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Tracy Edwards and *Maiden* (f): the finish

Tracy Edwards, Gerard Seijts, and Ann Frost wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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*Maiden* finished the Whitbread Round the World Yacht Race on Monday, May 28, 1990, after having spent 167 days at sea. The yacht and her crew finished a close second in their class, winning two out of the six individual legs of the race; it was the best finish by a British boat in the previous 17 years and in 2019, was still the best finish by any British boat or any all-female crew.[[1]](#footnote-1) People witnessing the exceptional performance of the all-female crew, and even some sailing journalists, began to change their minds about women’s abilities to race yachts. The journalist who had earlier called the *Maiden* and her crew “a tinful of tarts” now described them in the press as “a tinful of fast, smart tarts”[[2]](#footnote-2)—an improvement, perhaps, even though the women were still referred to as “tarts.”

However, the sixth and final leg had been difficult for Tracy Edwards and her crew. Throughout the leg, the wind was poor, and Edwards’s navigation had disappointed her. She had been undecided about whether to settle in to ride the Gulf Stream, which would have given the boat another two knots of boat speed, or to seek out better wind, which might have provided an even greater boost in speed. Edwards desperately wanted to reclaim time the crew had lost to their main competitor; however, her indecision meant that she was left with the worst of both worlds, unable to take full advantage of either option. It was a rookie mistake, and Edwards was angry with herself for the error, especially because she had become more decisive with each leg of the race.

That final leg was the worst for Edwards. She felt the most pressure to do well and yet found herself least able to perform. She felt paralyzed by the fear of losing the race, especially because her crew had had a glimpse of what they could achieve. Her objective had been to win the race, but making up the time lost during the fifth leg proved to be impossible. Edwards noted, “You go through a mixture of emotions. Obviously, if you’re winning, it’s all happiness and wonderful and fantastic. We hadn’t won; we’ve come second, and it took me a long time to come to terms with that because second is nowhere in racing.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Edwards expressed similar feeling at another time:

I was so angry with myself, and I felt I had let us all down by not being decisive. Ultimately, it is hard to see how we could have made up the time unless *L’Esprit d’Équipe* had broken something, but it didn’t stop me blaming myself. We knew it was the final chapter of our amazing journey and how much we would miss each other, but you also want to get home as well.[[4]](#footnote-4)

*Maiden* arrived in British waters at sunrise. Because she was sailing up Southampton Water, hundreds of boats came out to meet the crew. Dinghies with small children and larger boats with adults and families sailed toward *Maiden*, then turned around to join her, blowing their horns as *Maiden* sailed to the finish line. Tens of thousands more people were waiting for *Maiden* at the docks. The scene was described by one of the crew members as “a thing of disbelief” and “completely overwhelming.” But it did not matter much to Edwards—27 years old and fiercely competitive—at the time.

It had been a most amazing adventure and an extraordinary experience, but Edwards was heartbroken and devastated; she felt that she had achieved nothing. In most situations, winning evokes a feeling of pride, and losing evokes feelings of failure and shame. But soon after *Maiden* had crossed the finish line, Edwards began to reflect: How could she process what had happened? What had she and the *Maiden* crew really accomplished? What, in the end, was the legacy of *Maiden*?

1. Blane Bachelor, “Tracy Edwards on What It Took to Race Around the World,” *Outside*, June 28, 2019, https://www.outsideonline.com/2398738/tracy-edwards-maiden-documentary. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bob Fisher, “Maiden Comes Home,” Magzter, July 2017, https://www.magzter.com/stories/Sports/Yachts-Yachting/Maiden-Comes-Home. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dave Davies, “With an All-Female Crew, ‘Maiden’ Sailed around the World and into History,” NPR, June 27, 2019, https://www.npr.org/2019/06/27/736523914/with-an-all-female-crew-maiden-sailed-around-the-world-and-into-history. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Leadership Character Candour Conference 2021,” Ivey Business School, February 9, 2021. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)