

June 27, 2008

Yesterday concluded the 2008 New Jersey State Optimist Championships, held out of Shelter Cove Park in Toms River and sailed in the famous Barnegat Bay. Sailors came from as far away as Florida to the event, which is back for its nineteenth year.

So, on Wednesday, sixty-five sailors drifted out to begin the regatta. The first race started in a northwesterly, uncommon for the Bay, which quickly resolved into the Southeasterly sea breeze during the race. Racers experienced breeze from every direction during the first race as the wind meandered around to the sea breeze direction. Upwind legs became downwind legs, and the leeward gate a choice between two windward marks. As the day went on, the breeze built to a steady fifteen to twenty from the sea breeze direction and only the toughest survived; just over half the fleet finished the fifth and final race of day one. After the first day, Scott Barbano led the tightly clumped top ten with a one-point lead over Jonathan Lutz.

Day Two began as an overcast day with a light Southeasterly breeze, as the race committee sent out the sailors bright and early to begin racing. By the last race, the breeze built to around ten or twelve knots out of the sea breeze direction, and the regatta was incredibly close: the last race would be the one that decided who would win. In the end, New Jersey native Connor Swikart won the eight-race event with a strong 1-1-3 on the last day to clinch it by the thin margin of one point over Nikki Medley from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. Haley Fox, also from Ft. Lauderdale, finished third.

Overall, the regatta was expertly run by the experienced PRO Paul Coward, who ran off eight good races in two days. Make sure to keep an eye USODA's calendar next year for the States, which is held the last Wednesday and Thursday in June every year. It is a great event that guarantees a great venue with excellent conditions, because there is no place to sail in June quite like New Jersey.

Jack Swikart