

## **Alumnus Sails Into Beijing Olympics**

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John Dane III has waited a lifetime for his shot at the Olympics. At 58 and four decades after setting his goal, the Tulane civil engineering graduate finally got his chance to represent the United States at the 2008 Summer Olympics in China.



Longtime sailing enthusiast John Dane III, right, a Tulane alumnus, competes with his son-in-law, Austin Sperry, left. The pair represented the United States in the Summer Olympics. (Photos by Fried Elliott)

Dane, who holds master's (1972) and doctorate (1975) degrees from Tulane, is the oldest member of this year's U.S. Olympic Team. He joined son-in-law Austin Sperry, 30, for a weeklong set of racing competitions in the Star sailboat event in Qingdao, about 400 miles east of Beijing.

A sentimental favorite, the pair's search for gold came to a halt on Wednesday (Aug. 20) as they finished in 11th place after 10 preliminary races, edged out of the 10-boat cutoff. Their final race ended in fourth place.

In an interview with *The Star-Ledger* of Newark, N.J., Dane said his boat was designed for light air from the keel and the hull to even the sails. The vessel was chosen after 20 years worth of weather data and a month-long stay in Qingdao pointed to the chances of light air.

“It's not enjoyable, but it's a great experience to be at the Olympics, and I'm fortunate to be one of those few people who have been to the Olympics,” Dane told the newspaper. “I just wish I had done better for our country and the rest of the team.”

Still, the accomplishment was noteworthy for the New Orleans native and part-time sailor, who has spent the last 40 years and reportedly about \$500,000 over the last three years for this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to put the pair in the spotlight among the world's best athletes.

Dane, president and chief executive of Trinity Yachts Inc., a luxury boat maker with operations in New Orleans and Gulfport, Miss., became something of a media darling after he and Sperry qualified for the Olympics in October.

Profiles have been written about him in national publications, including *The New York Times* and *USA Today*, along with dozens of television interviews. He also had dinner with President George W. Bush during his stay in China.



Competing in the Olympics has been a lifelong dream for John Dane III, who also is president and chief executive officer of Trinity Yachts, with operations in New

Orleans and Gulfport, Miss.

The media enjoyed re-telling the story of the 6-foot 3-inch, silver-haired Olympian who came close many times over the years, but always fell just short.

The other part of the story was the odds of making it after Hurricane Katrina devastated Dane's business and New Orleans home.

The floodwaters engulfed the 38-acre Industrial Canal yard, destroying equipment and yachts under construction, and displacing the workforce of about 800. He moved the headquarters and home to Mississippi.

These days, the sun shines brightly on Trinity Yachts, which has seen record backlogs and nearly 1,000 employees and subcontractors in two locations.

And the sun will undoubtedly shine again for Dane even after a disappointing ending to his Olympic dream that would have placed him in sailing's lore.

In a recent interview with *The Times-Picayune*, Dane said he would return to boatbuilding after the games.

"Life goes on whether I come home with a medal or not," he said.

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