

Up Close and Personal

Connor and Porter Kavle, 2012



The Kavle Family

Nathan Adamus

There have been plenty of father/son combos in professional sports. There are the Mannings, the Griffey's, the Earnhardt's, the Pettys, the Harbaugh's, and the Ripkens, just to name a few. Perhaps one day we can add the Kavles to that long list of successful tandems in competitive sports.

If you're not familiar with the name, AYC member Jim Kavle was a grinder on Dennis Conner's *Stars and Stripes '87*, the boat that took back the America's Cup from Australia after they ripped it free from the New York Yacht Club in 1983. Nearly 20 years after retiring from competitive sailing, Jim's frame is still intimidating. Even with his hulking arms disguised under a pressed cotton long sleeve, it's obvious that Jim was built to be a grinder. He still appears to be in extremely good shape and would almost seem threatening if not for his glowing smile, quick wit, and cool confidence. As soon as you shake his hand, you instantly recognize that you're in the presence of not just a great man, but a great teammate, husband, and father as well.

Growing up in the extremely large shadow (pun intended) of their father Jim, sons Porter (12) and Connor (10) were introduced to the water at an early age. Porter immediately took to sailing. "I remember when I was little, we would have to stand on shore and name the different parts of the boat before we got to sail," said Porter. "The whole time we were doing that, I was just thinking how bad I wanted to get out on the water."

Although both Porter and Connor grew up on the water, it's interesting to see how both have gravitated toward different sports. While Porter prefers to hoist up a sail, Connor prefers to lace up the head of his lacrosse stick. Even with his past sailing accolades in tow, Jim notes that he never made sailing a requirement for either of his sons. "I never forced Porter or Connor to sail; I simply gave them both the option. I wanted them to at least experience it and make their own decisions. Luckily Connor excels in ball sports so it doesn't look like I forced everyone to sail," Jim joked.

Connor has preferred to keep his land legs, excelling in both soccer

and lacrosse. Although he doesn't compete as actively as Porter, Connor still enjoys sailing and being on the water. On Wednesday nights, he is the bowman for Michael Krissoff's J/22 *LUNA BAMBINO*. He has also been with the AYC Junior Program for the last 4 years and just recently finished summer sailing in the RWB Opti class. At the 2012 Nationals and New England's, he sailed against all the big fish and held his own. "Connor had a great summer and he won a 1st place trophy in White fleet at Gibson Island. He was so proud of himself because he worked very hard and we were so proud too!" said his mother Lori.

Porter also played lacrosse for several years, but was forced to make a decision when he started to get really good at sailing. "Lacrosse and sailing would be on the same nights or something would come up and there were conflicts. I started missing lacrosse practices and the coaches would get mad," Porter chuckled.

Although no longer playing ball sports, Porter says that his previous experience has helped him transition over to sailing. "There are a lot of similarities if you think about it," Porter noted. "There

may not be a ball or a glove or a stick, but mentally there are a lot of similarities. Like on TV when I'm watching a football game, I find myself watching the athletes more than the ball. I try to figure out where they're going or what they're going to do next. Sailing is very similar. You try to gauge what the other person is going to do and adjust accordingly. In sailing you're always trying to think two or three tacks ahead."



Porter, Connor and Harrison Hawk aboard *Luna Bambino*.

STARS AND STRIPES FOREVER – THE 1987 AMERICA'S CUP

Jim began his sailing career at the tender age of 7 as a member of the Ocean City (N.J.) Yacht Club. After graduating from Episcopal Academy in Philadelphia in 1977, Kavle spent his college summers racing along the East Coast while attending Ohio Wesleyan University. He competed in regattas, but reserved spring and winter for other activities. Sailing in the America's Cup wasn't even a consideration, but soon after he graduated, that would all change.

"I was basically just in the right place at the right time," said Jim. "There was a friend of mine, John MacCausland who I had raced with in New Jersey and he had a friend who was looking for a crew for a Star Boat. I was about the right size and the right weight and he wanted to know if I would go crew with him." The other friend turned out to be Andy Menkart, a member of the 1980 Olympic team that was unable to compete after the U.S. and 64 other countries boycotted the games in Moscow.

From 1982 to 1984, Jim and Andy traveled all over the world racing Star Boats. "We clicked really well as a team," Jim exclaimed. "In 1983, we were the first Americans to win Kiel Week in Germany in the Star Class, we won the Bacardi Cup, we were 2nd in the Worlds, and we won the Spring Championships. We went out to our Olympic trials in 1984 and lost to Bill Buchan and Steve Erickson who ended up winning the trials and eventually went on to win the Olympic gold medal."

During the same time, Dennis Conner had lost the America's Cup to Australia in 1983. Dennis knew that it was going to be really windy in Australia and decided to do some scouting at the Star Class Olympic trials in search of muscle. He ended up recruiting John MacCausland, Jay Brown, and a stunned Jim Kavle from the 1984 Star team. "Dennis came to me and said, 'If I get all my money together and all my funding, would you guys be interested in coming out and sailing with me?' When Dennis Conner asks you to sail, I don't know too many people that would say no. About 4 months later, he called us and said he had his funding together and he wanted us all to move out to San Diego for a few months, then go to Hawaii for a year, and then head to Australia the following year," Jim added.

After losing the Olympic trials, Jim really didn't know where his sailing career would go. He would eventually find out that about 350 people would be trying out for 11 spots on the boat. Seven guys from the '83 team would also be rejoining as crew, leaving only 4 remaining slots. Despite the stiff competition, Jim developed many solid relationships with the other guys. "It was pretty tough to deal with mentally, just knowing that every day out in the boat you're trying to outdo your best friend for a position," he said.

"My parents were also a little worried I would turn into a beach bum," Jim laughed. "The offer from Dennis wasn't solid and they sort of insisted I get a real job. I told my parents that if the opportunity came up, I really wanted to try one more time and see what happened. My parents were very forgiving. I told them that if I didn't make the A team for the America's Cup, I would come home, but looking back on that now I know that I couldn't have done that. There was an A team, which was the primary team, and the B team that was the backup. All of us worked so hard. The guys on the B team worked just as hard as the guys on the A team. I couldn't have worked side-by-side with all the guys on the team for a year and a half and then bail on them when they went to Australia. I don't think I could have looked any of them in the face ever again if I abandoned them."

Perhaps due to a solid work ethic, a positive attitude, a bit of good luck, and even better sportsmanship, Jim managed to hit the proverbial lotto and made the A team grinder position on *Stars and Stripes* '87.

Of course the stakes were much higher for the 1987 America's Cup. In 1983, Conner's *Liberty* failed to retain the Cup, losing to the Royal Perth Yacht Club's *Australia II* and its controversial winged keel. For the first time in 26 challenges, the trophy was no longer in the hands of the New York Yacht Club and the '87 race would be sailed in the volatile waters off the coast of Fremantle in Western Australia.

It was the '87 Cup that would ultimately change the way the

America's Cup would forever be sailed. Technology was moving to the forefront of the heated battle and the 12-metre class rules had been pushed so far that the boats were closer in speed than they had ever been in the past. Conner's radical hull shape and snub nose sailed well in 10 to 12 knots, but was extremely fast in 16 to 24 knots, making it difficult for Australia to engage the Americans in a tactical race, allowing *Stars and Stripes* to reclaim the '87 Cup in what many consider the highlight of America's Cup racing.



Jim Kavle Celebrates his 1987 America's Cup Win.

AFTER THE AMERICA'S CUP

Jim moved to Annapolis and began working as a boat broker and a project manager after competing in and winning the '92 Cup. "I was spending so much time here sailing that I figured it was a pretty good idea to stay," he joked. "After '92, I decided I was going to settle down, so I started working right across the creek at Passport Yachts."

But his early retirement from competitive sailing was short-lived. In 1995, the grinder who replaced Jim fractured his arm while training. "They didn't have time to train somebody, so they called me," Jim said solemnly. "I raced in all the qualifying races to get to the '95 Cup, but I had told Paul that as soon as his arm was better, I would step out and he could have his position back. During that time, I would train for several days, participate in the races, and then come home and go back to work. It was unlike most of the guys there. When you sign on to do the program, you're working on the boats, you're working on the sails, and you're there nonstop, so I was a unique situation. They qualified to make it to the finals, but by then Paul's arm had healed and I came back to Annapolis. Dennis had asked me to stay, but from the get-go, my deal was that when his arm got better, I was out of the picture. So, I held up my end of the bargain even though it may have been nice to compete that year."

THE TRANSITION FROM SAILOR TO LIFE COACH

After settling in Annapolis, Jim married wife Lori and the two were excited to welcome sons Porter and Connor into their family. When they were old enough to get out on the water and take an interest in sailing, Jim began to share his competitive racing knowledge with his sons. But, instead of instructing them in sailing matters, Jim chose to focus on being a life coach to Connor and Porter.

"When they're out sailing, I help out with little things, but the majority of it should be done by the coaches and I'm not a professional coach. I'm just a Dad who happened to sail," Jim said with a grin. "I'm much better at life lessons than actual coaching. Parents are the ones responsible for teaching the kids the intangibles. You may not be able

to understand the decisions they make on the water, but you can guide them to make good decisions everywhere."

Jim fondly refers to sailing as a life sport. "You're going to be able to meet a lot of really nice people and at times they'll be influential," Jim said. "I've met people who own companies, I've been to the White House, I've had dinner with kings and that's the kind of thing I want Porter and Connor to be able to do, too. You never know where it's going to lead so I try to let them utilize these opportunities for more than just sailing. Connor may end up being the Bowman with Porter skippering an America's Cup boat one day and who knows where that will lead!"

"To be able to do what Porter is doing at this age is wonderful. Being members at AYC has enabled him to get to where he is now: travel all over the United States and now overseas. The experience is just as important as the sailing, and this is one of the things Porter is learning from me. You end up building lifelong relationships. There are guys I raced with and against during the America's Cup that I now run into when we're watching our kids race Optis. In turn, the boys became friends with their kids so it's quite an adventure for all of us and a lot of fun to travel together."

Not one to keep his praise bottled up, Porter also notes that the Club has been a huge factor in his development as a sailor and a person. "Sailing is a community," he said. "The kids that I'm going to Holland with are all kids I've sailed with before or I've met at other regattas. You run into the same people and you meet good friends."

Although Jim does leave most of the coaching to the professionals, he does occasionally offer advice to the boys. "He's obviously told me a few things I remember distinctly," Porter chuckled. "A couple I remember are 'If you're not sure what to do, just go with your gut' and 'If it's really windy and you can't keep your boat flat and you're not doing real well, just finish the race ... that's all you can do.'"

Those were the two things I was going to mention," Jim said with a smirk. "We had a little episode at the New England Championships a few years ago. It was really windy out (like 20 – 25 knots), it was the end of the day, the kids were quitting right and left, and there was still one last race to go. Porter came around the back of the boat and he had this look on his face like 'I don't want to sail anymore.' But before he could say anything, I said, 'kids are dropping like flies, you get on that starting line, you finish the race, and you're gonna do great.' He gave me one of those not-happy-at-all looks, turned around, and sailed away. Another one of his friends came over, got a pretty similar speech from his parents, then sailed about 50 yards away and tied up to a coach boat. But Porter went out and probably sailed one of his best races and at the end of the regatta he finished 5th overall in the White Fleet."

"Finishing that race was very hard for me because I was wet, cold, and tired," said Porter. "I didn't want to keep racing and even after my Dad said that, I still didn't want to do it, but afterward I realized how important it was to continue. When you looked at the results, there were like 75 DNFs out of about 200 for the last race." "And we learned our lesson, didn't we?" Jim said. "Yep," Porter exclaimed. "Do not quit."

GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP, GOOD GRADES, AND FAMILY VALUES

A positive attitude, the desire to never give up, and treating others with respect are just a few of the key values Jim has instilled in both of his children, particularly Porter who has received countless sportsmanship and leadership awards including the CBYRA's Art Libby Corinthian Spirit Award, the USODA National Sportsmanship

Award this summer in Sandusky, Ohio, and AYC's Bill Bennett Sportsmanship and Leadership Award, which he won in both 2010 and 2011, becoming the first junior to ever win the award consecutively. Commodore McNeil has even referred to Porter as "a natural leader."

"I feel I'm a good team member and I just do my best to help people whenever I can," Porter said with a smile. "When we load the trailers during the summer, I'm usually one of the last people there. Last year, the coaches gave me the "Trucker" award at the Junior Sailing banquet. I always have my toolbox with me. I help kids carry their boats, check

their rigs, and replace missing parts. Some of the kids just think that it's not their responsibility to assist, but you really should help other people out when you get the chance."

When you speak to Porter and Connor, you instantly realize how well they were raised by parents Jim and Lori. "One of the things both Lori's and my parents drilled into us was manners," Jim reflected. "I think that pays off in spades if you teach kids manners when they're growing up and it's really not that hard. Family is very important to us. All four of us try to eat dinner together at least 4 or 5 days a week during school depending on our schedules, and I know that it makes a huge difference in the lives of both our children. Lori and I have been to dinner many times when other parents or servers stopped by to tell us how well behaved Connor and Porter are. One time, I remember Nana Haze was there to hear it, so I scored a lot of points with her since having good manners was always a big deal to her."

Teaching manners and being good parents doesn't come without some criticism though. "Some of the boy's friends think we're strict parents, but so be it," said Jim. "At least I know that when my kids go out with someone else or they're chaperoned by another family, they're going to be well behaved and polite and they're going to get respect for that."

Jim is also quick to credit the Club for being an important factor in the maturation process of his sons. "We joined this yacht club before we had kids, knowing that eventually it would give them the option to sail and at the same time surrounding them with a good group of people," Jim disclosed. "There are a lot of parents here who take the time with their kids and they're well mannered. Porter has been to Middle School Etiquette night at AYC with his friends where he learned a lot and really liked it! It's a great group of people to be associated with and I know that my kids have learned a lot of invaluable life skills here. The Club really pushes that attitude with the Junior Programs. Just getting kids on the water and getting them accustomed to it helps them understand the importance of behaving when they do come to the Club. The whole atmosphere is fantastic for the kids."

Porter is also very complimentary of AYC. "It's probably one of



Jim Kavle with President Ronald Regan.

the greatest places in Annapolis that I know of," remarked Porter. "It's really fun. I've met some really great friends through Junior Sailing and adults here at the Club as well. I love the card room. All of our friends get to hang out, have fun, eat really good food and watch movies together."

"The members and staff have been great in making the kids feel like they are part of the AYC community, so we end up spending more time at the Club to meet up with our friends, especially on nights when the kids walk over the bridge to meet us after sailing practice," said Lori. "I think the members realize that these kids are the future of our Club. I look at Kevin McNeil and Rod Jabin—their family roots run deep and they were running around here when they were little kids. Just take a look at them now. Their love and passion for this Club made them take the initiative to be our Leadership."

While manners and a positive attitude come first, the Kavles also stress the importance of a good education. Because colleges don't offer sailing scholarships, good grades are extremely valuable to young sailors looking to compete at the collegiate level. "One of our rules is, as soon as you don't make Honor Roll, you stop playing sports and concentrate on your schoolwork. Only then can you go back to sports. Lucky for us, both boys do great in school," Jim laughed.

School can be tough for athletes at the top of the game, and sailing is no different. Traveling for regattas around the world can result in absences, make-up exams, and lots of homework. Luckily, the Kavles have been quite successful relaying this message to Annapolis educators. "Once you explain to people what it takes to sail, specifically to principals and teachers, they begin to appreciate all the nuances that go into it. It's a lot of mathematics ... angles, degrees, wind speed, headers and lifts, constantly figuring out lay lines, and there's a lot of geometry involved. It's the only sport I know where the field moves,"

For example, when Porter was at Team Trials in San Francisco, we took Connor to the Redwood Forest, the Presidio, Alcatraz, and a cable car tour of downtown. It was great!"

Even with all the extra attention surrounding his exploits and sailing adventures, Porter remains humble. "I try to explain where I've been or what I was doing if people ask, but that's about all I say. I don't like to brag about what I've gotten to do, but I'm always happy to explain it if someone asks."

WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS

As generations of families continue to make headlines in sports, the question remains, "Why do generations of families continue to excel at the professional level?" Is it as simple as good genes, perhaps solid coaching from siblings and parents who made their mark on the game, or is it all politics? Maybe we'll never know, but there's no denying that children and siblings of family members who have excelled at the professional level have an advantage if they choose to utilize it.

"The relationships I have formed carry on and that certainly makes it easier for the boys to do things," Jim added. "If Porter wants to sail in Houston or somewhere there is a national level regatta, I have friends who I've met through sailing that I can call. That makes it much easier for him participate. My career offers him benefits, but he still has to do all the work."

Of course, not every star athlete's child makes the big leagues. Several of Michael Jordan's sons have played basketball at the college level without making enough of an impression to join the professional ranks. But this isn't exactly something Jim, Porter, and Connor are worried about.

While Connor now looks to be a contender on the lacrosse field, you never know if he may end up like his Dad too. Porter plans to walk

in his father's footsteps and credits his Dad's sailing career as a primary factor in his love for sailing. "I was young when I started sailing, but I was old enough to know about my Dad winning the America's Cup," he smiled. "I remember when he first talked to me about going sailing. He said, 'You're going to go to AYC sailing camp this summer and see what it's like,' and I fell in love with it. My goal with all of this is to one day race in the America's Cup. I plan to continue through high school and college and see where it takes me. And I can always continue sailing as an adult for fun if it doesn't work out."

Although racing in the America's Cup is quite a lofty goal, it's one that Porter may have never considered if his father hadn't been selected out of a pool of 350 sailors to join Dennis Conner

in 1987. It's quite obvious that both of his sons are proud of his accomplishments, but they're even more proud of their Dad for being just that, a great Dad. No matter where Connor and Porter end up in their respective athletic careers, the life lessons passed on from one generation to the next will certainly ensure one thing ... they both will grow up to be well-mannered, extremely considerate, and respectable men, on and off the water. ⚓



Porter and Connor Kavle pose with their Optimist Dinghies.

Jim explained. "It's not just going out on the boat and going where you want. Let's just say that it makes it a bit easier to sell the whole learning concept to the teachers and principals."

"Porter has been very fortunate," Jim exclaimed. "We've talked to his principal and teachers and because of what he's doing—the fact that he's nationally ranked—and they count his absences as educational field trips. When he returns, he gives speeches and presents his classes with descriptions about what he has done. Same goes for Connor. When Porter is sailing, we take Connor on some really great excursions that the area has to offer and he gives a report to his class."