y. State Regatta at Canandaigua.

All of this was of course a prelude to the trek to Cleveland for the attempt to dethrone Sandy from his perch atop the Thistle world. Such is the life of a champ:

Sandy must have had some idea of how the New York Yankees felt as he took *Paukie* to the starting line for the first of the 3-race Labor Day weekend regatta, Aug, 30, 31 and Sept. 1. A line squall cancelled the Saturday race and two were sailed on Sunday in moderate airs, followed by a ghoster on Labor Day. In the 3-mile windward-leeward first race, Bob Laughlin skippered Jim Hendricksen's *Blac Jac* to a 35-second edge over Sandy, who was followed by John Lovett. Winds were 14-18 with 3-foot rollers on Lake Erie, which caused some boats out of the 35 starters to fail to finish.

In the second race the waves dropped to 18 inches and the wind to a shifting 4-6 mph. Here the firm of Douglass and McLeod took the bit between their teeth on the twice-around 3-mile triangle. Sandy copped the race, with partner Ray McLeod in second place (team sailing????) and Lovett again third. This put Sandy into the series lead over Lovett by a 3 1/4 point margin, and it looked like the old master had things well in hand. However, there was one more race to go, and the wind gods decided to make life difficult for him by providing an exasperating 0-2 mph floating crap game for the finals. Rochester, N.Y. sailmaker Herb Sinnhoffer in *Kitty* (198) found a lovely wind shift in the early stages of the race and — after losing the lead briefly — regained it to get the gun. Lovett improved to a tense second place over Canandaigua's Frank LeBoutillier in *Nymph* (76) by a scant two-second margin around the 6-mile triangle. Sandy could salvage no better than 8th place out of this, and the Thistle Class found itself with a new champion - John Lovett, with Sandy in second. Sinnhoffer's two 8th places linked up with his first to give him series third, Ray McLeod played his 6th, 2nd and 9th into a close fourth place, and Harvey Busch scored two 7ths and a 4th to follow hard on Ray's heels. John Sheldon, who had to send for his sails from Norwalk after trailing west without them, took sixth spot.

Lovett's victory wasn't too astonishing. He was instrumental in getting a sailing club started at the U. of New Hampshire and sailed with that group during his college years. He campaigned his International 14 for about 4 years and was quite successful in that class. Also, he had some Comet experience, all of this most valuable to an aspiring Thistle sailor. In subsequent years he became well-known for his quest for the Canada's Cup. The Class showed its admiration by electing him as President, at the Annual Meeting; Tony Herrmann of Racine -- another great

pioneer in the Class -- became the new Vice-President, Fred Best of Rocky River the Secretary-Treasurer, and Norm Tischler the *Bagpipe* Editor. This was a very talented slate of officers who were destined to guide the Association into the ensuing developing years with great skill and enthusiasm.

Not the least of these personages was Norm Tischler. There were few, if any, who worked harder or more sincerely for the Class in those years. He was a Thistler first, last and always. His *Lassie* (13) was to be seen battling for honors wherever there was a Thistle regatta within range. Like the grand Senator from Ohio, Robert Taft, Norm's statesmanship for his cause has been outstanding.

As a postscript to the season's activities, it so happened that the Lightning Nationals were held that year at Toledo where, inevitably, the visiting skippers cast disparaging remarks at the Thistles of the Toledo fleet. This prompted Jack Snell to issue a challenge over the club P/A system, and the 3 Thistles took on 12 (!) Lightnings, a la original *America* style, for a twice-around race. After one round, the Thistles led the best Lightning by 9 minutes; at the weather mark the lead had increased to 12 minutes. This took the heart out of the Lightning skippers, who sheepishly withdrew from the race at that point, and were thereafter somewhat less disrespectful on the subject!

That fall Ray McLeod sold No. 33 and made plans for her successor. (Heck, he'd finished 4th in the Nationals and was beginning to wonder if HE couldn't beat Sandy too! Maybe, just *maybe*, with a new boat...). Ray wasn't too sure about the paint job on the new one, though, explaining with a straight face that the plaid motif meant a lot of work to keep the ravelings neatly clipped!

Meanwhile, Thistles were making news in such places as Boston, Baltimore, Buffalo, Miami and Watkins Lake. Toward the end of the year, Herb Sinnhoffer moved to San Diego, California where he was destined to fire up the imaginations of the Coast people when they saw his Thistle. This led to the formation of a fleet of Thistles on Mission Bay, where enthusiasm ran rampant and all the boats sported Mexican names such as *Amigo*, *Pedro*, etc. Three thousand miles to the east, in Southport, Conn., a new fleet was forming, headed by famed yachtsman and auto racer Briggs Cunningham.

This was the situation as 1947 drew to a close. Sandy was left to puzzle out how (a) he ever lost the Nationals in the first place and (b) how to win back the title; Ray was lost in deep contemplation as to where he could obtain another can of plaid paint, and other classes were looking at the Thistle with astonishment and — in some cases — apprehension.