

I must go down to the sea, but how 'bout them Dawgs?



roger brigham in my time

Ken Johnson, 29, and Peter Ledig, 23, are radio operators on the *Odyssey*. As such, they provide a link between the rig's famished fans and the wide world of sports beyond the waves.

Depending on the season, the pair jump on the telephone to call up the newspaper to find out that day's scores. The latest in the baseball, football, hockey and basketball races are typed onto a sheet and tacked up on the board. What's happening in the America's Cup competition? Check the board.

"We type a list and post them," Peter says. "There's a good majority of guys that check it. We get mail every day, but the papers we get are at least a couple of days old."

Twenty-eight days on, 28 days off, in 12-hour shifts they work. Peter is from the Boston area. Most of the crew members are from the South or the East Coast.

"This is the Cadillac of rigs," Peter says. "We have a rec room, outside activities, luxurious living quarters, a pool table, movies on cassettes, video games, a Nautilus weight room with sauna." Sheer heaven, right? "Well, I guess we are kind of isolated from sports," Peter adds.

"A lot of guys want to know how their home teams are doing," Peter says. "I'm personally interested in the Celtics and the Red Sox. Last time I was home was Labor Day weekend and I saw the Patriots versus the Colts, and they lost."

Peter's also a hockey fan, having played since he was seven, but he's rooted for the Islanders rather than the Bruins ever since Boston traded Eddie Westphal to New York.

Ken is originally from the Maryland area, but you won't find him suffering from Terps withdrawal. He's lived in Alaska for eight years and is at home in Anchorage. "Frankly, I'm not really interested in watching sports. I'm a runner. I used to do a lot of races around town, like the 24-hour relay at Bartlett and the Frostbite Footrace."

There are no bike trails or roads upon which to train on the *Odyssey*, so one must improvise. "I used to run around the helicopter landing deck," Ken says, "but it's about 50 laps to the mile, which really wears on the ankles."

Ken says he's attached to Alaska because of all of its outdoor activities, but he feels for the crew members who long for greener, lime-lined pastures Outside.

"Most of these guys are from the Lower 48, and they're in the wrong state. Unless they go for the Seattle SuperSonics, this is sort of the wrong state."

Roger Brigham is The Daily News sports editor.

Your home team, that mass of bruised flesh and spilled blood to which you have pledged allegiance since you were a guppy, is driving toward the playoffs. After years of suffering, of sitting in a rainy, windswept arena watching other teams turn your pet players into pulp and puree, you find your team bashing and battering the other guys into sweet submission.

You also find yourself thousands of miles away from home, isolated from televisions and newspapers and arenas. You're 40 miles from the nearest land. You cannot hear the roar of the crowd for the crashing of waves. You cannot smell the sweat of frenzied victory for the salty tang of angry ocean.

It's enough to make you run in circles. Welcome to the *Ocean Odyssey*.

Forty miles from Yakutat, the semi-submersible oil rig *Ocean Odyssey* drills into the ocean floor, probing the petrochemical potential of the Gulf of Alaska. On board at any given time are some 80 participants in this Homeric effort. Some 80 sports-starved fans whose souls are yearning for the latest scores.