

Waugh's voyage of discovery

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All hands on deck...Loyal's celebrity contingent, from left, Larry Emdur, Antony bell, Grant Hackett, Sean langman, Phil Waugh, Phil Kearns and James Dack. Photo: Helen Nezdropa

"THE rougher it got the more I enjoyed it." That's typical Phil Waugh. And the attitude that should have Wallabies coach Robbie Deans questioning why he ever left the tough-as-nails breakaway out of last year's spring tour.

Just days back from his maiden Sydney to Hobart voyage, in which he finished fourth aboard supermaxi Loyal, the Waratahs skipper said he's already counting down the days to the 2010 race.

However, he only got an hour's sleep in three days, so that could just be the celebratory beers talking.

"I certainly enjoyed the yachting and the actual racing. I think it's the competitive spirit," said Waugh, who was joined on the 100-footer by ex-Wallaby Phil Kearns, world champion boxer Danny Green and Olympic swimming gold medallist Grant Hackett.

"As we were going along all we were saying was 'how far behind are we? Are we catching them yet? How fast are we going?' The navigator must have been getting sick of us.

"It was an awesome experience. The most pleasing aspect of it was raising money for charity and if we could perhaps do the same thing again, then I wouldn't say no."

Waugh admitted he had a new-found respect for sailors, who he insisted were just as strong as any rugby player.

"It was tough work. I knew it would be tough just being aboard, but the physical part in lifting sails up and down – it's unbelievable," said Waugh, who as part of the mid-deck crew was an integral part in not one but three sail changes. "We broke one headsail straight out of the harbour just off the start – had to change that. Then a few hours later we were making some ground and we blew the No.3 headsail, which wasn't great. And then we put up another one and it was up for two minutes and we blew that as well.

"We were just dragging sails up and down, up and down. And pulling sails down and putting sails up. It was definitely tough work.

"I probably slept for an hour and a half the whole time, so it was pretty hectic."

Veteran Loyal skipper Sean Langman said Waugh's experience playing rugby played a valuable part in the boat's fourth-placed finish, acknowledging the 30-year-old's understanding of team mentality and harmony was second to none.

Waugh agreed it made his task a lot easier, but admitted he was close to losing his composure at least once.

"The scariest bit was when the steering went. We were doing 25 knots and the cable on our starboard side just went on us," he said. "The skipper went to the portside while the crew had to fit emergency steering, and I was getting worried. I just kept thinking 'this is going to be interesting if the portside snaps too."

"But like footy, you rely on your skipper to make the calls and whether it's the right call or the wrong call, the most important thing is for everyone to follow that call. The whole crew has to back the skipper. I certainly wasn't game not to."

And like any good team member, Waugh's Waratahs and Wallabies teammate Luke Burgess was there to congratulate him when he arrived in Hobart last Monday.

"That was a surprise. He was in Hobart with his girlfriend, so I gave him a big hug," Waugh said.

Waugh said a number of teammates had already expressed interest in taking part next year, as had Green.



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