

SPORT

RATTUE ON WEDNESDAY

Symonds' pot shot a sobering slap

see B17



CALM BEFORE THE STORM



IN THE GROOVE: Alinghi get a taste of the conditions on the Waitemata with Swiss Ambassador to New Zealand, Dr Beat Nobs (right), on board as 18th man.

by Dana Johannsen

Despite the America's Cup hostilities, Alinghi skipper Brad Butterworth insists there is no underlying tension as his team prepare for the Louis Vuitton Pacific Series.

The on-going legal battles between the Swiss syndicate and Larry Ellison's BMWOracle Racing has added extra spice to the Louis Vuitton regatta, which begins in Auckland on Friday.

The two feuding syndicates are likely to face off on the water on several occasions during the two-week regatta in what has been billed as a grudge match.

Likewise there has been little love lost between Alinghi and Emirates Team New Zealand in recent times, with the Kiwi syndicate also embarking on legal action at one time. Team NZ dropped their lawsuit late last year to ensure their participation in the next America's Cup. Part of the deal also included a guarantee Alinghi would send a team to Auckland to compete in the LV series.

It has all the makings of a tense couple of weeks on the water, but Butterworth said he doesn't feel any animosity towards Oracle or Team NZ, nor has he detected any hostility towards his team.

"I don't have any problems with any of the teams, they've all got mates of mine in them

BATTLE LINES DRAWN FOR REGATTA

The battle lines have been drawn in the inaugural Louis Vuitton Pacific Series regatta.

The 10 international teams assembled in Auckland for the event last night learned for the first time where they were seeded. From there a ceremonial draw took place to select the daily pairings for the racing that will start off North Head on Friday.

The pools were determined by seedings based on past results, or in the case of the new syndicates, in order of entry.

Emirates Team New Zealand heads pool A, with BMWOracle Racing likely to be the only real threat in the group. But with Team NZ advancing straight through to the final, the round robin stages of the regatta will be purely a training run for the Kiwis.

Pool B, which features top seeds and America's Cup holders Alinghi along with Luna Rossa and Team Origin, looks to be the strongest pool.

and I'm here to go sailing and enjoy myself," said Butterworth.

"What's happening with the Cup and the court case is completely foreign to me. I don't have a law degree and I'm not a judge. I really

PACIFIC SERIES TEAMS

Pool A: Team New Zealand, K-Challenge, BMWOracle Racing, Damiani Italia Challenge, China Team.
Pool B: Greek Challenge, Team Origin, Team Shosholoz, Alinghi, Luna Rossa.

The Oracle boats — USA 86 and USA 92 — have been assigned to pool B for the round robin stage of the regatta, with pool A drawing Team New Zealand's yachts.

A bleak weather forecast forced yesterday's practice to be called off, with organisers instead scheduling a maintenance day, originally set down for tomorrow.

The teams have just two more days to familiarise themselves with the inner workings of the two sets of boats.

— Dana Johannsen

don't totally understand it, but it's the way the Cup is at the moment."

A PR war has also raged between the two syndicates, with Alinghi often cast in the role as the bad guys trying to hijack the America's

Cup by creating a set of rules which unfairly serve their own interests.

But the role of villain is one Butterworth has become accustomed to over the years.

Since defecting to Alinghi after Team New Zealand's defence of the 2000 America's Cup, he has copped plenty of bad press.

He admits it's a little unfair, but said in some ways it is a measure of success.

"Nobody likes to be the bad guy, but I guess it's something that comes with being the defender. When I was defending the Cup with Team New Zealand, we were the bad guys. Everybody wants what you've got and it just goes with the territory."

Butterworth said Alinghi have never set out to stack the rules unfairly in their own favour. He said the new protocols drawn up at the end of last year were done so through a "thoroughly democratic" process.

He also contends that Alinghi have not deliberately tried to exclude BMWOracle from competing in the next event.

Should Oracle's appeal to the New York State of Appeals next month fail, the American syndicate will not be able to compete in the 33rd America's Cup as they did not meet the December deadline for entries.

Oracle's entry would only have been accepted if the Golden Gate Yacht Club dropped their appeal.