

Captain Lawson Sets His Sight on Breaking Records

"I don't come from a sailing family."

From an athletic family, Donald Lawson was looking to excel in a sport of his own, just as his siblings had. When his mother organized a summer camp trip on the topsail schooner Lady Maryland, 9-year-old Donald's passion for sailing was kindled, and when the captain told him he could sail around the world, he knew he found his calling. Through middle school and high school he developed his skills through Baltimore's Living Classroom (<https://livingclassrooms.org/programs/shipboard-education/>) and by joining the Naval Junior ROTC, and at 17 he began teaching at Baltimore's Downtown Sailing Center (now a [Seibel Sailing](#) partner). "I knew I was breaking ground as I was the only instructor that looked like me," he remembers. For the next two years he spent the sailing season developing skills as an instructor and sailor, and by applying lessons he had read about on his long commute. 20 years later, Captain Lawson can still quote those articles and books.

"...I didn't know enough people to break into crews and teams that had been together for years. But that all changed after I destroyed a number of instructors in a series of races on J-22's & Sonar 23's..."

After proving himself a skilled solo racer, Lawson was invited to join teams for the club regatta's and for races with the Chesapeake Bay Yacht Racing Association (CBYRA). As he began leading teams to victories on bigger and faster boats, he set bigger goals. He began to meet the accomplished sailors of the Chesapeake Bay, including African American sailors and veterans who became his role models, and record setters who became mentors in his quest to set his own records.

While picking up some extra money in college making boat deliveries, Lawson discovered that a lot of sailing records are still based on freight routes established as ports developed in the 18th and 19th centuries. Later, with the guidance of the World Sailing Speed Record Council, he was able to identify 12 records he plans to break, from shorter point-to-point courses such as New York-to-Miami, to the circumnavigation record. He believes he can shave over 30 days from the US round-the-world record, currently 107 days.

Through all of his work, Captain Lawson seeks to level the playing field by making sailing available to people who didn't know that it's possible sail for a living, as hobby, or for glory.

The captain's rise through the racing ranks and his goals for breaking records have helped him develop quite a following, both locally in Baltimore as well as nationally. A documentary about his sailing adventures, and the work of those who came before him, is in development. More information at [Dark-Seas-Documentary](#).



A recent segment from WBAL News, Baltimore:

<https://www.wbal.com/article/baltimore-capt-donald-lawson-sailor-wants-to-beat-american-sailing-record/32190756>

Capt. Lawson spoke about his path so far as well as his goals for racing glory on The Starboard Portal:

<https://youtu.be/2ZTh11BQjd8>

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