

Scant support for body searches?

FREMANTLE (Australia) — The top America's Cup syndicates have ridiculed suggestions for body searches in an effort to halt the use of illegal electronic weather pagers on the boats.

Vern Reid, a spokesman for the Alan Bond Syndicate, one of the top groups competing to be Australian defenders, said: "This has always been a sport where a person's word counts for a lot of things.

"We brought the matter up at a defenders' meeting last week, but it was purely a potential scenario aimed at making the Royal Perth Yacht Club Cup Committee aware of the dozens of ways available for syndicates to gain an unfair advantage.

"No allegations were made by us or anybody else to our knowledge, and the prospect of asking grown men to shake down their drawers for a search is ridiculous."

The pagers provide weather reports on the America's Cup course. International racing rules make it illegal for yachts to receive any information after the start.

The suggestion about body searches had been made by Admiral Sir Ian Easton, a committee member of the Royal Thames Yacht Club's challenging 12-meter (39-ft), White Crusader.

The Parry Defence Syndicate showed equal disdain for Easton's proposal.

"The first we heard of it was at the defenders' meeting, but there were

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no allegations made or evidence given of cheating," said Kookaburra's spokesman Grant Donovan.

"To carry a pager for a bit of weather information which a good yachtsman should be able to see up the course anyway, is not worth disqualification in a 200 million-dollar competition," he said.

"The point is that Royal Perth does have to look at the whole setup; and that includes examining a number of sophisticated ways boats can pick up information illegally.

"But body searches? Well, I don't see anyone agreeing to that.

"I think it's like jockeys carry switches. Sometimes you catch them and sometimes you don't."

H Dyer Jones, America II official and vice-commodore of the New York Yacht Club, said yesterday he had heard of no evidence supporting any allegation relating to the weather pagers.

"Anyway, what's to stop someone shoving it into an unused spinnaker or dropping it overboard. A body search won't guarantee anything.

"Ultimately, we have to depend on sportsmanship," he said.

Michael Fay, the head of the New Zealand syndicate, said he did not expect yachtsmen to take too kindly to appearing on television in their underpants while searches were conducted. — Sapa-AP