

Isotope Nationals 2011

Hurricane Irene may have blown out the originally scheduled date, but it couldn't cancel the 35th Isotope National Championship entirely. Instead, the regatta was rescheduled (still at Lake Waccamaw) to coincide with Waccamaw Sailing Club's Indian Summer Regatta (October 8-9). Nine Isotopes made it out for a weekend of fresh breezes and undimmed hopes.



JP Ayres sailing his shark boat

The fleet shared the lake with Tanzer 16s and open class boats, including a Lightning and a Hobie Wave. Mike Sigmund, who came from Raleigh to be PRO for the event, set long courses with separate marks and starts, to keep the fleets apart.



Race 1 start

Saturday brought winds starting at about 8 knots and building to over 10 during the day. True to Lake Waccamaw form, the shifts were small and the chop light - ideal Isotope racing weather. In the first race JP Ayers led at the start and the fleet (except for Steve Chobot, who split and went right) followed him to the left side. Eric Rasmussen and Joleen Rasmussen battled for the committee boat end of the starting line and were late initially, but both sailed high and fast,



Joleen adjusting downwind trim

winding up ahead at the first weather mark. Eric extended his lead on the downwind leg and kept a loose cover by "staying inside of the other boats and gybing when they crossed astern". Joleen followed close behind for the first lap, but Eric pulled away the second time around. JP passed Joleen on the last leg to come in second. Rudy Tatum finished fourth.

In race two, Steve and JP led initially, and quickly trapped out as the wind picked up. Steve was first to the windward mark by a good 20 seconds, followed by Eric, JP, and Walter Brier, who rounded close together. Eric sailed deep and fast on the second leg, catching Steve at the gybe.



John Kirles hiking hard

"I was late at the start", he said, "but I had good boatspeed, especially downwind". Eric was first at the leeward mark and tacked back across the middle of the course halfway up. He pulled ahead, enjoyed good wind, stayed in the center for the duration of the race, and won. Steve finished second, JP third, and Joleen nosed out John Kirles for fourth place.

JP, Steve, and Frank Meldau started at the pin and were the early leaders in race three. Eric caught up at the first tack and reached the windward mark just ahead of JP, Walter, and Rudy. "The whole fleet rounded the mark within 20 seconds", remarked Steve. At that point, however, Eric again outdrove and outfooted the others. He pulled ahead, and then covered the fleet for the remainder of the race. With slightly more wind, this was the fastest race of the day. Steve came in second, and John third.



Frank Meldau and Howard Alexander

"I was very surprised to win all three races", said Eric. "Usually we mix it up a lot more". At the end of the day, Eric was in the lead, followed by JP, Steve, and (to her astonishment) Joleen.

The winds picked up Sunday morning. Joleen regretfully decided to remain ashore, along with Frank and Howard Alexander, but she did help several boats get safely out from between the docks.

Steve and JP began race four trapped out under full sail while the others started more conservatively, sailing with jibs furled until at least the first tack. Steve was first to the mark with a large lead, and JP second. Eric was behind, but caught up on the downwind leg, passed JP, and rounded the leeward mark shortly behind Steve. Steve sailed high and fast upwind, though, and regained a wide margin. He held his lead and finished first.



Rudy Tatum on his new Isotope

Even though the winds freshened more for race five, boats unfurled their jibs at or shortly after the start. Steve was first around mark 1, with Eric close behind. Eric again passed Steve going downwind, and they traded places repeatedly for the rest of the race. Eric sailed faster and deeper downwind, but Steve pushed hard, and trapped out with impeccable form to pull ahead upwind. Steve won the last race again, with Eric shortly behind.



Walter Brier turning downwind

The monohulls, which had stayed onshore earlier, braved the wind to join the Isotopes for the Waccamaw Cup race (the traditional last race of the Indian summer Regatta) - a winner-take-all Portsmouth Yardstick handicap race. Eric pulled out all the stops, hitting the starting line at speed, pulling away from beneath Butch Blanchard's Tanzer 16. and then trapping out to establish an early lead. "The wind picked up on the first leg", said Eric, "and it was a bronco ride to the windward mark. I nearly capsized". Once around the mark, he was gone like a shot. Eric extended his lead for the duration of the race, finishing a minute and a half before the next Isotope, and over 4 minutes ahead of all other classes on corrected time. It was the first time an Isotope ever won the Waccamaw Cup. "I'm glad to finally get the Isotopes on the trophy," Eric remarked, "but it really was our racing conditions".



Eric and Steve approaching the windward mark

Eric took both the Waccamaw Cup, and the Isotope Nationals. Steve came in second place overall ("always the bridesmaid, never the bride"), and JP took third. John finished fourth, and newcomer Rudy surprised the fleet by taking the fifth place trophy his first time out.



**Isotope Sailors. Top to bottom:
Rhoda Meldau, Frank Meldau, Joleen Rasmussen, Walter Brier, Leslie Lyon, Cindy Chobot
Eleanor and Rudy Tatum, JP Ayers, Eric Rasmussen, Steve Chobot, John Kirles, Howard Alexander
Angel Chobot**

Final Results

			Place	Total	Race 1	Race 2	Race 3	Race 4	Race 5
235	Eric	Rasmussen	1	7	1	1	1	2	2
827	Steve	Chobot	2	12	6	2	2	1	1
186	JP	Ayers	3	18	2	3	4	3	6
2008	John	Kirles	4	22	7	5	3	4	3
1776	Rudy	Tatum	5	27	4	8	6	5	4
427	Walter	Brier	6	28	5	7	5	6	5
199	Joleen	Rasmussen	7	34	3	4	7	10	10
1953	Frank	Meldau	8	42	8	6	8	10	10
769	Howard	Alexander	9	49	9	10	10	10	10

Photos courtesy of Howard Alexander, and Doug and Katie Sherwood.