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## EVENTS

# America's Cup Qualifier Sails Into Chicago

By Dawn Reiss

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When it comes to sailing, Tod Reynolds, event director for the [Louis Vuitton America's Cup World Series Chicago](#) event, says racing a hydrofoil—a sailboat that skims the surface—is like watching NASCAR on the water. The rocket ship-like sailboats will likely break speed records on Lake Michigan during the June 10-12 event.

The [Chicago](#) race is part of a five-city qualifying tour that began February in Muscat, Oman, and will conclude Sept. 16-18 in Toulon, France. New York City hosted the series in early May, and a race in Portsmouth, England, will be held July 22-24. The tour is a lead-up to the 2017 America's Cup in Bermuda. Six teams, including [Oracle Team USA](#), which won the last America's Cup in 2013, will compete.

From transporting shipping containers by rail, truck and boat to executing the logistics of building boats in a convention center to hosting an anticipated 100,000 fans along Chicago's shoreline and waterfront, there's a lot of event planning to manage. Connect Sports caught up with Reynolds, a former collegiate sailor who earned an electrical engineering degree from Northwestern University and spent the early part of his career building submarines for the U.S. government, about keeping up with the challenges.

### **Why is this event going to be held in freshwater for the first time in 165 years?**

It's really the nature of the boats. The [teams] are now sailing wing-sail, hydrofoiling catamarans. What that means is these boats literally fly above the water at 40 miles per hour. These boats might set speed records. No longer do they need to be raced miles offshore in order to have good racing; they can be raced right off the city shore.

### **What is a good lesson you've learned from this?**

No. 1 is make sure you have good partners. We have a fantastic operational partner in [Navy Pier](#). This is their bread and butter. They do all kinds of events, from small things to massive trade shows and events. They handle all the security and labor, and all those details you never think about or see at an event but are so massively important to get right. The [Chicago Sports Commission](#) has been helpful in connecting us to all the right parties from a promotional standpoint, as well as an operational standpoint.

### **What's been the largest logistical challenge for this event?**

Everything shows up in 40-ft. shipping containers. There are about 60 of them. They all get driven into Navy Pier into the convention center there, and the boats will actually get built in Navy Pier. From there, we launch the boats from Navy Pier. So you have to use a big crane. We had to get the engineers and Navy Pier involved to make sure we could actually launch these boats into the water.

### **Navy Pier is such a popular spot with tourists and boats. How are you going to manage that aspect?**

We will use Navy Pier's convention hall, which is a secure space. From a public standpoint, it is making sure we've got the production schedule and are able to set up early in the morning. In a lot of respects it's letting Navy Pier be Navy Pier for a lot of the other pieces. We are lucky we don't have to set up a ton of concessions, extra bathrooms and kids activities because Navy Pier has that stuff already built in.

### **Why did Chicago stand out as a host city?**

Operationally it works. Some of the other cities just can't do it; they don't have the waterfront space for it or there was too much commercial traffic or space on shore. Another huge piece of it is the sports culture. Between the pro teams and college teams, Chicago is a sports town. We've seen that with things like the NFL Draft. We've seen it with things like the Ryder Cup. Folks in Chicago come out for sporting events. That's a huge thing America's Cup was looking for. They want to start expanding the fan base with these new rocket ships of boats from beyond the traditional sailing audience.

### **How do the boats stay safe at such high speeds?**

The teams are very safety-conscious. There's risk in sailing a foiling multihull. Unlike other races, all of these boats have a safety boat that comes with them that always has a suited-up diver and medic onboard. Each team's safety boat has trained very specifically what to do. They're wearing body armour, rebreathers, big carbon knives and helmets. It's not your average sailboat race.

### **Is it fair to say this is the NASCAR of sailing?**

Exactly. In many respects this is the NASCAR of sailing.