

West Kirby Hawks claim victory after a thrilling five race final at the 2009 Wilson Trophy.

The 2009 British Open Team Racing Championship for the Wilson Trophy came to a breathtaking finale on the marine lake at West Kirby Sailing Club today, when in front of a large crowd of enthusiastic spectators who had packed the grandstand and lined the promenade, local heroes West Kirby Hawks overcame the visiting US team from Larchmont Yacht Club in a wild and windy five race final.

With twenty five to thirty knot winds blowing from early morning, the race organisers were forced to abandon plans to run further round robin flights and move straight into the sudden death elimination rounds, when conditions moderated slightly in the afternoon. In the first quarter-final BUSA gave Larchmont an early scare by taking the first race convincingly 1,3,4. The American team squared the tie in the second to set up a third race showdown for a place in the semis. After an even start in this race there was little between them until the leeward mark when both teams were engaged in a vicious scrap for supremacy. Larchmont's superior boat handling enabled them to wrest control at this point and go on to win both the tie and the match.

Royal Thames, who had been widely lauded as the surprise package of this year's Wilson Trophy, faced the experienced Lions team in the second quarter-final. The first race was a tight affair which saw the Lions snatch victory only at the end of the final beat. The second race was a must win for Royal Thames but the Lions won the start and were able to close the race down with a 1,2,3 formation by the end of the run giving them the win and booking their place in the semis.

In the other pair of quarter-finals the Hawks made quick work of dismissing the Ungrateful Colonists with a 1,2,4 and 2,3,4, wins while another squad from the host club, the West Kirby Sailing Club team, disappointed home fans by losing in two races to US entry the Woonsocket Rockets.

With tension building rapidly, the pairings for the semis drew the Americans against each other in one heat, leaving the British to fight it out in the other. Last year's semi-finalists Larchmont were now on a roll and despite a spirited defence from the Woonsocket Rockets, Larchmont won two races to move through to a second consecutive final. The other semi produced some of the best team racing of the whole event so far, as the Hawks and the Lions slugged it out over three races. Ultimately the Hawks managed to prevail but only after making a number of seemingly impossible comebacks in a bruising third race showdown.

So after three days of racing and well over three hundred races, the 2009 Wilson Trophy and the chance to be crowned as British Open Team Racing Champions, had come down to a best of five final between the West Kirby Hawks and the Larchmont Yacht Club. Much was expected of this final series and it did not disappoint. In race one, after some heated prestart action, the two teams were locked together from the moment they crossed the line. So much so in fact, that within minutes there had been three red flag penalties flown by the on the water umpires. At the windward mark the Hawks held a 1,2 combination, but by the end of the run they were down to a 1,4,5. As the first two boats converged on the gybe mark they were involved in a major collision which resulted in the Larchmont boat being red flagged. This penalty put paid to any real hope for the American's to mount a comeback in this race and the Hawks went on to take a 1,2,5 win.

In race two the prestart was even more extreme as the Hawks turned up the heat on their opponents. As a result the Hawks won the start and were able to get out to the favoured left side of the beat ahead. They rounded the first mark in a 1,2,5 combination which they held to the bottom of the run, despite chasing Larchmont team's attempts to blanket them with a furious flurry of gybes. With everything looking secure for a second victory as they started the final beat, the Hawks were thrown into confusion when, seemingly inexplicably, their second placed boat tacked and was unable to cross the closely following Larchmont boat. The resulting penalty pushed the Hawks back to a 5,6 combination and by the end of the beat the grateful Larchmont team had converted this to a 1,2,3, win.

Larchmont really seemed to have got some impetus behind their challenge for the title when they rammed home their advantage by winning race three with a solid 2,3,4. Hawks sailed back from the finish of that race in close formation as they fought to regroup and refocus on what was now a do or die race for them. More aggressive prestart manoeuvring was followed by a start so close that it was impossible to say for certain which team had the upper hand. The Hawks held a 2,3,6 score as they approached the windward mark but the final Larchmont boat stalled on a tack and parked at the buoy allowing the Hawks into fifth. The British team pulled off a textbook double mark trap at the end of the reach which moved them into a winning 2,3,4 position. On the final beat the leading Larchmont boat tried every trick in the book to force the three Hawks boats into making a mistake, but they stoically resisted his attentions and hung tough for a win which squared the series.

With the bit now firmly between their teeth the Hawks took control early in the fifth and final race and rounded mark one in first second and third. At the next mark and with his two team mates sprinting away down the run, the third placed Hawks boat went on an all out 'suicide mission' to slow up the pressing Larchmont boats. Pinning two of them out at the gybe mark and almost capsizing in the process he was able to give his comrades a clear racetrack for the remainder of the race. Minutes later, with the home crowds cheering, a visibly delighted West Kirby Hawks team comprising Ben Field/Tom Foster, Dom Johnson/Debs Steele, Andy Cornah/Hamish Walker crossed the line in a 1,2,6 formation to claim victory in the 2009 Wilson Trophy and take the British Open Team Racing Championship title for the very first time.

Trophy Winners:

Wilson Trophy: West Kirby Hawks

Runners Up Salver: Larchmont

Wilson Plate: Royal St George

Under 21 Trophy: Oxford University

For more information go to the Official Wilson Trophy Website at www.wilsontrophy.co.uk .

West Kirby Sailing Club is grateful for the continued support of the following sponsors:

Buckley Industrial
Carlsberg
Deeside Services
GL Wilson
Hilbre Offsales
Holt
Mann Island Finance
Merseyside Coatings
Musto
Phoenix
Rondar Raceboats
RSK Group
Seldén
Serenity Clinic
Star Class Association
Uren Food Group
West Kirby Lettings
Yourcitybase

West Kirby Sailing Club would also like to acknowledge the important contribution of the following boat patrons:

Ancient Mariners
Mann Island Finance
Nick Flashman
NYC
Richard Uren
Royal St George Yacht Club
Stallions
WKSC

For more information about the 2009 British Team Racing Championship for the Wilson Trophy or for access to high resolution images from the event please contact the official press officer, Justin Chisholm:

+447769 938722
justin@justinchisholmsolutions.com
Skype: justinchis
