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Lending a Hand Lafayette resident helps at America's Cup

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Thomas Maher Photos Doug Kohen

Thomas Maher has been a sailor as long as he can remember. His father, Chris- also an avid sailor-always had a boat moored in Alameda and introduced him to the sport. Maher began racing at about the age of eight. "I always just wanted to win," said Maher of his early sailing days. He recently served as a shore hand for Team China in early America's World Cup events, the newest team addition to one of the oldest existing organized competitions around.

Maher landed on Team China when a friend of Chris's called months ago with the news that the team needed a shore hand for the AC World Series and the World Series in San Francisco from August 10-26. Maher-- whose love of sailing has not diminished in the years-- joined the team.

Although Maher's official title was shore hand, he did much more. He repaired the hulls of damaged boats and was aboard the coaching boat to monitor the crew. "In the world of sailing, you have to be a jack of all trades," he said.

He also acted as a "local representative," offering suggestions for places to eat and where to pick up supplies needed for the boat.

His favorite memory was his experience on the coaching boat. "Being on the coaching boat was amazing," he said. "You get to see the technology working firsthand."

A new technology used by the team was the wing sail boat, which is much faster than previous models. "You have to work hard, be a quick learner," said Maher who hadn't worked on a wing boat before.

Maher enjoyed his time with the crew. "The guys were surprisingly fun to be around," he said.

He did admit that there were moments when communication became an issue for the multinational crew. "With people from New Zealand, France and of course, China, there was a few times when things got a little mixed up," he explained.

He is thankful for the opportunity to participate. "I was just glad I got the experience to be around such a high level of the sport. Since sailing is not a well known sport in China it was really cool to be a part of something that spreads the sport that I love to the other end of the globe," he said.

The teams will return to the bay on October 1-7 for the preliminary competitions that lead up to the actual America's Cup, which will be sailed in San Francisco Bay in the summer of 2013.

"If the team calls and if my teachers let me disappear for a few weeks, I'll be in San Francisco," he said.

Currently a student at Cal Poly, Maher hopes to use his degree program, he's majoring in communication and marketing, to keep close to the sailing life he's always known.

"I want to be able to use my marketing knowledge to help promote the sport," he said.



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