

Wilson Trophy, 2010 – Day 1

from Justin Chishom

Racing got underway bang on time today at the sixty-first edition of the Wilson Trophy British Open Team Racing Championship, hosted by West Kirby Sailing Club. Widely recognised as one of the world's premiere team-racing events, thirty-two teams from the UK, Ireland and the USA will fight it out over three days of Swiss league and elimination rounds comprising over two hundred races and culminating in the Grand Final to be sailed in front of a packed spectator grandstand on Sunday afternoon.

Despite the unique logistical challenges thrown up by a regatta of this sort, with over sixty years of experience, the team of volunteers at the host club put on an impressive show. The marine lake at West Kirby forms the perfect amphitheatre for an event of this type of event, with all-round spectator access to view the racing augmented by live expert commentary piped throughout the regatta venue. The Wilson Trophy on-the-water organisation is equally impressive, with the racing taking place in a fleet of thirty-six equally matched and coloured coded Firefly dinghies provided by the organisers. The Wilson Trophy utilises a custom automated starting system to get the races underway smoothly and results are posted online within minutes of each race finishing. Given the high-intensity, cut and thrust nature of team racing and to avoid the need for time consuming protest hearings, instant justice is dished out-on -he water by a squad of twenty-five rib-based international umpires.

As ever, the 2010 Wilson Trophy entry list is made up a compelling mix of both rookie and experienced teams and studded with individual superstar sailors. On paper, the two local teams - West Kirby Sailing Club and last year's winners the West Kirby Hawks – look likely to be amongst the strongest contenders to make it into the final rounds come Sunday. The Hawks feature the same helm lineup of Ben Field, Dom Johnson and Andy Cornah who defeated the American Larchmont team in a thrilling grand final in 2009. Equally, the West Kirby Sailing Club team can also boast an impressive list of experienced team racing helmsmen in the form of Leo Dixon, Paul Kameen and Owen Modral.

The four potent USA teams who have made the trip to this year's Wilson Trophy, include two New York Yacht Club entries, plus Team Extreme led by Olympic 470 campaigner Stuart McNay, as well as the return of the enigmatically named Woonsocket Rockets who made a big impact here in 2009. Ireland is also represented by two strong teams, both from Dun Laoghaire's Royal St George Yacht Club. A notable new team attending this year is the Rutland Raiders, headed by team racing guru Steve Tylecote and featuring multiple Musto Skiff champion Richard Stenhouse and Steve's wife Fiona as the third helm. This team is the result of an interesting new initiative at Rutland Sailing Club which has already seen as many as sixty club members introduced to team racing this season.

The weather was good for the start of racing this afternoon, with eight to ten knots of breeze and even some welcome sunshine breaking through to warm the sailors. The predominantly landbased easterly wind direction resulted in shifty conditions that caused some major turnarounds in several of the matches. When racing finished just after six o'clock tonight, ninety-six races had been completed and just two teams remained undefeated over the course of the first day. With six wins out of six, the Royal Thames top the leaderboard at the end of the first day. In second place, also with six victories from six races, is the American Team Extreme.

With two more days of racing scheduled at the 2010 Wilson Trophy British Open Team Racing Championship, several top name teams will be keen to recover from lacklustre performances on day one.

Full results at the end of day one can be found at the official website: <http://www.wksc.net/wilsontrophy/results.asp>

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