

# White Crusader's hopes fade after defeat by USA

FREMANTLE — California's USA yesterday seriously undermined Britain's prospects of making the America's Cup semi-finals with a stunning three-second victory over White Crusader. Both yachts were protesting the result.

Although it is still statistically possible for the British yacht to pull itself into one of the four semi-final berths in the last six races of the series, it faces at least three tough races against New Zealand, Stars and Stripes and America II.

The result leaves White Crusader fifth equal with Tom Blackaller's USA — a position the pair have often shared in the past two months' racing.

Blackaller also has a demanding run towards the semi-finals later this month, still having to meet the same three tough competitors plus third-placed French Kiss, which lost to New Zealand yesterday.

America II was lucky to climb back into fourth position when Italia retired with gear problems while 30 seconds behind and closing in at the seventh mark on the eight-leg, 24.5 nautical mile full America's Cup course.

Still reeling from defeats by Heart of America, Stars and Stripes and French Kiss, America II led by just nine seconds at the second mark.

The New York Yacht Club entrant has fitted a new mast in a desperate bid to improve its performance and it, too, has some tough races to go against New Zealand, USA and White Crusader.

New Zealand, beaten only once in 28 races, easily disposed of French Kiss. The winning margin was four minutes 43 seconds.

Though the French experienced rigging problems on the final leg, the race was already lost to the New Zealanders, who led by more than a minute and a half at the seventh mark.

In the race of the day, White Crusader led USA around all marks by no more than 55 seconds. Fierce tacking duels on the upwind beat and aggressive spinnaker runs yielded at least one protest per boat.

On the final beat to the line USA took the lead in a tacking duel and, try as Britain's Harold Cudmore might, Blackaller kept him covered to nose USA across the line first.