

MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL DN ICE YACHT RACING ASSOCIATION

# RUNNER TRACKS

DECEMBER 2023



**THE REVIVAL OF JUNIOR ICEBOATING IN NORTH AMERICA - SAM BARTEL  
DN COSTING THOUGHTS - WARREN NETHERCOTE & BOB CUMMINS  
WESTERN CHALLENGE: ONE OF THE BEST - MIKE BLOOM**



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Cover Photo: IDNIYRA Junior Sailing Secretary Sam Bartell shares the thrill of a first-ever iceboat ride with a young sailor.  
Photo: Kevin Barta US4950



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Sam Bartel US1011



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RUNNER TRACKS is edited by IDNIYRA Secretary Deb Whitehorse

# COMMODORE'S REPORT

VIEW FROM THE STOOP  
DAVID FROST US5358, CHARLOTTE, MICHIGAN, USA

Well, the view from the Stoop last weekend was fantastic!

The traditional season opener at the Western Challenge on Lake Christina lived up to the hype. While wind on Friday would have been nice, it was a welcome slow entry into the season, with plenty of time to put the kit together, make notes on what I failed to fix over the summer, and visit with new and old friends. Saturday and Sunday's racing more than made up for lack of wind on Friday.

I don't know what factors led to such a fantastic turnout, but well over a hundred boats were on the ice. 75-80 racing on the main course in 3 fleets. Another ten new sailors were on the novice course set up by our new Junior Manager, Sam Bartel US1011. Plus a nice group of cruisers and people just enjoying the ice. If the Minnesota kids can generate that much interest for a weekend of scrub racing.... what can we do as a class?

Sam has made a great start with the Junior program and has a nice Madison-based team around him helping with equipment and logistics. How can you help plant the seed in your neck of the woods? Who do you know who just might fall into our kind of crazy, that given a boat and some ice.... just might turn into our next CRAM on ICE? (Catamaran Racing Association of Michigan) Have you seen or heard of that group of CAT sailors, dare I say, led by John Bauldry US5665? OK, leader might be a stretch, but he gives out CRAM ON ICE stickers, and his enthusiasm is contagious.

A significant force behind getting a fair number of CRAM sailers on the ice was Bruce Williams, US 3283. In case you have not noticed, Bruce has been around the scene for a few years and has amassed quite a few boats. A few years ago, he showed up to a CRAM regatta with a pile of boats, five more or less if my memory holds, and told the kids there that they were theirs if they sailed them.

So they took them, fixed them up, and sailed them. They are showing up to regattas, bringing more friends with more boats, and are a growing part of our fleet. You may not hear me say this often or again, but Be Like Bruce! Empty out the shop of that old, used-to-be fast gear and get it into the hands of someone who will make it fast again!

Racing season is a full go now. The 2023 Eastern and Central Regionals are both still possibilities in December. The 2024 season kicks off with Western Regionals, Senior Shuffle, and Central Regional. Then February starts with the Worlds and European Championship and ends with the North American Championship. Get to them! All if possible. But get to them, and bring a few new friends!

See you on the ice and likely the Stoop  
IDNIYRA Commodore  
David Frost US5358



Photo: Gretchen Dorian

### Note from the Editor:

The 2023 European Secretaries meeting minutes, held in April, have not been submitted by the IDNIYRA European Secretary. Please contact secretary@idniyra.eu for more information.



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PHOTO: CATHY FIRMBACH  
2023 WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP

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The 2023 Western Challenge is in the books. And truth be told, it probably ranks as one of the best Western Challenges we have seen in years. I wouldn't call it epic, but it was pretty close. Yes, the ice didn't exactly cooperate, and yes, there was no wind on Friday, but when the races finally got rolling Saturday morning, there were nothing but smiles all around for the rest of the weekend.

One of the first "challenges" we faced was managing the 91 boats that hit the ice. This is probably the biggest turnout we have ever seen at a Western Challenge. We had sailors from the US, Canada, Germany, Sweden and the Netherlands. With such a big turnout, a decision was quickly made to sail three fleets: Gold, Silver, and Bronze. We did a voluntary split, which worked perfectly with about 30 boats per fleet.

Under the expert guidance of PRO Pat Heppert, each fleet ended up sailing 12 races over the next two days. Do the math; that's a ton of races, but, to every sailor's delight, we had steady winds, and Pat started race after race with the precision of a Swiss watch.

The format for this year's regatta didn't change from years past. First, sailors of all abilities were encouraged to attend. So, we had everyone from DN rookies to World Champions on the same ice. Second, we sailed two lap courses with no scoring. With no scoring, you could pick your own starting block for each race. The short courses allowed sailors to practice their sailing skills without getting too tired. Other sailors focused on tuning their gear. We saw many sailors sail the course, come back in, make

# WESTERN CHALLENGE- ONE OF THE BEST

By Mike Bloom US321      Photos: Kevin Barta US4950



Peggy Menzies US5677

a change to their boat, and head right back out. Everyone said they loved the format.

The one thing this year's regatta reminded us is that ice is never safe. It was spectacular when we scouted the ice on Monday—a perfect sheet with a consistent 4 inches of ice. But, after the ice had grown substantially thicker by Thursday, it developed serious cracks and seams due to the thermal expansion. We saw a couple of mishaps that reminded us how quickly ice can change and never sail alone. Unfortunately, one of the sailors suffered serious injuries to his legs. On behalf of the fleet, we send our best wishes and our hopes for a speedy recovery.

On the positive side, our Junior Racing Director, Samuel Bartel, US1011, was hard at work promoting our sport to the next generation of racers. Sam set up a course for the junior sailors next to the pits. He invited youngsters, high schoolers, and their parents from the Lake Minnetonka area to the ice. Sam had multiple Ice Optimists and DNs for the kids to sail. By all accounts, it was a spectacular success. So, a tip of the helmet to Sam. Well done.



Of course, we owe a debt of gratitude to the volunteers who helped make the event happen. Without them, there would be no regatta. Topping the list is PRO extraordinaire Pat Heppert. Pat proved once again why he is among the best PRO on ice. He was assisted by Rudy, who originally came to watch John Harper (DN 60) but quickly volunteered to help.

Pat and Rudy did an outstanding job running the races. So, thank you both.

And, of course, no regatta can take place without Deb Whitehorse. Deb assisted with the behind-the-scenes stuff and, along with Tom Oelschlager US5050, managed all our internet postings. Thank you both.

Next, the ice scouts. We can't race without them. Last Monday, the Minnetonka boys loaded up the trailers and drove the 2 ½ hours up to Ashby. The crew consisted of Dave Glick US4249, Tom Meyer US602, Mike Miller US5369, and Mike Bloom US321. They then scouted Pelican Lake and Lake Christina in 9-degree temperatures, braving 20 mph winds. They got the job done, but all I remember now is it was fricken cold that day.

When the ice on Christina needed more scouting on Saturday morning, Central Region Commodore Pete Johanson US5633, Dave Glick, JR Francis US807, Mike Bloom, Paul Chamberlan KC5700, and Jeff Roseberry US5687, all hit the ice as the sun rose so a safe course could be set by 9 am. We needed them all, and they really helped us out. All the ice scouts deserve praise, so I thank them, too.

Finally, a big thank you to all the sailors who traveled to Ashby, Minnesota, to race the Western Challenge. You are the reason the event is such a success. We can't wait to see you next year. As always, the Western Challenge will be held the first weekend in December.

Think Ice.  
Mike Bloom US321



# DN COSTING THOUGHTS: CRAFT VS MANUFACTURING

BY WARREN NETHERCOTE KC3786 AND BOB CUMMINS US3433

Demographics are a concern in the DN class, with “Not enough young people” being the usual lament. There are several factors related to the problem but the cost of a competitive DN is seen as an important factor, especially in this era of people who would rather buy than build.

A ready to go DN is not cheap. A newbie could look for a competitive used boat and probably get one for \$5,000US. Or they could spring for a new turnkey Sherry or Kardas DN (as examples of commercial builders) with one set of runners and a single sail as a starting point. This totally new DN would cost more than a new ILCA 7 (aka Laser, Standard Rig) but a DN is arguably better value than a 14ft plastic boat with a mast made of aluminum tubes. A better soft water comparator for the DN would be a foiling Moth, typically at twice the cost of a new DN. The one-design Waszp foiler is comparable in price to a totally new DN.

Most of us don't buy a completely new DN after our first boat but instead gradually improve things bit by bit until we have two DNs. We are then able to offer a used DN to the market, hopefully to attract another new sailor. But today, many of those DN 'bits' needed for upgrading seem to be increasingly expensive, while others are not. Why is this so, and would it be possible to reduce the cost of some of our DN 'bits' so that we could lower the cost of our sport?

We can categorize the construction of something in a few ways. Some things are built by hand in low quantities: they are *crafted*. Most of our DN hulls are craft products. They are built in small numbers by individuals and if crafted commercially, the labour component far exceeds the materials component of the cost of the hull.

Other things are built in larger numbers using varying degrees of machine work or tooling: they are *manufactured*. Using Ron Sherry as an example again, his insert runners built using press mould technology, not to mention over a thousand blow-moulded masts, are representative of manufacturing processes. Both examples show cost savings relative to other, arguably 'better' technologies, like runner bodies or masts made with pre-preg carbon fiber, but for runners at least there is no strong evidence that extra money spent delivers extra performance. At some point, is better the enemy of good enough?

Finally, with a large enough market for something, if the distinction between different suppliers is weakened, the products become commodities. Blocks and lines are probably the only commodities on a DN, although it could be argued that sails are commodities too. Sailmakers don't build large numbers of DN sails, but lofts are organized to produce large numbers of sails of varying designs. DN sails are just part of the product line. Price similarities between sailmakers support the commodities argument.

How can we move more pieces of the DN from crafted to manufactured, or even from manufactured to commodity to reduce our acquisition cost? Ron Sherry has achieved manufactured status with his press mould runners, but with only the iceboat market, we are unlikely to see runners commoditized. Mast building is probably stuck at the manufacturing level and with the size of the market, amortization of tooling is unlikely to allow significant future reductions in price.

Hulls remain a craft product, with not a lot of difference between home and commercial builders aside from the accumulated expertise and experience of the latter. Our technical specifications make no distinction between home and commercial builders which begs the question: would amended technical specifications allow less costly commercial construction without prejudicing existing DNs or future home builders?

There are paradoxes. When Jeff Kent introduced a balsa-cored glassfibre DN hull he introduced manufacturing technologies but it was still more of a crafted product with a price considerably higher than the typical Sherry or Kardas hull. Was this simply a result of the materials involved and effects of low numbers built or did the DN Official Specifications prejudice the cost competitiveness of a composite hull? European hulls, generally conventionally built with an added glassfibre exterior reinforcement, do not seem to be as costly as the balsa-cored hull.

Runner planks are another crafted element of the DN. There are clearly advanced technologies involved, especially when commercial builders use NC-milled wood cores, but the overall process is still craft-oriented. Peter Hamrak's female mould process is perhaps closest to manufacturing a DN runner plank, but probably still needing further development before it could be turned over to semi-skilled labour. Again, could amended technical specifications help make commercially made runner planks less costly, remembering that the goal would not be performance improvement, but rather, cost reduction.

How can these questions be resolved? Are cost savings achievable or an unrealistic dream? We suggest that throwing specification change proposals at the wall until one sticks is NOT the way to answer these questions, not the least because of the danger of unintended consequences. As we have seen in recent years, proposals for significant specifications changes can be contentious and can divide



Continued on page 11





rather than strengthen the membership. Instead of resorting to ad hoc ballots we suggest that the questions be resolved by discussion and preferably by an expert working group.

What are the questions? We suggest two:

1. Are there techniques (be they craft or manufacturing) that would allow the price of major parts of a DN (hull, runner plank, mast, boom, and runners) to be reduced *without compromising performance or rendering existing equipment obsolete*, and
2. Would the Official Specifications have to be amended to permit promising innovations identified in Question 1, and if so, what amendments would you propose to the membership?

General discussion would be welcomed on IDNIYRA social media. An even better approach would be for

the Continental Governing Committees to appoint an expert panel to address these questions. That expert panel could (and arguably should) include members of the Technical Committee, but we suggest that the task not be given to the Technical Committee itself. The Technical Committee is perhaps a better manager of the status quo than an agent of change.

This is a discussion that needs to take place for the good of the class no matter what the outcome. We don't want or need proposals to do this, at least not for a couple of years, but we do need to do everything possible to make DN sailing as appealing as possible. Anything that brings down the cost of entry, no matter what the intended level of entry is, will be worth exploring. Cheaper, more durable equipment, whether new or used, is better at any level of entry. We need to explore what the potential might be, while at the same time avoiding any sort of instant obsolescence.



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# THE REVIVAL OF JUNIOR ICEBOATING IN NORTH AMERICA

BY SAMUEL BARTEL US1011 IDNIYRA JUNIOR SAILING DIRECTOR



The Western Challenge on Lake Christina, MN, became the playground for some brand-new junior ice sailors, and it's safe to say they left an impression. With ten young sailors and their families in tow, junior iceboating is making a comeback in North America.

These ten sailors, a mix of four Ice Optmistis kids (aged 9 to 13) and six DN kids (aged 13 to 18) from the Lake Minnetonka Sailing School, brought their sailing skills to the ice. Their prior soft-water sailing experience made the transition to iceboating quite smooth.

Our fleet, featuring three Ice Optis, three DNs, and a Nite from the McGary family, served as the perfect training ground. I experimented with various coaching methods, from riding the plank with the kids to providing guidance from a distance using a megaphone and whiteboard. The Nite was a huge asset, as it allowed the kids to ride along with me at high speeds, observing sailing techniques without the pressure of sailing alone.

The primary goals were simple:

- Introduce the kids to iceboating.
- Teach them safe sailing practices.
- Ignite a passion for the sport.

Mission accomplished! Everyone left grinning ear to ear, totally hooked on the sport.

Looking ahead, I'm excited about keeping these kids engaged in iceboating for the long haul. Soon, I hope to see them side by side with you and me on the starting line. I hope to see them participating in

regattas, driving the class forward, and eventually giving us all some added competition. Maybe they'll even beat you and me on the race course—just not too often ;-)

I also want to help these kids improve their soft-water sailing skills through iceboating. Iceboating is about speed and angles like E Scows, M15s, and 29ers. If these kids can learn to feel the iceboat as it powers up, make quick adjustments to the main-sheet and steering, and feel the boat as it sails in "the groove," their overall sailing skills will improve dramatically.

Big shoutout to the amazing people who helped make this happen: Daniel Hearn, Dave Elsmo, Pat Heppert, Erin Bury, Ken WhiteHorse, Paul Krueger, Don Anderson, Chad Atkins, Deb Whitehorse, Mike Bloom, David Frost, Joe Norton, and others. They've been instrumental, whether donating/lending equipment, sharing valuable advice, or chipping in cash for equipment/gear. Thanks to them, I have iceboats for the juniors to sail on and a trailer to transport the boats.

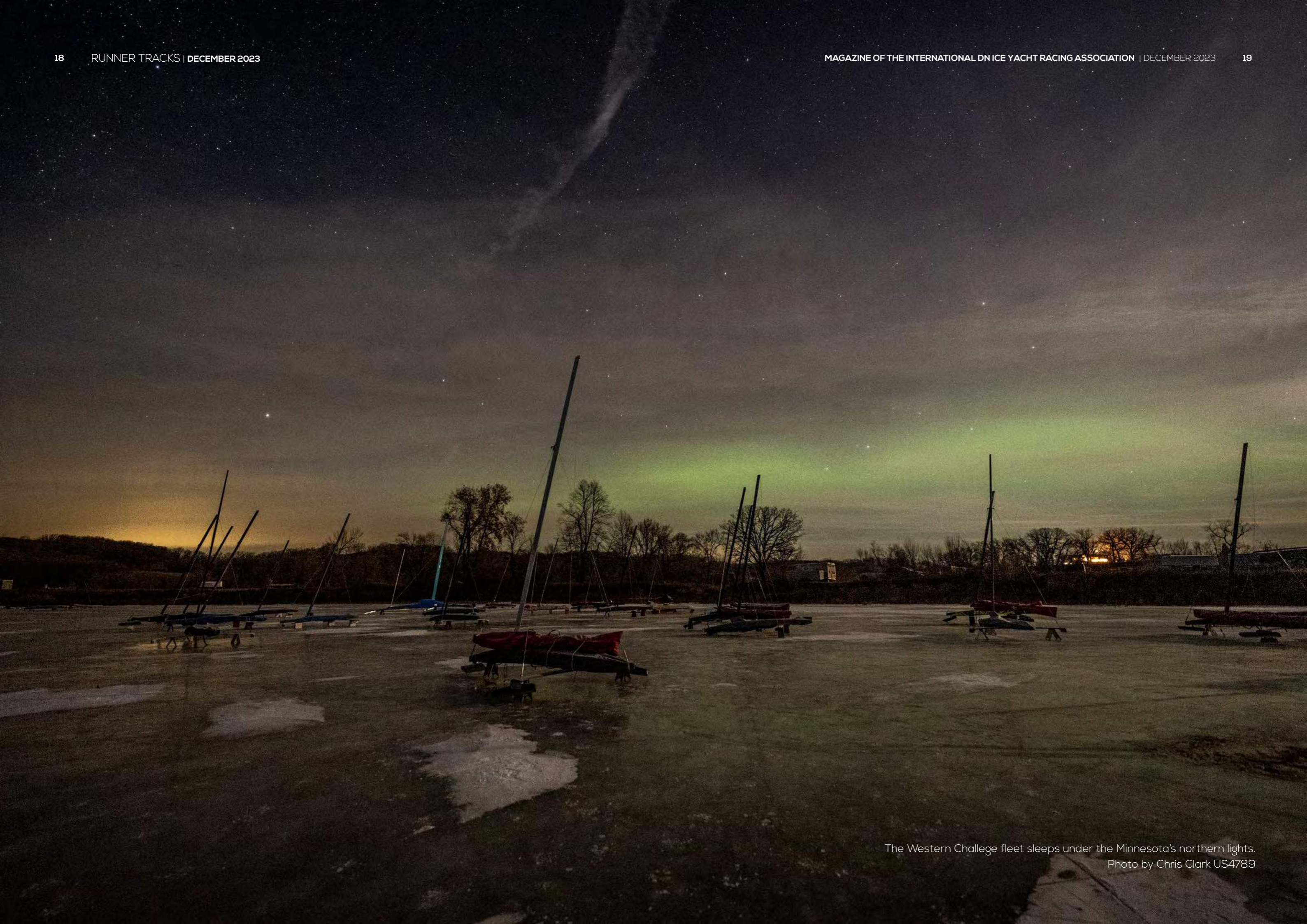
Do you know a junior sailor interested in iceboating? Shoot me a message, and I'll make sure they're on the email list.

Are you eager to pitch in? Awesome! Whether it's money, parts, gear, time, or advice, everything helps.

Think Ice  
Samuel Bartel US1011 [srbartel4@gmail.com](mailto:srbartel4@gmail.com)







The Western Challenge fleet sleeps under the Minnesota's northern lights.  
Photo by Chris Clark US4789



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