

The America's Cup or 'Alinghi's Cup'

Now that there is only one last chance left for an appeal, last week's decision by a New York court to re-instate CNEV as Challenger of Record puts the whole future of the America's Cup at risk. For if their decision stands, our sport's premier match will come to an end as a genuine sailing competition. What we will have instead will be a regatta that just pretends to be the Cup.

Predictably, we have heard panicky cries for a multi-challenger event at all costs. It is almost as if the rules don't matter. But what sort of event will it be when a sham COR has already connived at ensuring the defender can't lose?

In case you've forgotten, let's recall the protocol Alinghi now brazenly promotes as its 'vision.'

Alinghi claims the right to choose, at its sole discretion, the regatta judges, the committee, the umpires and the measurers, even going so far as to state that they must be its employees. Alinghi, again at its sole discretion, claims the right to accept a challenge or to penalize a rival and to change the rules at any time. Little wonder this protocol was immediately opposed by seven syndicates.

Faced with a stacked deck, top-level syndicates will stay away. You can argue it is still better to join and hope for change. But that's how a lamb thinks before it gets into bed with a wolf. We might as well rename it the Alinghi Cup now.

The three judges may have swallowed the bait that any multi-challenger event is better than a Deed of Gift match. But if so why even have rules? For a defender can now collude with anyone to fix the game. Incredibly, this ruling says the America's Cup Challenger of Record doesn't even need to own a boat!

Sure, we will still have an event called the America's Cup. But top sailors will know it's a sham. And it won't take sponsors and fans long to catch on either. Already we have seen Louis Vuitton, who have been a key part of the Cup's whole identity, go. What looks like a race will in fact be a procession. Ernesto Bertarelli's vision turns out to be a cynical marketing ploy that gives his commercial subsidiary, ACM, total control.

Oracle have courageously tried to stop an Alinghi take-over. There is only one round left in the court process. We have to hope Oracle will win. Because if they don't the modern Cup will have just come to a shameful end.

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