

Local sailors suffer wounded egos

"I DON'T know what is wrong with the British, we taught the whole world how to play these sports and now they are coming back to thrash us," bemoaned a British journalist at the Champagne Mumm Admiral's Cup media centre this week.

The woeful sentiment came prior to Dominic Cock's celebrated hat-trick at Old Trafford and Damon Hill's spectacular spin at the German Grand Prix but was made in specific reference to Britain's "dreadful" sailing on the Solent where they are lying eighth and last in the offshore championships of world yachting — their own regatta which they only managed to make at the 11th hour through the benevolence of the defending German team who loaned them two boats.

The South African team, making their comeback to world sailing after a 20-year absence, have the satisfaction of beating the host nation, but are lying in sixth position and suffering wounded egos after over-inflating their own ability with naive pre-race optimism that they were capable of finishing in the top three.

Exclusive

Perhaps it was the experience of meeting Princess Anne on the lawns of the most exclusive yacht club in the world, the Royal Squadron — where she told them Cape Town was one of world sailing's great cities — rubbing shoulders with the stars of world sailing and America's Cup campaigns, or the overwhelming welcome South Africa has received which inspired the illusion.

They are competing in a 24-boat fleet which includes King Harald of Norway, skipper of Fram, lying third in the ILC-40 class with Scandanavia in third overall.

There are also 900 yachts sailing the world renowned Cowes Week — a separate event to the Admirals Cup but running simultaneously — in the shadow of the Royal Yacht Britannia. The Grand Prix sailing stars of world sailing are also at the Solent, along with classy maxis such as the big 80-foot American maxi, Boomerang, the Swedish maxi, Nicorette, and the Corur racing team's Whitbread round-the-world, Tokio.

It was an emotional moment for the South Africans to be a part of it all in the venue of the greatest sailing tradition on the planet.

The World Cup rugby success of the Springboks created a false sense of belief in themselves with constant reference still being made by the residents of Cowes of how they crowded around television screens to watch those "tackling South Africans" ground Jonah Lomu and how that "marvellous" President walked onto the pitch wearing the number six jersey — something "you will never see John Major doing".

The South Africans have also declined numerous offers to sell their rugby-style national flag team jerseys and there was truth in the remarks of Anthony Spillebeen, sailing on the big boat, Sansui Challenger, when he said:

"Remember how the rugby team struggled when they made their comeback to world sport?"

What Spillebeen failed to acknowledge was that the South African sailing team had failed to heed the painful lessons their rugby playing counterparts had endured three years ago, starting with provincialism and its dividing influence.

Allegiance

While almost all of the South Africans hail from Cape Town with sworn allegiance to Western Province, the 32 members of the three boats, the American chartered ILC-46, Sansui Challenger (Geoff Meek), the German ILC-40, Sansui Express (Bruce Savage) and the South African built Mumm 36, Sansui Sprinter (Chris King) have remained about as segregated from each other as if they were back home battling it out to win the Lipton Cup.

In contrast the determined and smoothly oiled American team, bringing to fruition a campaign hatched four years ago, as well as the Italians and Germans have given them a lesson in the use of team tactics crucial to winning the Admirals Cup where consistency from all three yachts is demanded.

In Monday's windward/leeward Corum Cup race, the American ILC-40, Pigs in Space, skippered by Dave Clarke, was breasting in rounding the top mark among the big boats in third position — but streets ahead of her rival ILC-40's. She held station but enroute took time out whenever she could to cover the big boats not in her class to enable the other yachts in the US team to make ground. The end result was a spectacular one-two-three for the USA and their big boat, Blue Yankee, had to fight her way through to win after rounding the first mark way down in eighth position.

Gambling

In contrast the South Africans have been trying to re-invent the wheel tactically by gambling on flyers in a death or glory bid, and receiving the former.

Sansui Express, equal on boat-speed to the quickest ILC-40's, Italy's BravaQ8 and Pigs in Space, made a good start in the Corum Cup but squandered her efforts when everybody close to her tacked and she sailed outside the course to round the mark last.

South Africans are also asked "Is sailing back home as big as it is in New Zealand?"

The Kiwis are not sailing this year's Admirals Cup, as along with Australia they exhausted their money and efforts in the America's

Cup, but members of the famous Team New Zealand are everywhere making up the 40 percent quota of foreigners allowed on German, American and Italian boats.

Paul Cayard, Dennis Conner's right-hand man, is on BravaQ8, and David Barnes, skipper of two previous New Zealand America's Cup boats is on the German big boat, Plinta.

Barnes sailed for the Auld Enemy, the notorious Australia One, which broke up and sank at this year's America's Cup "when we went swimming" and justifies the sailing mercenary approach saying they are professionals and must earn a living — estimated at upwards of R3 500 a day. The South Africans, justifiably, point out that they are amateurs, not being paid, with only two foreigners on the big boat, British navigator, Peter Morton, and Harvey Davies of America. Both other South African yachts boast South African-only sailors

South African submariner, Hanno Teuteberg, sailing the big boat, and Sansui Sprinter tactician, Rick Nankin, have grand plans to bring black South Africans on board for future international regattas but evidently in world sailing affirmative action programmes are non-existent with the

Admirals Cup affair a fleet of "snow white" sailors and only about seven women in all.

When Prince Phillip popped into the Royal Squadron on Monday evening, a security guard at the gate said he had not seen a single black man in the club that evening and so far no-one has been able to answer the question of why black people do not sail.

Opinions vary from the politically correct answer with a question: "Why do blacks not ski and why do whites not run the 100 m in the Olympics" to the more honest, "I don't think they are attracted to watersports, they want to be basketball, soccer and boxing stars".

In an area like Cowes it's hard for sailing not to be regarded as a "white elitist sport" but the perception is not entirely correct.

Although the campaigns are funded by world sailing tycoons, the vast majority of sailors eke out little more than an existence with expenses covered but no pension, retirement benefit or fixed abode. Barnes says only about 50 sailors earn good money but for the rest it's a choice of a lifestyle which keeps them out of the office and packing their bags for the next destination on the world sailing circuit.

A typical example is Cape Town's Colln Richardson, the only South African to sail the Whitbread race on the British W-60, Dolphin and Youth, living in Lynton and sailing the great yachts of the 32 000 mile contest but not close to breaking the bank.

"I find sailing tremendously special in that it crosses barriers between rich and poor," said SA team manager, Keith Bellamy, "No matter how rich you are or how fantastic your yacht is, without a scruffy, tough-as-teak boat man on board you cannot hope to win races".

The SA team, poor on budget and performance in comparison to the multi-million rand campaigns and results of the top nations, have had to redefine their goals to a leap from sixth position to fourth overall — a result which will better the best ever of a South African team, a sixth in 1971.

To do so will entail a drastic performance leap in the one remaining day of round the buoys racing remaining, the Kenwood Cup, prior to the famous 605 mile Fastnet race on Saturday.

□□□□

ANOTHER important round of meetings took place this week. On Saturday morning last week National Ocean Watch, along with a number of other interested parties, met the Norwegian delegation who have made R240 million available which will help the RDP as well as set up possible guidelines for a National Fishing Police.

Norway has four million people, but has a R12 billion turnover in the fishing industry.

There are some important lessons which may be taken, in that they have an open access policy, but everyone must be registered and claims his place by being able to fish.

The nuts and bolts of how to divide up the pie will be discussed very soon, as well as means to bring in more people in such a way that the resources not be overstressed.

At present three companies "own" 85 percent of the coast.

