

# Earl brothers witness how Javelin sailing is passed down from generation to generation at the European Championships in Workum

Esther Broenink • 2025-07-23 • 14:45 • [Sport](#)



The European Javelin Sailing Championship will be contested on the IJsselmeer. Photo: Niels de Vries

**It's becoming increasingly difficult to inspire young people to take up sailing. But at the European Championships in Workum, taking place this week, the Earl brothers are witnessing how their love for the sport is passed down from parent to child.**

"Javelin sailing is fantastic. You need so many different skills. You learn to play with the weather and the wind." Brian Earl can't stop talking about his beloved sport. For over fifty years, he and his brother David have been on the water. Even now that they are both well into their 70s, they remain active in the competitive circuit.

## Pioneers

The British brothers are sitting in front of their tent on a camping chair at the Workum sailing club. Although no sailors from the local club are participating, the European Championships have been held in the Elfstedenstad (Eleven Cities City) several times. The Javelin organization was so enthusiastic about sailing on the IJsselmeer that they asked the club to sail there again this year.

Except for the Earls, the grounds are deserted in the afternoon. Here and there, a few clothes flutter in the wind on the washing line, but their owners are nowhere to be seen. They're battling it out on the IJsselmeer to see who can call themselves European Javelin champions. The Earl brothers would also have liked to join the battle, but the strong wind makes it physically too demanding for them to go out on the water. "But we'll just go again tomorrow," they say at least three times. The strong wind demands the utmost from the participants to keep the boat under control.



The strong wind demands the utmost from the participants to keep the boat under control. Photo: Niels de Vries

Brian and David are among the pioneers in the Javelin world. The type of boat was designed in 1968, and three years later, the brothers first set sail in it. The small sailboat is designed for two crew members, and so Team Earl was quickly formed.

While the Earls are enjoying the sun in front of the tent, the competitors on the water are preparing for the start of the race. An imaginary line is drawn between the buoy and the racing boat, which the sailors must remain behind until the horn sounds. On the starting boat, volunteers are busy ensuring everything runs smoothly. Ten minutes before the start, the first flag is raised to alert the competitors. The sailors skillfully maneuver as close as possible to the starting line without going over it.

A loud tone rings out. In an instant, the sailboats are spread out across the lake. Each sails its own course. Although it's a European race, only three nationalities are represented on the IJsselmeer: the Netherlands, Germany, and England.

### **More than just winning**

The group of nearly forty sailors knows each other well. The races are about more than just winning. "On the water, we compete, but on land, we enjoy a beer together," says Liesbeth Aupers from the starting boat. After years of sailing herself, she now watches her husband steer the boat with her daughter.

Brian Earl also recognizes the friendly atmosphere: "If you see three people bent over a broken boat, they're probably a Dutchman, a German, and a Brit. We want to help each other, because we want to beat each other on the water." This comment is indicative of the atmosphere. Everyone is incredibly fanatical, but also not averse to helping each other out a bit.

### **Few new recruits**

Despite the enthusiasm of all participants and volunteers, the Javelin class is struggling. The younger generation is having a hard time finding their way to the water, and since the coronavirus pandemic, sailors' priorities seem to have shifted. Due to the cancellation of competitions during that period, several sailors have quit, and new faces rarely appear.

The barrier to entry is high, says Aupers: "Sailing takes a lot of time and you need a lot of equipment." These are the most frequently cited reasons for the lack of new sailors. Many young people simply don't have the time to be on the water ten weekends a year. And not everyone has a trailer with a sailboat in their backyard.



On the starting ship, volunteers keep a close eye on the wind. Photo: Niels de Vries

## **Four generations.**

The young people sailing in the Javelin class today often learned the sport at a young age. Anyone who carefully examines the entry list will notice that the couples in the boat are often family, like Ben and Joel Fisher. At 12, Joel is the youngest competitor in the field, and with his father as helmsman, he's learning the ropes.

”

*Sailing is magical. You sit so low in the boat and you feel the water*

"We sailed with his great-grandfather," says David Earl outside the tent when asked about the Fisher family. While the brothers have been active in the class for half a

century, they've seen one Fisher sailor after another over the years. Joel's great-grandfather designed the Javelin boat, and since then, no championship has gone by without the British family participating.

Sailing runs in the family for Aupers too. "Sailing is magical. You sit so low in the boat and you feel the water." With sparkling eyes, she talks about her time in the sailboat. She visibly enjoys watching her husband Olav and her daughter Xanthe skim across the water.

Peering in, she sees Olav and Xanthe's boat quickly approaching. They cross the finish line in ninth place. With one hand, Xanthe holds the ropes for the sail tightly, while she waves to her mother with the other. The first races of the day are over, two more to go.