

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Seaman Named 2015 Virgin Islands Sailor Of The Year By VI Sailing Association For Third Year

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ST. THOMAS -- It's not everyone that can start skippering a revolutionary boat at the beginning of a year and end that same year as it's classes' world champion. This impressive feat is the defining reason why Taylor Canfield has been named '2015 Virgin Islands Sailor of the Year' for the third year in a row by the Virgin Islands Sailing Association (VISA).

"Olympian in the Laser class, Cy Thompson, had a good year along with Optimist sailor Teddy Nicolosi. However, Taylor's dominance in the M32 while at the same time maintaining his number two ranking as a match racer were deciding factors," says VISA president, Phillip Shannon, of the awarding of this highly coveted title.

Mr. Canfield, who learned of this honor via email in route to the World Match Racing Tour's (WMRT) 2015 season finale, the Monsoon Cup, in Malaysia, where he finished second, says, "What an honor! To even be considered for this award is incredible after [blank] of all the other sailors representing the U.S. [blank] sailing with fellow islanders, I have to accept [blank] crew members throughout the year and out



Taylor Canefield

The conferral of the VISA award is what Mr. Canfield calls "the icing on the cake" of a successful sailing year. He and his US One Sailing Team started off 2015 on a different tack than usual when they decided to race M32s, a 32-foot catamaran dubbed a high performance 'speed machine' by its builders. Mr. Canfield's desire to test his skills for the first time on two hulls instead of one was driven by three key factors. First, he had an opportunity to train against members of the Nacra 17 US Sailing Team and very much enjoyed the experience. Secondly, the fast double-hull design fit in well with the ultimate carrot of his sailing career, that of sailing in the America's Cup, an event now trending into a multihull competition. Third, the cincher was a ride on a M32 owned by Sweden's Mathias Rahm, a world champion, Olympic and America's Cup contender and inaugural M32 champ in 2013.

Mr. Canfield, who has thrived on speed since his days sailing Optimists in the Caribbean tradewinds, got hooked and geared up to throw down the gauntlet in the M32. This he did by winning the four-leg M32 North American Series in April before heading to Europe in the summer for the five-leg M32 Scandinavian Series.

“Of all the regattas this year, I would say the biggest accomplishment was winning all but one of the M32 Scandinavian Series. This achievement was enough to win us the M32 Series for the year! This was a huge upward climb that required countless hours both on and off the water, in the gym, and doing our homework until late hours in the evening since we had just started sailing the M32 for the first time just nine months before,” Mr. Canfield says.

He also didn't miss a beat keeping up with his match racing career in 2015. In fact, Mr. Canfield successfully defended his title in the Congressional Cup, hosted out of the Long Beach Yacht Club, in California, in May. Mr. Canfield joined an elite club being one of only 8 skippers in the 51-year-old Cup's history to win two years in a row. One of these other skippers is fellow U.S. Virgin Islander, Peter Holmberg, who accomplished this feat twice. Mr. Canfield ended the year by topping a talented fleet to win the Carlos Aguilar Match Race, in St. Thomas, in December. What's more, he held tight to his No 2 spot in the Open World Match Racing rankings throughout all of 2015.

The 26-year-old U.S. Virgin Islands' professional sailor – a national team and fleet racing champion in high school and three-time All American, two-time fleet racing champion and one-time team racing champion, sloop champion and match racing champion at Boston College – credits the scores of supporters, teammates and coaches who have helped to shape his career. This includes his parents who launched him off the beach at the St. Thomas Yacht Club in an Optimist dinghy at age 6 and who continue to support him.

Mr. Canfield also thanks girlfriend, Stephanie Roble (2014 Rolex Yachswomen of the Year), for supporting him in all of his endeavors and constantly pushing him to be a better sailor and person. Lastly, he gives a shout out to his home island of St. Thomas as the hands down best place in the world to learn to sail.

“The beautiful weather and strong trade winds offer a perfect environment for taking competitive sailing to the next level. Between coming back to the St. Thomas International Regatta to race IC24s (the first keel boat I learned to sail) and escaping the winters to race in the Carlos Aguilar Match Race, I could not ask for two better events to top off each season,” Mr. Canfield says.

What's head for 2016? It will be a best-of-both-worlds scenario as Mr. Canfield heads back on WMRT and continues catamaran sailing since Tour officials have selected the M32 as it's featured one-design boat.

“It will be a completely different dynamic of match racing while trying to control a boat going at speeds in the high 20 knots at times. Other than M32 racing in Bermuda this winter, Scandinavia this summer and also on the WMRT, I will continue to do some other pro sailing. I have a great Etchells program and hope to get back into the Melges 24 since the worlds are in Miami in December with already more than 100 boats registered,” he says.

In his spare time, Mr. Canfield gives back to sport he loves by speaking at numerous yacht clubs throughout the year. He says there is nothing more rewarding than helping and inspiring some of the young sailors of today, especially back home in St. Thomas. To those who aspire to follow in his wake, Mr. Canfield says, “If you wish to pursue a career in sailing, there are many ways to get involved. But what I would recommend is to try as

many types of sailing as you can and find what you enjoy the most and where you can see yourself excel in the sailing world.”

VISA, which started its ‘Virgin Islands Sailor of the Year’ award in 2014, is the organization that administers all sailing activities in the US Virgin Islands. We are a Member National Authority of ISAF which is the International Federation that governs sailing worldwide, the Pan American Sailing Federation and Central American and Caribbean Sailing Organization. In addition, VISA was a founding member of the Virgin Islands Olympic Committee, which administers all Olympic sports in the Virgin Islands.

Feature Image: Taylor Canfield and his team racing in, and winning, the Carlos Aguilar Match Race, presented by AeroMD, in Charlotte Amalie, St. Thomas, December 2015.

Image Credit: Dean Barnes.

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