

THE GO AHEAD BOYS AND THE RACING MOTOR-BOAT



Chapter 26: Conclusion

When the Black Growler slowly moved forward to take her position in the line, the excited boys were aware that the shores of the nearby islands were filled with interested spectators. Outside the limits of the race there were scores of yachts and motor-boats, whose owners with their guests had assembled to watch the exciting contest. Patrol boats were noisily demanding that the line should be kept clear and were busily speeding back and forth to see that their demands were strictly enforced.

Before the boys had left Chestnut Island, Miss Susie Stevens and her friend had arrived, the impulsive girl begging that she might be permitted to be one of the company on board the Black Growler during the race.

Her request, however, was denied. Only the four Go Ahead boys and Sam were to be on board to manage the swift little craft.

When the boys advanced toward the starting place, they discovered, after lots had been drawn for positions, that they were next to the Varmint II, the latter boat having drawn number four, while its chief rival was fifth in the line.

“Those fellows aren’t so bad, after all,” said George good-naturedly to his companions when he saw the five men that were on board the rival boat. “There we were suspecting them of all sorts of tricks and yet nothing happened to the Black Growler. We had our troubles for our pains.”

“Huh!” interrupted Sam. “You aren’t out of the woods yet. There’s no knowing what may happen before we turn the last stake.”

“Sam,” demanded Fred anxiously, “have you any reason to suspect anything more?”

“Nothin’ except that I know those fellows will not stop at anything to win the race. They have a lot of money bet and they aren’t goin’ to lose it if they can help it.”

“Well, I shan’t have any sympathy for them if they do lose their money,” spoke up Grant, “at least if they lose it by betting on their boat. I don’t believe in that thing myself. I don’t want any money that I haven’t honestly earned.”

“That’s all right to talk,” laughed John.

“It’s all right to DO, too,” asserted Grant positively. “I don’t believe there’s anything that takes away the best part of a man as surely as gambling. The gambler has no sympathy for any one, his heart is dried up and to my mind he is about the worst specimen you can find anywhere.”

At that moment the conversation was interrupted by the firing of the first gun. This was the signal for all the boats to prepare themselves for the coming struggle. Several minutes

would elapse before the race began and the report was for the warning of the contestants.

The boys now were clad in bathing suits although every one wore a sweater in addition. They were confident that they would speedily be drenched and they were prepared for emergencies. If any accident befell the boat and they were compelled to swim, they would not be hampered by heavy clothing.

It had been agreed that there should not be a flying start. Every boat was to rest on the line and turn on its power after the second signal was given.

As Fred, who was at the wheel glanced along the line of the contestants he counted ten other boats that had entered the race. The only one of the number, however, which he feared was the graceful little motor-boat, only a few yards distant from the place where the Black Growler was resting.

There was no conversation on the boat. The faces of all the Go Ahead boys were tense and drawn and apparently all were unaware of the noise and the presence of the hundreds of interested spectators.

Sam, though he was silent, was not idle. Every minute he was either looking into the machinery or rubbing it with the cloth which he continually held.

“It’s time for that gun,” said Fred in a low voice.

Every one was watching the face of the little clock on board and as the seconds slowly passed, the boys did not even glance at one another.

In spite of the fact that everything had been done in their power to prepare the Black Growler for the race, the boys were fearful that something had been omitted or overlooked in their preparations.

A silence so tense that it was almost possible to feel it had settled over the region. Even the judges seemed to share in the excitement of the spectators.

The long stillness was broken by the report of the gun.

Instantly every one of the boats on the line started forward.

The Varmint II, and the Black Growler, as we know, were close together and it was speedily evident that the expectations of the assembly were that the former was to be the winner of the race.

“What’s the trouble? What’s the matter?” demanded George excitedly as the Varmint II was seen to be creeping steadily ahead of its rival.

“Never you mind,” said Sam brusquely. “We aren’t goin’ to be left in this race. If everything keeps up as it ought to and nothin’ breaks down, we’ll be in ahead at the finish.”

The race was far different from that in which the boys had engaged in their track meets. In those contests endurance and a reserve of strength were elements that counted almost as much for success as speed.

In the present race, however, there was no fear of exhaustion and if the Black Growler only held to her course, the Go Ahead boys were satisfied that they had little to fear.

When the Varmint II had gained a lead of about ten feet the distance between the two boats remained stationary. Both now were moving swiftly, the stern of each boat had settled low in the water and the spray from the bow speedily drenched every one on board. All, however, were unmindful of any thought of discomfort. Their eyes occasionally were turned toward their rival, but in the main all were looking straight ahead. The sound of the whistles of the yachts, many of which now were slowly moving in a line parallel to that which the racers were following, apparently indicated the delight of many that the Varmint II was leading. Already it was manifest that the other contesting boats had dropped back, as had been expected. The real race was between the two rivals who now were ahead.

The first lap had been covered and the boats had made the first stake. Here the skill of Sam manifested itself by the sharp turn which he told Fred to make. The lead of ten feet had been decreased by at least a yard. The relative positions of the two boats were maintained while they both sped swiftly toward the next turn.

Taught by their rivals of the advantage a quick turn might bring, the Varmint II here was sharply brought in and a shout of protest arose from the Go Ahead boys when for a moment a collision appeared to be unavoidable. The Black Growler yielded a little in her course, however, and the danger was avoided, although the Varmint II by her trick regained the yard which she had lost at the previous stake.

The boats now were speeding back toward the starting place. The entire course covered eighteen and three-eighths miles and each boat was supposed to cover the course three times.

When the racing motor-boats drew near the start a chorus of whistles and cries were mingled in the salute which greeted them both.

The sounds to the Go Ahead boys seemed indistinct and far away. They were all intent solely upon what the Varmint II might try to do when the stake was turned.

This time, however, each boat held to its course and the danger of a collision was avoided. Sharply and swiftly both boats made the turn and then, with the Varmint II still leading by nearly ten feet, the second course was begun.

Sam had taken his position directly behind Fred. He seldom spoke to the excited boy, who was handling the wheel with marvelous skill.

“We can turn on more power,” suggested Fred.

“We don’t want any more now,” replied Sam. “Just hold her as she is.”

The wind was slightly stronger than it had been a few minutes before and the spray dashed more frequently over the crews of both boats. Somehow the two racing motor-boats

had now drawn in so that they were nearer each other by at least two yards than they had been at the start.

When still holding the same relative position the two swiftly moving boats passed the Caledonia on which Fred's grandfather was the guest of the Stevens', there were several prolonged blasts of the whistle and numerous loud calls from Mr. Button as well as from Miss Susie for the Black Growler to overtake her rival. The sounds, however, were all lost upon the Go Ahead boys whose attention now was centered upon the boat immediately in front of them.

Sam was complacent and apparently confident, but his feelings were not shared by his young friends. To them it seemed as if their efforts to cut down the distance by which the Varmint II was leading were vain. The speed of the two boats apparently was equal. The bows alike flung the water far from either side while the stern of each boat appeared to be almost buried in the midst of the seething, boiling, rushing water.

Far behind them in a long line stretched out the other contestants. There was slight interest in the race now except between the two leading boats, one or the other of which seemed to be certain of the prize.

Apparently the narrow escape from an accident when the turn had been made in the preceding lap had made the crew of each boat more cautious. At all events neither tried to cut in very far upon the other and even on the home stretch in the second lap neither had gained any advantage upon the other.

"It looks as if it was all up," exclaimed George dolefully.

"Never you mind," said Sam. "If we can hold them where they are I think we can do a little better on the home stretch than they can."

"But they may be planning the same thing," protested Fred.

"You just give your attention to your wheel," said Sam. "I guess if you attend to your share, the rest of us will try to look after ours."

On the third and last part of the course even the shrill whistles of the yachts and the cries and cheers that greeted the ears of the Go Ahead boys appeared to take on a sharper edge. The face of every boy was set and drawn. That silver cup in the eyes of all four now appeared to be the most valuable prize that life could offer.

Steadily and swiftly the two boats rounded the first point and then Sam once more began to work. Just what he was doing was not apparent to his companions, but after a few minutes George exclaimed excitedly, "We're gaining on them! We're gaining as sure as you live!"

In a brief time the announcement of the excited boy was manifestly seen to be correct. Slowly and yet steadily the lead of the Varmint II was cut down. Less than six feet now

intervened between the two boats.

The supreme moment apparently arrived when the last turn was made. Before them was the home stretch. The last leg of the course was now to be run and here the Black Growler must win if she was to win at all.

As the boat rounded the stake a shout of anger arose from all on board the Black Growler when it was seen that their rival again was trying to cut in upon the course.

“She wants to box us,” muttered Sam. “She thinks if she can get right in front of us that we’ll have to take her breakers and that we’ll not be able to make up any of the distance.”

Rising to his feet Sam seized the megaphone and called in his loudest tones, “Don’t you try that! We shall ram you if you do. Keep to your own course and we’ll keep to ours.”

Whether it was Sam’s demand or not will never be known, but the course of the Varmint II veered slightly and almost before the boys were aware of the change which had occurred they were side by side with their rival.

As the two boats drew near the finish the excitement on board each apparently was shared by the spectators. The calls and screams and cries redoubled, while the blasts of the whistles were added to the deafening noise. Swiftly and steadily and yet side by side the boats swept forward. To the anxious boys it did not appear that there was any distance between them. Do what they might the Go Ahead boys were unable to increase the speed of their racing motor-boat, which now seemed to be almost below the surface so low was it lying in the water.

The Caledonia meanwhile had moved closer to the line and the excitement on her deck was keener than that on any other boat in the assembly. If Fred’s attention had not been so strongly centered upon his task he might have seen his grandfather running back and forth near the rail, his hat in one hand and his cane held midway in the other, shouting in his loudest tones to his grandson to “put on more power and win that race.”

Miss Susie already had lost much of her ability to shout. Her voice rose scarcely above a whisper.

Of all these things, however, the Go Ahead boys were ignorant when the two boats swept across the line.

Even those who were on board were not able to say positively which had won the cup.

“That is the worst finish I have ever seen in a race,” said Fred to his friends when the Black Growler in a wide semi-circle turned from the course.

“I think it will be for the judges to say anyway,” said George as he wrung the water out of his dripping sweater.

“I fancy they will be the ones who will pick the winner,” laughed Grant. “I hope they’ll not call it a draw and that we shall have to try it all over again.”

“I shan’t mind very much if they do,” said John.

“There’s a call from the judges!” interrupted Fred, who had seldom looked away from the judges’ boat, which now they were again approaching.

Suddenly a great hush fell over the assembly. Every one anxiously looked toward the boat of the judges, striving to hear the announcement which was about to be made through the megaphone.

“Hold me!” said Fred. “If the Varmint II wins I think I shall need somebody to brace me up.”

At that moment, however, the voice of the judge was heard and when he announced that by a margin of only six inches the Black Growler had won the cup, a shout went up from the crew of the little racing motor-boat that was heard above the din that followed the award.

“That’s worth while, Peewee!” declared George as he pounded his diminutive friend upon his back.

“That’s what it is!” joined in the other boys.

Meanwhile the victorious motor-boat had drawn alongside the Caledonia and as Fred looked up to the enthusiastic people on the deck the only voice to which he was listening was that of his grandfather.

“That was fine, young man!” shouted the old gentleman. “If you hadn’t won that race I think I should have cut you off in my will. I have got a reward here for Sam, too, and you tell him not to leave before he has seen me.”

Sam who also had heard the statement made no response until Fred eagerly turned to him and said, “You’ll not leave, will you, Sam, without seeing my grandfather?”

Sam smiled as he replied, “Probably not. I don’t intend to leave this boat anyway. She won out by six inches in this race but I’m tellin’ you this isn’t the only race she’ll have, and when she is racing I don’t intend to be very far away.”