

2018 ETHELLES FLORIDA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP – In Memory of Tom Piper

February 5, 2018

The 2018 Etchells Biscayne Bay Series had its third regatta in Miami this weekend with the Tom Piper Memorial Florida State Championship. Hosted by Etchells Fleet 20 and the Biscayne Bay Yacht Club five races were competed over two days. Forty-eight boats took part for this regatta, with several Etchells world and national champions on the starting line.



Saturday's weather though cloudy was still a nice day for racing. Temperatures in the low 70's and a fresh easterly breeze of 15 knots greeted the sailors when they reached Biscayne Bay. The first race went off right on time with a bearing of 080 degrees, a distance of 1.5 nautical miles.

First to the top mark was Steve Benjamin on Scimitar. He was closely followed by Lawrie Smith on Alfie and Jim Cunningham on Lifted.

By the first gate Peter Duncan, newly crowned U.S. Sailing Yachtsman of the Year, had pulled into third place.

At the second weather mark, the first three boats had swapped position with Duncan leading Smith and Benjamin. The breeze was holding steady at 15-17 knots. That order held to the finish which was extremely close with Duncan catching a late puff for the horn.



Race two was another course 4 set at 080 degrees with a distance of 1.5 nautical miles. By now with the wind at 15 knots and all of the traffic, Biscayne Bay was beginning to get choppy. Five boats got anxious and pushed the start, getting called OCS. Among them was Peter Duncan, and though they all cleared, they were trailing the fleet heading up wind.

At the top mark disaster struck Duncan's Raging Rooster, or more accurately, Athena struck them, leaving a thirty inch long gash in their port quarter. They were forced to retire.

Benjamin and Lawrie Smith rounded the weather mark one-two with Ante Razmilovic in third. At the gate Steve Girling had pulled into third. The breeze was holding steady; 080 degrees at 15 knots.

By the second weather mark Lawrie Smith had overtaken Steve Benjamin and William Douglas on Goombay Smash was in third. That order held to the finish.

For race 3 PRO Stuart Childerley went with a "U" flag. The wind was oscillating between 60 and 80 degrees at 12-15 knots and a strong current was sweeping the fleet towards the starting line. After two AP's and a general recall the racers finally started up the course.

Lawrie Smith again led the way followed by Jim Cunningham and Steve Benjamin. At the gate, Dirk Kneulman took over second. The wind was still moving and a Charlie flag greeted the fleet at the second weather mark.

Smith and Cunningham finished one-two with Dirk Kneulman rounding out the top three.

So at the end of day one it was Lawrie Smith in the lead with 4 points. Steve Benjamin held second with 10 points, and a bit further back was Jim Cunningham with 26 points. As so often happens in this fleet, 10 points separated third and ninth.



Sunday morning brought sunnier skies and a balmy 72 degrees. Beautiful conditions for the scheduled two races.

Race 4 finally got underway under a "U" flag after two General Recalls. The course was a bearing of 155 degrees with the wind at 12 knots. Again with a strong current sweeping the boats toward the line, nine boats were caught over, leading to a score of UFD.

At the top mark it was once again the Smith and Benjamin show with Kneulman in third. Those same three were together at the gate with Benjamin in the lead, Kneulman in second, and Smith in third. That order held for the next two laps with Benjamin taking the horn.

The championship all came down to the last race. Lawrie Smith was in the lead with seven points. Steve Benjamin was close behind with 11 points. Nobody else could mathematically catch the leaders.

For that race 5 PRO Childerley set course 4 at a bearing of 170 degrees, with the wind at 6-8 knots. After two General Recalls, he pulled out the Black flag, encouraging the fleet to behave themselves.

At mark 1 it was Michael Gavin in the lead followed by Kevin Grainger and Peter Duncan. By the time the fleet got to the gate the wind was going light. A Charlie flag signaled a minus and shift to 185 degrees.

Through the gate, Michael Gavin held on the lead with Peter Duncan close behind. Scott Kaufman was in third. That order held to the finish.



Winning the 2018 Florida State Championship Regatta was Lawrie Smith with his crew of P Andrada, G Ribeiro and R Parslow. Finishing second was Steve Benjamin sailing with Michael Menninger, Ian Liberty, and Johnny Goldberry. Third place went to Jim Cunningham with his crew of Jeff Madrigali, Mark Ivey, and Serena Vilage. In fourth place was the team of Scott Kaufman, with Alec Anderson, Lucas Calabrese and Jesse Kirkland. Rounding out the top five was Peter Duncan along with Andrew Palfrey and Jud Smith.

Taking the Florida State Championship perpetual trophy for the fourth straight year as the top Fleet 20 boat was Steve Benjamin and crew.

Next up in the Series is the Midwinter Championship on March 2, 3 & 4.

