


Tony Ronza, Jr.

Inducted by Kevin McAuley



Tony Ronza Jr.
Two Time Canada's Cup Winner

In 1981 Tony Ronza stepped forward to defend the Canada's Cup on behalf of RHYC after Don Green and Evergreen's victory in 1978. Tony commissioned Doug Peterson to design, and Andy Wiggers to build, the custom 42-footer *Coug*. Ronza and *Coug*, with an RHYC crew, beat the American Challenger *Black Magic* 4-0. Tony again stepped forward in 1984 to defend against another Bayview Yacht Club challenge, this time in the Brendon Dobroth designed and Wiggers built *Coug II*. Unfortunately, RHYC was not able to host that event, with the result that RCYC took over the trials and final racing. Tony and *Coug II*, with a mixed RHYC and RCYC crew, were again victorious, beating the US Challenger *Stars and Stripes*.

Inducted 2022



Kevin McAuley Inducted Tony Ronza, Jr.

Throughout my years of sailboat racing, there have been a few characters integral to my early experiences, in life and on the water. Many of whom are here today and many live on in our memories. Today I would like to share with you a story of a man named Tony and a Canadas Cup win!

The Royal Hamilton Yacht Club has a strong history in the Canadas Cup. The Canada's Cup is a silver trophy, made by Tiffany & Co, deeded in perpetuity in 1896 to be awarded to the winner of a series of match races between a yacht representing a Canadian Yacht Club and an American Yacht Club both located on the Great Lakes. The trophy was named after the first winning yacht, *Canada*, which defeated *Vencedor* in 1896 on Lake Erie. The first ever winner of the Canada's Cup was AEmilius Jarvis, who is also an RHYC Hall of Fame member and the founder of RHYC. Jarvis would compete in four Canada's Cup matches. The Canada's Cup is known for seeing advancements in yacht, sail and equipment technology and we saw some amazing introductions that would later help to mold many of the international offshore rules.

Incredibly, RHYC is the only other Canadian Yacht Club, other than RCYC, to win the Canada's Cup, and we did this two times, or three if you ask me. In 1978 RHYC's Evergreen, owned by another RHYC Hall of Fame member Don Green, won a hotly contested Canada's Cup challenge against Bayview YC. That campaign was riddled with controversy and legal wranglings, as is so superbly detailed in Doug Hunter's book, "Against the Odds". Described as a combative affair by my father, the two sides squared off and fought till the last protest was decided. Dad shared how he was an observer on the Bayview YC committee boat in 1978 to ensure there was a fair approach to the competition.

How do you follow Evergreen? You change the attitude, or at least try to! In 1981, when RHYC was set to defend the Canada's Cup against the Bayview Yacht Club's challenger, *Black Magic*, a local business owner Tony Ronza Jr, stepped up and the planning began! What motivated Tony to take on this challenge? Perhaps it was a means to sell more shoes.....I'll leave that for him to share.

Tony and his family, best known for the Susan Shoe Company that launched Cougar Boots at the time, also had a thriving automotive part's production business. In fact, the name of the RHYC boat "Coug" came from the cartoon mascot of the Cougar Boots company which actually generated some controversy over advertising. You see, International Yachting would not allow advertising in those days. I have shared a video of an old TV show on the eighty-one campaign on our yacht club page and you'll see the name is taped over.

Tony got into sailing, as I understand it, through his father with the George Cuthbertson designed Galatea. Later in 1980 Tony owned a C&C 35, sailing on the harbour out of the marina around the corner. Tony and his friends spent that summer sailing without a motor, to try to learn as much as they could by sailing into and out of the dock. In addition to becoming a great sailor Tony also had a great knack for building teams. In 1980, I met Tony while sailing with Eddie Jocelyn at LYRA. Eddie was also hoping to be a defender of the Canadas Cup, but it was not his year. It was around this time that Tony had begun the project and decision making around the design and builder for the 1981 *Coug*.

Tony had chosen Andy Wiggers from Whitby to build the Two tonner which was designed by a young Doug Peterson. Doug was at the time the hottest young designer responsible for many of the SORC, Admirals' Cup and America's Cup hulls through the good old days.



Coug I in the 1981 racing against Black Magic (Sharon Green photo)

The rules called for the boats to weigh not less than 15,000 lbs, so we lifted the boat on a crane on the old fuel dock with a scale from Stelco. They did not have high tech cranes then. Tony had the right personality and approach to pull this all together. I recall Tony mentioning that he wanted to take a good mix of amateurs and pros and make them gel as a team. Tony would try to break the combative aura that was so prevalent in the previous events and break down some old stereotypes of strict camps to create a great atmosphere.

In addition to the great people was the new technology. In the late 70's and into the 80's there were great strides in technology. The 1980 and '83 America's cup saw computers play a huge part in sail and hull design. We saw some cool things including the beta version of onboard computers and instrumentation to the latest Kevlar sails and designs.

The *Coug* crew was outfitted with what you know now as Patagonia gear. You'll see the bright orange suits in some old videos and the first fleece layers. The local crew members that eventually joined Tony included:

- Evergreen alumni, **Jim Talmage**, still highly active in this club sailing, coaching and volunteering today
- **Alan Megarry**: Alan is now Chairman of the Canada's Cup Committee
- **David Megarry**, who was part of the Dong Feng's team for the 2018 Volvo Ocean Race

- competitor
- **Wayne Buckingham** who knew how to build and fix everything,
- my brother **Scott McAuley**
- Myself, **Kevin McAuley**

In addition to the local crew, key team members included:

- **Michael Gooding**, as Navigator who was a computer engineer with IBM
- **Jay Hansen**, who worked for North Sales in Toronto at the time and retired a few years ago after his run as CFO for the North Sales Global Group
- Olympic silver, bronze medalist and sailmaker **Hans Fogh** as Tactician and starting helmsman. I was fortunate to campaign with Hans many times over the past decades before he passed.



The 1981 Crew of Coug I

There were numerous additional pros and of course friends and family that were integral to the campaign, training and operations. We had many of the Evergreen alumni including **Tim Stearns** and **Lowell North** to help the team continually improve. I was fortunate to have sailed with Lowell North on the Bayview flagged, Ontario built, *Sprint*. when we won the 1987 SORC.

Coug sailed an elimination series the summer of '81, defeating Chuck Bentley's *Magistri* (old *Marauder*) and Rudy Kohler's *Impetus*. That's the very same *Impetus* that now sails out of this club owned and skippered by Wayne Mullins. My father **Alex McAuley** was on the Race Committee for that series.

Tony ensured that camaraderie was a theme that extended through the competition and even into the final series with some fun parties. There was even a spouse program, called the Cougettes, that created the fun atmosphere, both on and off the water. One evening after practicing, just days before the final competition, Tony had a dinner in Aldershot inviting just the Canadian team and the US crew. Tony was passionate about changing the attitudes around the competition.

Even the US helmsman, Mike Thompson, known as Grizz, said he would rather drink our victory champagne with us even if he should pour it all over Tony. On to the defense series in September of 1981 against *Black Magic*, we had a definite speed advantage over *Black Magic*. She was a modified boat from the 1978-challenger series and was just not fast enough to catch *Coug*.

There were some great TV shows and articles that chronicled that campaign and many awards for Tony's Canada's Cup success as well as numerous other local championships over the following years. The 1981 *Coug*, after an extensive refit, is still sailing on Lake Ontario today as *Coug* with a big paw on the side.

In 1984, the RHYC was unable to host the defence series event as it had just resumed operations after going through receivership. RCYC, the holders of the deed of gift for the cup graciously hosted. I am sure there were some trying times that year, but Tony always kept the team focused. Tony and the new *Coug* won the challenger series over the summer with a second Wiggers built yacht designed by a young Brendan Dobroth. That boat could go upwind to the point that we would gain six feet every time we tacked. The onboard computer could track the gain to windward. It's crazy that I now have that technology on my watch! Tony chose Brendan as the designer because he had been making a name with a radical approach to designs to create some fast upwind machines and this boat proved that.

The '84 campaign saw many of the original crew with some key RCYC additions. Notably. Americas Cup bowman Sandy Andrews. Sandy was the bowman on the recent Canada's Cup victory last September.

In looking back, there wasn't as much hype or press, or even photographs of the '84 campaign, however the RHYC support was in full force! After a hard-fought summer of elimination rounds with three challenges and sailing a 300-mile practice long distance race by ourselves, *Coug* squared off against Bayview's Bill Martin's Nelson Marek *Stars and Stripes*. *Coug* won every race. The '84 *Coug* is still sailing in Canada after a refit as *Dynamo*.

We all owe Tony our appreciation for his drive, focus and team building skills. Tony was able to pull together a range of personalities over a few campaigns and created some exceptional teamwork.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to introduce you to a man I am so grateful to have met all those years ago. A leader, a team player, a gentleman and a champion. Congratulations to Tony Ronza on your induction into the Royal Hamilton Yacht Club Hall of Fame.

Kevin McAuley