

BREEZE ON!!! for the 49er and 29er North American Championships

Columbia River Gorge, Oregon, July 15-17 – Ultimately, it was the crews that kept their masts dry, daggerboards wet, and boats in one piece that triumphed, as over thirty 49ers and 29ers raced at “The Gorge” this past weekend in a very windy North American Championships.

Day One – Friday Yard Sale

The first day of the regatta dawned sunny and clear, allowing classic Gorge conditions to develop. RC Chair Jarvis Brecker decided to alternate series’ of three races between 49er and 29er fleets on the one windward-leeward course off the beach at Cascade locks and sent the 49ers first in an 18-20 knot breeze .

By the scheduled start time the wind had steadily built to 26 knots and only six boats managed to start the first two races. With a tricky windward mark placement off the beach to woo spectators, the leaders quickly realized that a low-lane hoist was necessary to avoid hitting shore early, allowing them to stay in the slacker current/flatter water next to the Oregon shore. A few spectacular wipeouts were suffered by those that had to gybe away early and were forced into the shipping channel on the Washington side of the river where the strong current-against-wind caused a washing machine effect. Gord Cook/Ben Remocker (CAN) and Andy Escourt/Pete Spaulding (NZL/USA) traded first place finishes in the first two races with Dalton Bergan/Zach Maxam (USA) sandwiched in second both races.

Only four boats managed to finish the morning races (a fifth – 49er rookies Steve Waldie/LP Bougie Bastien (CAN) – managed to sail the course but missed the time limit), but by the end of the second race only three boats were still able to race, so the RC sent the 49er fleet in for some much needed R&R....rest & repairs!

One of the best stories on shore was the fleet effort to resuscitate the CAN 1 boat – Andrew McCorquodale/Rob Boardman had snapped their mast which had subsequently punctured the deck and damaged the boom. With the clock ticking, the Bond brothers donated their spare rig, Team Pegasus donated a boom and several others got to patching the fist-sized hole with FastCure 5200, duct tape and the plastic lid off a BBQ chicken container provided by East Wind Burgers (best Shakes and cheeseburgers in Oregon!). With 5-6 people and new Vanguard 49er Rep. Matt McKinlay working on the boat at any one time, the “pit crew” got CAN 1 back on the water in time for the second series of races .

Meanwhile on-water the 29er fleet got four races to complete their day – Jon Ladha and Dan Inkpen from Newfoundland, Canada served up straight bullets in all four races with Louis LeBlond & Andree Lorette from New Brunswick, Canada close behind.

The second half of the day lightened to 20-22kts and the 49ers were again sent out to complete two more races for four on the day. The BBQ lid held tight on CAN 1 for McCorquodale/Lowden to pick up a pair of 7’s and there was no further damage to the fleet.

Day Two – Epic Saturday

Day Two was an epic, with six races completed for both fleets in 18-22kts, again from the west. The slightly lighter conditions made for some great racing. In the 29er fleet, LeBlond/Lorette continued to consistently pop home top-five finishes, but it was Brian Blumer/Peter Dixon (CAN) and Cameron Biehl/Charlie Smythe (USA) who made the biggest splash with two wins each. Bermudians James Doughty/Gareth Williams and Canadians Winston Latter/Michael Leitch picked up the remaining bullets. Blumer/Dixon were set to win the day with consistent top-5’s, but ended up with a DSQ from a leeward mark incident in race 6 leaving Biehl/Smythe with the lowest score on the day.

In the 49er fleet, Andy Escourt/Pete Spaulding were quick all day battling it out with Bergan/Maxam and picking up a slim one-point lead by the end of the day. USST members Mike Karas/Anthony Boscolo shook off the rust from Day One to claim two wins and top finishes in all but one race on the day. NA Class President Dave Fagen also began to get on-track in the morning’s races, but a crack of fiberglass heard 200 meters before the finish of race five indicated the third broken mast for the fleet and sent Dave and crew Ned Goss back to the beach for an early lunch.

Day Three – Final Races Held in Easterly

A strong Easterly breeze greeted the sailors for the final day of racing and RC Chair Jarvis kept the fleets on shore until the wind came down. Around 11:00am the 29er fleet was sent with out five boats all capable of taking home first place honors. Four races were sent off in quick succession with Biehl/Smythe winning three of them, but it was the consistent performance of Leblond/Lorette that would take the remaining win and title of 2005 North American Champions. Biehl/Smythe jumped into second overall on the day's performance with Ladha/Inkpen winning the tight race for third overall.

RC Chair Brecker kept the tempo going in the afternoon, determined to get a full series for the 49ers. With few points separating 1st-2nd and 4th through 6th, there was still a lot on the line for the racers. Fagen/Goss were first off the line and didn't see a transom all day, leading and winning all four of Sunday's races with superior boatspeed and a comfortable cushion over the rest of the fleet. CST athletes Dan Cunningham/Rob Paterson (CAN) dropped out of the top five with a snapped spin halyard and subsequent mast tip breakage...the fourth mast of the regatta.

It was the battle for the top three that was perhaps the most interesting though. Bergan/Maxam, Cook/Remocker and Karas/Boscolo regularly battled up the Oregon shore for current relief and small shore shifts while Fagen/Goss and Escourt/Spalding played more of a speed game more off the shore. In the final race, Bergan/Maxam almost pulled off the victory overcoming a two point deficit, but with one more win in their scoreline it was Escourt/Spalding that won the tiebreaker and took home the title of 2005 49er North American Champion. Cook/Remocker rounded out the top three.

Thank you to: RC Chair Jarvis Brecker and crew for superb racing in typical Gorge conditions (one of the most beautiful and best places to sail in the world); Vanguard Rep. Matt McKinlay for parts/service support; Roger, Dave Fagen, the Bonds; Cascade Locks Chevron for help with coachboat engine repairs; and especially the Columbia Gorge Racing Association for hosting the event.

Full results can be found on the CGRA website www.CGRA.org

Minutes from the 49er Canadian Class Annual Meeting will be available on www.49ernorthamerican.org

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