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Bar boys say bully for Bruce

DEAR BRUCE,—As far as yachting goes, most of the boys at Bert's Bar couldn't tell a stern board from an outboard. But they have deep-seated, almost instinctive feelings about what is right and wrong in sport, and they are 100 per cent. with you in your decision not to protest against Geoffrey Williams and the Sir Thomas Lipton.

They say there is far too much bad feeling in sport today, too many bad losers and too much bickering about results.

When they first heard that Williams's yacht was being helped by a shore-based computer they were very unhappy, and when the Sir Thomas Lipton rounded a mark of the course incorrectly at the finish, they were incensed.

I tried to explain to them that, in any ordinary yacht race, a boat which goes the wrong side of a mark is blown out automatically.

Declaration

Yacht racing is still very much a game of honour, because you can't have a judge sitting on every mark of the course, sometimes miles out to sea, to check that every boat actually goes round it.

What happens is that the skipper, when he gets back, has to sign a declaration which says that he has observed implicitly all the rules and the sailing instructions.

If he hasn't observed them, he is on his honour to retire — and not sign the declaration. If he does sign the declaration, and another competitor feels that he has done so misguidedly, that competitor may lodge a protest, which will be heard by the sailing committee.

In ordinary yacht racing, protests are not considered bad sportsmanship. The yacht racing rules are very complicated, and protests can often lead to their simplification or clarification.

Not Ordinary

But, as I said to the boys at Bert's, the single-handed race across the Atlantic wasn't an ordinary yacht race by any means. It was more a test of sheer guts, stamina, willpower and resourcefulness.

The boys argued that Williams appeared to them to be an out-and-out "pothunter," as he had transgressed the rules right from the start and incurred a 12-hour penalty. They said his computer had possibly steered him clear of the calms, which set you back, Bruce, and storms which sank some of your fellow competitors.

They said he might have saved the five hours by which he beat you by taking a short cut at the end of the course, and that he should have retired — or at least offered to — when he found out that he had made a mistake.

And when they'd got all that off their chests, they began to realise that people are not silly, and even if they're not yachtsmen they'll understand all this.

The boys knew that there must be a lot more sympathy for you, in America and in England, than there was for Williams. They came to the conclusion, eventually, that if you protested against Williams, you'd lose all that goodwill, and South Africa would be accused of bad sportsmanship.

They're very glad you're keeping up the tradition. They congratulate you on a damn good effort and they're horribly proud of you. They think it's a pity you're so young and goodlooking.

They reckon you ought to be grey and grizzled and more salt-grimed — but they realise they can't have everything.

Finally, they acknowledge that, in spite of everything, Williams must have had more than his fair share of guts, skill and stamina to do so well.

Nothing can alter the fact that he sailed his boat across the Atlantic faster than anyone else has ever done it alone, and the boys salute him, too.

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Tailpiece

The girl at the box-office noted that Piet van der Merwe was buying another ticket, although he had bought one just a short time before. When he came back a third time she said: "Is there something wrong, sir? This is the third ticket you've bought."

"Ja, I know—but there's this huge oke in the blue uniform jus' inside the door, and he sommer keeps tearing them up."

TODAY'S THOUGHT

The life of man is like a game with dice: If you don't get the throw you want, you must show your skill in making the best of the throw you do get.

—Terence.

It's a bit choppy today!