

Difficult Conditions Test Australian Optimist Sailors in Singapore.

Light, shifty winds coupled with a strong current tested 16 of Australia's Optimist Sailors last week in Singapore. The Sentosa Singapore National Championships has become a popular regatta for the Aussies, attracting a large international fleet to a venue well known for predominantly light breezes... two factors which our sailors often have limited opportunity to experience.

This year nine Australian Optimist Sailing Team members coached by Diego Figueroa were joined by seven less experienced sailors coached admirably by Brett Sharpe. This was the first international regatta for Carolina Townsend, Sabrina Campbell, Harrison Campbell, Olivia Stowell and Thomas Blaauw while eight year old Elliot Young was returning for a second time!



Carolina Townsend and Sabrina Campbell

The fleet of 234 sailors, representing eight countries were divided into six groups and started in three flights on the same course area. The first and third flights sailed a trapezoid outer loop, the second flight an inner loop which pretty much guaranteed mayhem at Mark two. As the first fleet were approaching it to round for a second time at the end of the sausage, the second and third fleets were approaching the same mark for the first time reaching on starboard, rounding and leaving it on the run. Boat control and tactical mastery were in demand with rich rewards for the proficient and brave young sailors.

The light and shifty winds and wide range of sailing abilities led to the fleets overlapping sometimes prior to the top mark. If the Aussies wanted big fleet racing, this is certainly what they got!

Parents and interested spectators strained through binoculars attempting to keep track sailors and fleets, a task made almost impossible by the inevitable mingling of flights into an almost continuous string of 234 overlapped craft! Under these extreme conditions coaches Diego and Brett always seemed aware of each sailor's progress providing invaluable feedback and encouragement were needed.



Day 1 set the pattern for the rest of the week, excited sailors arrived at the government funded National Sailing Centre at 0830hrs to rig their boats, claim a spot on the beach, have their briefing and await the AP to go up at 1030hrs. On the first day racing got underway at around 1600hrs – one race was completed and then the RO sent the sailors back in. It was disappointing for three of our sailors who scored OCS but Alsitair Young and Riley Skipworth were both thrilled having both scored an 11th place.

The second day was spent waiting for the wind, staying hydrated, making friends with sailors from other Nations and sampling the food produced by Raymond in the canteen. Doug Campbell and Mark Spearman represented Australia in the improvised hiking competition and both reached the finals. At 1600hrs the race committee called it a day and the sailors headed for the shops.



Day three started with an onshore postponement, but the sailors got out around lunchtime. Two races were completed and the emerging leaders were from Malaysia, Greece, Thailand and Singapore. The Aussies had a number of good results, Doug Campbell scored a second place, Nia Jerwood a 13th and ninth, Mark Spearman a third. A third race was started but abandoned and the fleet were sent back to shore in the fading light.



With three days of the five day regatta gone and only three races completed, the pressure was on the race committee to complete the qualifying series, minimum 5 races, before the fleet could be divided into Gold / Silver and Bronze for the final series. The following day a further three races were completed – the Malaysians cemented their positions at the top of the ladder and the Aussies continued to show talent and determination. Riley Skipworth had a beautiful race win accompanied by an 11th and a sixth, Doug Campbell scored a 17th, fifth and tenth, Paris Stowell 16th and two 13ths, Sam Blackburn a 13th, Alistair Young a 16th and 17th and Nia Jerwood a 19th, seventh and a tenth. It was an anxious evening for a number of the Aussies waiting to see which fleet they had qualified in.

Tension was high for the Singaporeans with this regatta forming part of their selection series for the World Championship. Although the wind had improved for the last day the current continued to challenge the sailors making the laylines to marks almost impossible to judge. The Australians sailed well but were less experienced in these difficult conditions than the local sailors and occasionally struggled to consolidate good positions when approaching marks. The best results of the day in Gold fleet went to Paris Stowell in Race 8 with a 16th while Mark Spearman rounded off his regatta in the Silver fleet with a clinical race win while Carolina Townsend finished only a few places behind. Unfortunately, due to a race management error the final race of the regatta was discounted from the overall results, but to the Australians credit the focus remained on fun and friendship.

In all, our sailors learnt a lot about congested race courses, light winds and currents. The experience, although challenging will prove invaluable for their future sailing. The onshore postponements gave chance for the sailors to make new friends and also learn some essential sailing skills!



Brett Sharpe passes on his skills to Alistair Young

Overall results and official photographs can be found at <http://www.sailing.org.sg>

Australian Results

Gold Nia Jerwood 35th, Doug Campbell 49th, Paris Stowell 54th, Alistair Young 63rd, Riley Skipworth 65th, Sam Blackburn 71st.

Silver Dylan Passmore 24th, Mark Spearman 35th, Carolina Townsend 40th, Thomas Blaauw 49th, Suzanne Oliver 67th.

Bronze Sabrina Campbell 16th, Olivia Stowell 18th, Freya Skipworth 40th, Harrison Campbell 48th, Elliot Young 56th.