

## The Inaugural Challenger Harbour Clinic and Junior Australia Cup

Seventeen Optimist dinghy sailors, ranging in experience from the top of the Gold fleet through to newcomers to the class, pioneered the first major dinghy event held at Royal Perth Yacht Club's Challenger Harbour. Built on the Indian Ocean in Fremantle for the 1987 America's Cup Defence, the facility will once again be the focus of the international yachting world in 2011 as one of the key venues for the ISAF World Sailing Championships.

The eighteen Optimist class sailors launched their boats over a rickety old jarrah dock, soon to be replaced by an Olympic standard ramp. Only a few miles up river, former Optimist sailor, and triple Olympic Gold medallist, Ben Ainslie was sailing a Foundation 36 yacht in the Australia Cup. No doubt he would have been a bit envious of the Opti sailors who participated in the clinic, practicing on the race track where he will be racing his Finn class dinghy in preparation for his tilt at a medal in the next Olympics.

Our 18 Opti sailors were coached by Australian Head Coach (and RPYC coach) Diego Figueroa, and New Zealand's National Optimist Coach Riley Dean (who was flown in from Auckland for the clinic). The intensive Clinic started after school on Thursday when the sailors were greeted with a 25 – 30 knot sea breeze and waves plus chop that was often twice as high as an Opti is long. They stayed on the water until late and enjoyed some amazing surfing down the waves. A few spectacular broaches, nosedives and other methods of having a quick dip in the ocean did not deter these intrepid young sailors.

At midday on Friday they were out there again in a slightly tamer sea breeze. Diego and Riley put the fleet through endless drills, closely contested starts, huge upwind beats, leading to wonderful downwind surfing competitions. Again the sailors returned to the Challenger Club rooms as the sun hit the horizon.

The sailors spent all day Saturday in the Clinic, with light winds in the morning where they sailed on the ISAF World Championship "Centre Course" off Bathers Beach. After lunch the sailors cooled off by swimming through the marina, and jumping off the highest pylons they could find. After some lawn games that included bobbing apples and a range of skills that had nothing to do with sailing, but lots to do with building teams and camaraderie, the fleet returned to the sea and the sea breeze again to do some teams racing.

As the sun once again set over the Indian Ocean, the dedicated parents packed the fleet onto trailers and roof tops to be transported to Crawley for Sunday morning.

The sailors participated in the inaugural Junior Australia Cup, held on Perth Water in the shadow of the Perth skyline. The regatta, sponsored by Swan River Sailing, Zhik, Hamelin Bay Wines and Sailmakers WA attracted 41 entries. The four race regatta was modelled on the iconic Junior Gold Cup raced in Opti's in Bermuda alongside the

Bermuda Gold Cup Grade One Match racing event hosted by the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club. Skip Lissiman invited the WA Opti fleet to race a regatta alongside the Australia Cup.

It was a real thrill for the Optimist sailors to race on the same race course as the World's best Match racing crews in front of spectators who could watch all the action from the foreshores adjacent the Bell Tower, or South Perth.

After setting off from RPYC at 8.30 and being towed by a fleet of Rib's, the sailors waited over an hour for the first whispers of sea breeze to ruffle the water and see the hotly contested racing begin. Sailors from Fremantle Sailing Club, RFBYC, RPYC, Hillary's, Perth Flying Squadron, and South of Perth Yacht Club competed on the tight windward and return courses. Four races were conducted in the freshening sea breeze with the regatta being won by Sam Blackburn. Douglas Campbell was 2<sup>nd</sup>, Lachy Gilmour 3<sup>rd</sup>, Nia Jerwood 4<sup>th</sup> and Thomas Blaauw 5<sup>th</sup>.

Sam won a \$500 travel grant donated by Swan River Sailing.

The Optimist fleet would like to thank the flag officers of RPYC for their strong support of the Optimist class. A special thanks to Stuart Walton who has been a champion of our class development. Challenger Harbour Master Clem Rogers made us feel right at home at our amazing Indian Ocean facility. Thank you Clem, you are a legend. Thanks to all our volunteers who made the event possible.