



ONE OF THE GREATEST SPANISH ATHLETES OF ALL TIMES

# Pedro Campos: sailing, risk and passion

Every sport inherently has its fair share of risk, but that risk becomes all the more significant when the sport in question depends on the unpredictability of an element like the sea. It is in this environment, particularly when you consider its severe risks, such as storms, that attention to detail – no matter how small – is crucial. It can be the difference between success and failure. This relationship, between risk and success in a sport like sailing, led **FULLCOVER** to interview **Pedro Campos**, the prestigious Spanish yachtsman in charge of the MAPFRE team in the Volvo Ocean Race.

One of the top sporting events in the world, the Volvo Ocean Race attracts hundreds of sailors to a nine-month-long regatta that takes them around the world in a number of different legs. During the race they encounter every imaginable type of sea and weather conditions, from the dead calm of the equator to the 'roaring forties' around Cape Horn.

This is considered to be one of the toughest sporting competitions on the planet. To put it in context, just one leg of the Volvo Ocean Race takes longer than the entire Tour de France cycle race. Not to mention the fact that the sailors in the Volvo Ocean Race are competing for 24 hours a day, something virtually unheard of in other sports.

Pedro has his father to thank for his sailing career – he used to take his young son sailing with him in a *galeón* on the Arousa Estuary in Galicia. And he remembers that at the age of three, he was already bold enough to take the boat's helm.

## Risk and safety

As with any competition, preparation is one of the critical factors for success, and it takes time. According to Pedro, preparations for the regatta begin as soon as the necessary sponsors have been found. First of all, the crew and the boat must be chosen; and it must be done in that order because the most important crew members have a say in the final decision on the boat and its preparation, which can last for months – or even years – before the race itself. Whenever possible, training is undertaken in conditions similar to those that will be encountered during the regatta. All of this work leads to a good knowledge of the boat and its characteristics, which will allow top speeds to be achieved under all circumstances.

On the subject of safety, Pedro says this is the most important factor both before and during the competition, so crew training and boat maintenance are fundamental when it comes to reducing risks. He explains: "The limits of boat and crew are one of things the captain must know best."



Sailing enthusiast King Juan Carlos of Spain and the MAPFRE team.

Another important aspect is being able to predict the kind of breakdowns or malfunctions that might occur so that the tools and materials necessary for repairs are taken along. This is to ensure as many potential problems as possible can be resolved, helping prevent minor issues from developing into something more serious.

Pedro discusses one of the many incidents he has had to deal with and which clearly shows how, when it comes to risk management, you cannot make the mistake of thinking that only the big issues matter. On the contrary, in such a difficult setting and with so many risks, you have to pay attention to everything, including tiny details. Failure to do so could put a major project or undertaking in jeopardy.

Aboard the boat, the crew eat freeze-dried meals, prepared with hot water. Normally,

the equipment used to heat water for this purpose was washed at the stern and, once, during training in the South Pacific, many miles from land, it was accidentally dropped overboard. This might seem trivial but it was actually a huge problem because it was the only water heater container on board and without it the crew could not prepare their meals. Obviously, without an adequate diet, the crew's performance would suffer dramatically and the risk of a serious malfunction would rise exponentially.

The problem was solved following discussions with the land-based members of the team who suggested an alternative water heater could be a distress flair container and lots of sticky tape. After this incident, they always carried a container with a handle and kept it permanently tied up with a safety cable so it couldn't be dropped overboard during washing.

When it comes to studying or implementing risk management in an organisation or project, Pedro's example teaches us two very important lessons:

- 1.** The risk analysis and corresponding measures taken to address the identified risks were not effective enough - since they failed to identify this particular risk, meaning neither boat nor crew were prepared for the sudden loss of their ability to prepare their meals.
- 2.** When facing adversity, the team was able to react and find an alternative solution. However, since the incident occurred during training, it was not possible to assess what could have happened had it taken place during the race and whether it would have prevented the team from winning a regatta.



Pedro Campos at the helm.

Apart from the risks, the teams sometimes have to face up to tough legs where they are losing successively but nevertheless are able to 'change course' and win. Pedro says: "The source of motivation is the mindset of the team, who train to become accustomed to giving it their all." There are many factors that help keep the crew motivated, starting with the leadership skills of those in charge and which could be summed up as not being overconfident of victory but not becoming demoralised by defeat. He continues: "You have to appreciate the worth of your rivals and give them all due respect, while still being aware they can be beaten".

"Furthermore, the life of the 10 people aboard is tough because the environment is demanding and you always have to be 100% at the top of your game. The crew must be able to get along with each other and this must be achieved before the race begins, while the boat is being prepared and during training."

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## Lessons learned

Pedro talked about the hardest moments in his career and the lessons he has learned. Curiously, the incident he recounts took place not at sea but somewhere completely unexpected - the Entrepeñas Reservoir. He describes it as: "One of the toughest moments of my sporting career."

It was a Sunday in February, and Pedro and his companions were competing in a regatta in a small boat. When they arrived at the club, they boarded a dinghy with an outboard motor to get to their boat, which was anchored nearby. It was very windy and cold and, although the reservoir is small, the surface was a bit choppy because of the strong wind. They had only travelled about 100 to 150 metres and were about half-way to their boat when the prow of the dinghy dipped into the water, flooding and capsizing it in seconds. Luckily, the dinghy's watertight bottom kept it afloat. Although they were not far from shore, the temperature of the water and their saturated clothing hampered their attempts to swim to dry land.

As luck would have it, a nearby boat owner was able to reach Pedro and his companions in a little rowing boat. They decided not to try and clamber aboard the rowing boat, not only to avoid sinking it but also because it was tiny and there were a lot of them. Instead, they grabbed onto its sides, keeping their bodies as high out of the freezing water as they could, and made their way back to land without any more mishaps.

Pedro recalls one of the crew members had a wetsuit and was able to stay with the capsized and still-floating dinghy, helping the club's sailor who did not know how to swim.

Fortunately, everything ended well and nobody suffered from hypothermia but things would certainly have turned nasty had it not been for the rowing boat.

Pedro concedes the lesson he learned that day is that you should never let your guard down, especially in adverse conditions, and that safety rules and standards are sacred and must be followed. Problems can occur when you least expect them.

### Support: the key to victory

Out of all the trophies he has won – there are lots of them and they are all very important – Pedro confesses: “My proudest achievement is winning five world championships in a row in the ¾-ton class between 1990 and 1994, in three different countries.” He believes this record still stands to this day.

Former King Juan Carlos is a sailing enthusiast and a long-standing friend of Pedro, confirming the Spanish Royal Family’s commitment to promoting the sport in Spain. Pedro agrees: “His regular appearances at the main regattas and his constant support for Spanish sailors have been key factors in the considerable success achieved in our country in every sailing discipline.”

Pedro considers sponsors to be essential for the survival of sports such as this and has no hesitation in saying: “Nowadays, no top-level competitive sport can survive without sponsors and sailing is no exception.” From sailing schools and Olympic sailing to the world championships or ocean sailing, sponsors’ contributions are essential for anyone to be able to compete and have a chance of winning. It is up to the athletes to make the most of these investments.”

And he tells us how it all began with MAPFRE. The relationship started with a non-stop, round-the-world race - the 2010-2011 Barcelona World Race. The team, sponsored by Olympic champions Iker Martínez and Xabi Fernández, successfully sailed round the world without putting into land. They took second place overall, the first Spaniards ever to do so, and the only ones to date. In conjunction with MAPFRE, they are the fastest Spaniards to have circumnavigated the globe. That round-the-world trip was so successful and mentioned so often in the media that the insurance company’s brand visibility dramatically rose.

Since then, the collaboration with MAPFRE has been so intense that two more round-the-world trips have been undertaken jointly – but with stops this time – in the Volvo Ocean Race. The boat stops at some of MAPFRE’s most important markets, such as Spain, China, the United States and the rest of Europe, achieving extremely high levels of brand recognition. Not only is MAPFRE across five continents but it has given its name to this ‘round-the-world team’. Such sponsorship has made a huge contribution to the brand’s presence both in the media and in direct customer campaigns.



Pedro Campos as a child when he went sailing with his father.



The Volvo Ocean Race Mapfre boat.

### Essential qualities – in sailing and in business

When asked about decision-making in high-pressure situations and the qualities needed to lead this type of team, Pedro confirms decision-making during a competition, whether in a championship or facing difficult conditions, or more importantly, when the two circumstances occur simultaneously, requires: “A cool head, nerves of steel and as much experience as you can muster.” In this respect, the qualities he considers essential are: mutual trust between captain and crew, experience of working as part of a team, in-depth knowledge of the boat and your rivals and the ability to concentrate and keep a cool head, all of which can be acquired with time and practice.

He can remember many very tense moments during competitions but highlights the one which probably marked him most, Spain’s first ever participation in the Americas Cup, in San Diego in 1992.

When the regatta started Pedro felt that, as Captain, he had the responsibility for the entire country’s image in his hands, on such a highly significant date: the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. In the end, it all worked out perfectly, they won the start and the first regatta against the Australians, and that victory gave Spain ‘a foot in the front door’ of the oldest competition in the world.

Pedro sees similarities between sailing and the business world, suggesting ocean sailing and business can be easily compared. He says: “First of all you have to face up to the elements, which in the business world would be the market - always changing, sometimes unpredictable and where wind and sea are alternately in your favour or against you - exactly as happens with companies.” Pedro also mentions rivals, who can influence our strategies and tactics, again exactly as happens with rival companies. And the ultimate goal of trying to do better than your competitors is also the same.

Asked about whether he can see himself leaving the sea one day, Pedro replies: “I have no doubt that moment will come, but I hope it won’t be any time soon! Sailing is a sport that has a big advantage over others; you can compete almost for your entire life, unlike other sports where the physical demands on your body mean you have to give them up much earlier.”

He concludes: “In sailing, you have two ingredients that need to counterbalance each other - one is physical fitness and the other is experience. And as one decreases, the other increases.”

In sailing, just as in life, you may lose vigour with the passing years, but you gain wisdom. In Pedro’s case, he is in great shape, and FULLCOVER would be so bold as to say that, for the time being, he still has both! We are convinced his childhood passion will remain with him for the rest of his life – you only have to look at Pedro in the photo, firmly grasping the helm at just three years old, to be sure of it. •