



Yves und Maja im Interview in Sail-World mit Adam Whitehouse

After their close fought win at the Fireball Worlds in Garda we caught up with the Champions Yves Mermoud and Maja Siegenthaler to find out a bit more about their Olympic journey and why and how they ended up competing for a Fireball Worlds in 2025.

Can you tell us a bit about your sailing journey — how did you each get started, and what led you to the Olympic 470 class?

Yves: I have been sailing since I was 16 years old. I started with a 10 year career in gymnastics, then began sailing a 420. I did this for around 2 years, then moved to a 470. I sailed with male crew for 4 years up until the Tokyo Olympics, where we were sparring partners for the women's team of Linda and Maja. After Tokyo it became mixed, so I teamed up with Maja and we started an Olympic campaign for Paris 2024.

Maja: In school I got the opportunity to sail for a week in an optimist which I really enjoyed so went again the year after. People pointed out that if it was something I really enjoyed I could train weekly and enter competitions. I really enjoyed sailing an Optimist and my coach encouraged me to do the Europeans but I never really had any big ambitions. Later I changed to a 420 and began sailing with Linda - we became very successful in juniors. This was surprising for us and soon we were hungry for more, we dreamed about the Olympics then qualified for Rio, later finishing 4th in Tokyo. As Yves mentioned, the 470 got mixed after Tokyo so I paired up with him. Our previous partners teamed up together so we were still travelling and competing as a 4, just in a different combination.

What were some of the highlights and challenges of competing at the Olympic level?

Y: It was a challenge at the Olympics dealing with outside pressures such as the media and people watching - something that doesn't usually happen during sailing. I feel highlights are much more important, and for us a highlight was that we won two out of eight races. In one of the races we were actually last on the leeward mark, we had one upwind left to catch up and to qualify for the middle race and we managed to go from last position on the leeward mark to first on the upwind mark.

M: This was a very big highlight for me. But also from the previous Olympics in Tokyo with Linda, we were fighting hard to qualify for the middle race and we qualified as 6th, then finished 4th overall. Some people say you must be sad to finish 4th, but from where we were initially this was a massive achievement.



Yves Mermoud/Maja Siegenthaler - SUI - Mixed 470 - Day 8 - Marseille - Paris2024 Olympic Regatta - August 4, 2024 - photo © World Sailing / Sander van der Borch

How did you first hear about the Fireball class, and what drew you to it after your Olympic campaign?

Y: My father has sailed a Fireball for over 15 years. As I started, I became more interested in what he was doing and sailing was soon a point of discussion around the family dinner table. We always wanted to sail against each other and following a break after the Olympics it seemed like a good time. We took on a Fireball for the Swiss Championships and the Worlds.

What were the biggest differences you noticed when switching from the 470 to the Fireball dinghy?

M: Both boats are similar in length, but the biggest difference is that the Fireball feels a lot smaller. Tacks almost feel like something is missing, as it's much easier to reach the other side of the boat than in a 470. The Fireball seems a little faster downwind, and feels more stable to sail on the reach due to the rails. The rudder on a Fireball is also longer which helps make everything flow better. One thing I did struggle with was that the spinnaker pole is high on the mast, and given that I'm not that tall, it was trickier when there was a lot of pressure on the pole.

Did your Olympic experience give you any advantages in adapting to the Fireball, or did you have to unlearn certain habits?

Y: Yes, the main benefit being cumulative hours spent on the water in the Olympic campaign. Because of this we could adapt much quicker on smaller changes. For example at the beginning, after each tack, I was searching the traveller to pull windward, and now on the 470 I forget it sometimes as on the Fireball there is no traveller.

M: We did a lot of boat work and changed the ropes and systems to a way we use them on the 470, which helped us get used to the boat a lot faster.

How did you prepare for your first Fireball World Championships — was the training approach different from your Olympic preparations?

Y: For the Fireball worlds we had 2 hours training on our lake, then we did 4 days Swiss championship then 2 more days in Garda before the worlds - that's it. As I said previously we had so many hours on the water together in the 470, we just felt solid with how we were sailing. In the end it was just about having fun and not about the result.

M: Preparation for the Fireball worlds were pretty different. After the Olympic Games in Paris we both needed a break. We mainly stopped sailing and training in the gym and just went to our usual jobs. We were still keen to sail a little and have fun which is the main reason we took this challenge on.



2025 Fireball World Championship day 1 - photo © Elena Giolai

Lake Garda is iconic in the sailing world — what was it like competing there in the Fireball for the first time?

M: We were in Riva five years ago with our old crew combinations so it was great to be back in a competition together. The scenery and the weather in Riva is beautiful and makes for great sailing, but sometimes racing in typical conditions there can be hard as everyone knows where to go. It makes it challenging to find clear lanes or to execute tactical plays but the conditions this time were not always typical which made things more interesting.

What were the standout moments from the championship that you'll never forget?

Y: Standout moments were definitely the starts. Starting out with 136 boats, an 800m line and a comity boat in the middle with two pin ends on the left and the right certainly brought new challenges.

As a mixed-gender team, how do you balance roles and communication on the boat?

Y: In general Maja is in charge of doing tactics on upwind, and I am in charge downwind. We discuss at the start the wind, current and lay lines. We talk constantly throughout and say "copy" to ensure we are both clear on what the other has said. In tight situations we are usually happy for each other to make any necessary calls, then work on a solution together after that.

What strengths do each of you bring to the partnership, and how do you complement each other?

M: A strength of Yves is that in stressful or tricky situations he keeps calm. One of my main strengths is that I am precise and a bit of a perfectionist, at times this can be detrimental but Yves will often pull me up on what is actually important. We definitely compliment each other in that respect.

What did this win mean to you personally and professionally?

Y: It's a nice achievement for sure. It's the first world title for me and the first for Maja in the senior fleet. It's always nice to get that win.

M: In terms of professionally, I would say we have made many new contacts and friends. This is the benefit of going into new classes, meeting new people. This win may open new doors for us, we'll see. We're optimistic.



Switzerland's Yves Mermod & Maja Siegenthaler win the 2025 Fireball World Championship - photo © Elena Giolai

What advice would you give to young sailors looking to transition between classes or aim for high-level competition?

Y: I think the most important thing is to have fun. It doesn't matter which class you are coming from you can always improve in other classes or take benefits from the class you

were in. Don't be shy to try new boats. If you ever have doubts about your weight / the size of your body don't worry - techniques and skill can be just as important.

Favourite sailing venue?

Y: For me, it has to be Israel. The warm weather, perfect wind, crystal clear waters, animals in the water - it's just an amazing place to sail.

M: I would also say Israel, but as Yves already did I will say Lanzarote. A beautiful island with super sailing conditions in the Winter.

Pre-race ritual or superstition?

M: Not exactly a ritual but every start we have the same routine. We take the time to talk about strategy and wind, and where we will position ourselves to choose our spot freely. This was hard to do in Riva due to the size of the start line.

Most memorable sailing fail?

Y: Probably loosing the tiller extension at the Games and capsizing because of this. I have fallen out of the boat many times by missing my hiking straps.

M: There are many fails but you need the fails to improve yourself. In Rio 2016 there was one day with no wind, then when they sent us out a wild storm front blew in. Later they told us they were evacuating the tents, but we were still out on the water at the time. We kept capsizing whilst waiting for the wind to drop, but it didn't - time went on and the light was fading. We got up managed to drop the sails, someone towed us in with the gib sheet flapping whilst I was in the trapeze. It was a survival moment for sure.

Dream sailing partner (besides each other)?

Y: I don't have a best sailing partner next to Maja, I just like going out sailing with friends and spending time on the water. Being on the water with my best friends is a nice thing.

M: I think a dream sailing partner is hard because it's very important you sail with someone that has the same targets, then you can work for them together. If you have a dream partner, they might not be dreaming about the same things as you.

Thank you both so much for your time, it was great to understand more about your success in Riva, hoping we see you back in a Fireball again... maybe Worlds 2026 in Torquay defending your title?

