

# Kiwi win could revitalise the America's Cup

SAN DIEGO: New Zealand's defence of the America's Cup in 1999-2000 could revitalise yachting's greatest prize.

"We should have a fantastic yachting regatta at the start of the new century," said Peter Blake, chief of Team New Zealand, after his dominant 1995 Cup campaign ended on Saturday.

"I'm guardedly optimistic we're entering a new dawn of the America's Cup," said Dennis Conner, who lost the Cup overseas for a second time. "With the enthusiasm of the New Zealand people, I think they'll breathe some new fresh air into the America's Cup."

Plagued by the perception it played fast and loose with the rules, San Diego Yacht Club's 1995 defence, its third, had almost everyone unhappy — no one more than the Kiwis.

"We're going to clean it up," Blake has pledged.

"I think this is going to be a cleansing for the Cup," said American Bill Koch, chief of the 1992 winning defence. "I think the Kiwis are going to improve the sportsmanship and ethics of the game."

## Sceptical

But Paul Cayard, Conner's helmsman, is sceptical that Royal New Zealand Yacht Squadron would run a completely fair competition if it was in danger of losing the Cup. "Are they really going to give up the ball?" Cayard asked.

"There'll be no difference whether you're a defender or challenger," Blake said. "That might be to our detriment but we're quite happy."

Blake says his model is Australia's 1987 defence. The Aussies lost the Cup back to Conner then, but put on one of the best shows ever.

That was partly due to the more exciting, more photogenic conditions off Fremantle — wilder seas, more vivid weather. Conditions in New Zealand should be somewhere between Fremantle and San Diego.

In truth, almost nobody passionately wanted San Diego to keep the Cup except San Diegan Conner and his fans. Even rival US syndicates felt their chances would improve down under.

Koch, the multi-club-member head of the America3 (cubed) syndicate that this time fielded an all-women and then all-women-but-one team, has long been thought to prefer challenging on behalf of another USyacht club.

Cayard, sailing's ultimate hired gun, might rather race next time for his hometown San Francisco or for Italy, for which he sailed in a losing challenge against Koch in 1992.

A Kiwi defence should bring more competitors, attracted by the idea they'd have a better chance of winning.