

Yacht race to Havana resumes after 58 years, complete with Cuban crew

Times staff

Tuesday, February 28, 2017 8:00am

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ST. PETERSBURG — The last time sailors sped south in the St. Petersburg-Habana Yacht Race, they ran alongside some of the biggest news of the year — the resignation of Cuban President Fulgencio Batista and the rise to power of Fidel Castro.

The year was 1959. The race wouldn't survive the deterioration of relations between the United States and Cuba.

But inspired by the move by President Barack Obama to reach out to Cuba, the St. Petersburg Yacht Club has revived the race after a hiatus of 58 years.

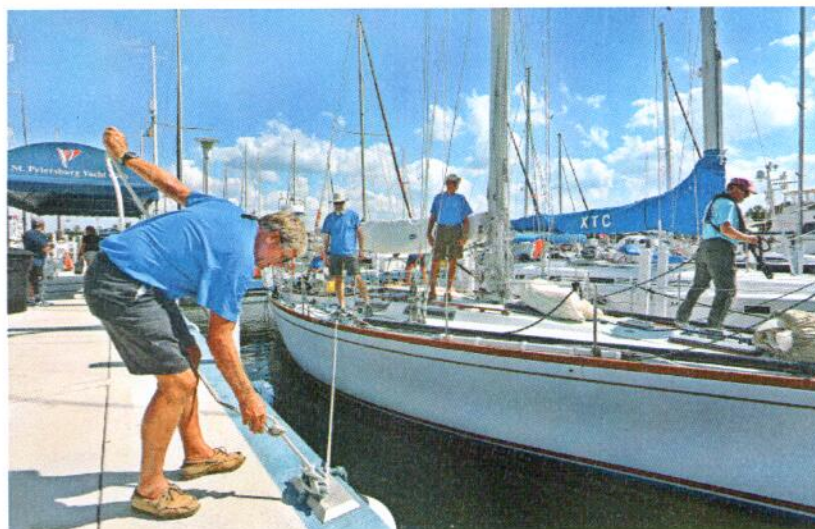
More history is being made, too: For the first time since the travel and trade embargo was imposed by the United States more than 50 years ago, a Cuban boat with Cuban sailors — the *Micara* — will participate in a U.S. regatta, Commodore José Miguel Díaz Escrich of Havana's Marina Hemingway told the *Tampa Bay Times* on Monday.

Some 550 sailors aboard 81 yachts were scheduled to set off at 10 a.m. Tuesday for a journey from the St. Petersburg Pier to Marina Hemingway. They will travel for a day or two across 284 nautical miles.

With President Donald Trump threatening to roll back Obama's Cuba policies, there is no guarantee the race will return next year.

Said John McMasters, whose family has played in a role in the race since it started in 1930, "Who knows if there will ever be another one."

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Ben Rottevee of Englewood unties a line from the dock at the St. Petersburg Yacht Club on Monday as the crew of the 43-foot-sailboat "Fruition" prepares to set sail on Tampa Bay. The crew and boat was practicing for Tuesday's St. Petersburg-Habana Race. [SCOTT KEELER | Times]

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