

CHARLIE BUCKINGHAM —

RICHARD LANGDON / SAILING ENERGY / WORLD SAILING



Charlie Buckingham learned a great deal from his first Olympic sailing competition in the Laser on Rio's Guanabara Bay in 2016. He's currently well into his planning for the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo, training and competing on a worldwide scale, determined to bring home a gold medal for the United States.

The California native is now 29 years old, but he's been an avid sailor since he was a young boy. "I grew up in Newport

Charlie Buckingham ripping it up in the Laser class in Miami this January during a World Cup Series regatta. The WCU on the hull stands for West Coast University (his sponsor).

Americans at California YC in Los Angeles on August 14-19; and in the Star Worlds at Tred Avon YC in Oxford, MA, on October 5-15.

For Charlie though, there was never an "Aha!" moment when he realized he

wanted to race sailboats. "I liked it from the beginning; it wasn't really a choice. I stuck with it because I enjoyed doing it. I enjoyed the competition, and it helped that my family was involved with the sport and that they were very supportive."

Charlie in his beloved Brian Thomas Sabot #7938.

"Olympic-level competition seemed like something that was going to be possible."

Beach where my father first taught me to sail. Then I learned to sail solo in Naples Sabots at the age of 8 at the Newport Harbor Yacht Club," he says.

His father, Jim, learned to sail at the same club, and, although he has never competed at an Olympic level, Jim continues to sail at a high level today. The commercial real estate professional will be racing in the upcoming Star North



COURTESY BUCKINGHAM FAMILY

SOCAL OLYMPIC HOPEFUL

After racing Flying Juniors and 420s throughout high school, Buckingham eventually discovered Lasers, and, at age 18, began a serious endeavor to sail them competitively throughout college at Georgetown University in Washington DC.

Two important components to being successful in any sport are mentors and idols. Fortunately, Charlie had some really good influencers early on — in addition to his father. "My first A-Division coach, Nate Dunham, was really influential in my career. Later on, it was my collegiate coach, Mike Calahan. They were my major mentors. They were directly involved with making me a better sailor. I looked up to them, and they helped me a lot," he says.

"Beyond that I had some idols in the sport. Olympian gold medalists Mark Reynolds, Paul Foerster — basically any US medalist in the golden era of US Sailing in the late '80s and '90s. I was a young kid when all their success was happening, and it was really inspiring that our team was so successful back then."

Charlie's interest in the Olympics was

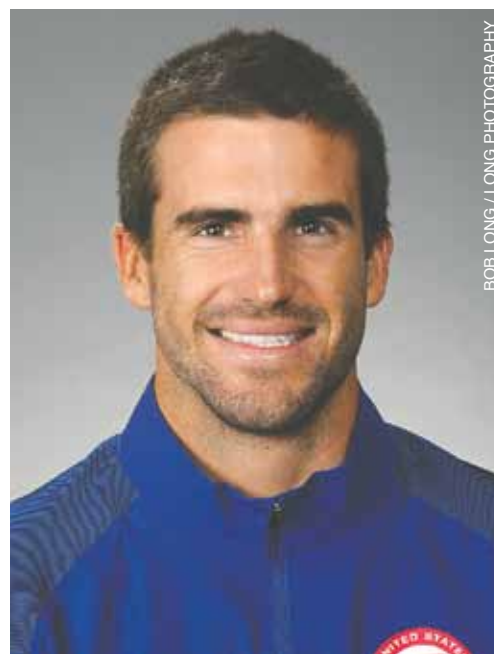
furthered by watching the 2000 Sydney Olympics when he was only 11 and became fully aware of sailing as an Olympic sport. "That's also when I started really enjoying sailing myself. My dad was very interested in the Olympics and Olympic sailing, and I would follow it with him — I was really motivated by the Games. I wouldn't say it was a decision I made when I was 11, but I think I was really inspired, and as I progressed through each level (of competitive sailing) and kept getting better, Olympic-level competition seemed like something that was going to be possible."

Charlie's arrival in Rio two years ago was, "a pretty overwhelming experience from an event and competitive perspective," he says. "I think that you don't truly understand what the Olympics is about until you get there. And because it is a unique event that only happens every four years, there's an added element of pressure, and it was a lot to absorb at one time. Having done it once I think the experience combined with the outcome (placing 11th out of 46 competitors) has given me a clearer idea of what I need to do to improve as a sailor and come away

Charlie competing in a Laser in high school.

with a medal in the future."

US Sailing has always been a primary factor in helping Charlie, and other Olympic hopefuls, reach their podium ambitions. And, although there's been a



BOB LONG / LONG PHOTOGRAPHY

Charlie Buckingham, Olympic sailor.

lot of water under the bridge, he sees US Sailing in a very positive light. "I think that they are working hard at helping athletes get the best out of themselves from a performance perspective," he says, "and we are lucky to have Malcolm Page as the new Chief of Olympic Sailing. He's a two-time gold medalist, so he understands how to win and what it takes to develop performance. He's a really valuable asset for the team, and I think he's trying to make positive developments that will get our team back on top. It's an exciting time for US Sailing."

Back in California it's all about training. And although San Francisco Bay is often an excellent venue for heavy-air training, Charlie finds a greater variety of consistent conditions on his

"You need to take an extended view... it's a long road."

home turf, in Long Beach. "I try to sail in Long Beach as much as possible when I'm not traveling for events. But our competitive season is really long, so

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I spend a lot of time sailing overseas at different venues for training and competition. When I am home for extended periods of time I sail in Long Beach and that's about it. Long Beach has very reliable wind, and it has a lot of different conditions that you can get at any time of day based on your timing or where you want to sail," he says. "You can sail in lighter wind in the morning or you can wait for more wind in the

afternoon. You can also choose your sea state based on where you sail relative to the shipping jetties, and there's Seal Beach Pier, which has shallower water, so it has a different sea state as well."



STAR SAILORS LEAGUE

Jim Buckingham and son Charlie race Stars together.

It's taken Charlie a lot of time and hard work to reach this level. He has a few suggestions for young sailors with dreams of winning a medal: "The main thing is perseverance. Getting better takes a long time and there's a lot of things that you learn along the way. It's not always easy but I think you need to take an extended view and understand that it's a long road and you

must keep going through the peaks and valleys — especially the valleys," he says.

Read more about Charlie Buckingham at www.charliebuckingham.com.

— ross tibbits

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