

The Sun Shines Bright on Southern Bay Race Week 2015

By Rich Payne

Although none of the Fishing Bay Yacht Club boats made it down to Hampton for the kickoff event of the 2015 J/105 Southern Chesapeake Bay One-Design Series, the two local boats, Don DeLoach's "Special K" and Rich Payne's "Flying Colors," raced all three days of the event, although forced by the small showing to race as a sub-fleet in PHRF A. Over the years, this regatta has experienced a variety of conditions (the worst being the tornado that struck Hampton Yacht Club after the first day's racing in 2012). For the 2015 version, the weather was summerlike, with hot and clear conditions and wind that shifted direction as the sea breeze kicked in mid-day. As was the case last year, the format was different each of the three days: a series of windward-leeward races in Hampton Roads on Friday (three were sailed), a distance race in the Chesapeake Bay on Saturday, and a series of windward-leeward races in the Bay on Sunday (two were sailed).

On Friday, the PHRF Fleet assembled in Hampton Roads for the scheduled 10 AM first warning signal. Due to the almost total lack of wind, the Race Committee was unable to set a drop mark course, so at ten o'clock, the postponement flag was raised, followed by two and a half hours of drifting, with periodic motoring to counteract the effect of the ebb current trying to suck the fleets onto the Hampton Bar, and various creative efforts to improvise shade from the blazing sun. Finally, at 1230, the sea breeze filled in from southeast, providing relief from the heat and 10-12 knots of breeze, the best wind of the regatta. In the J/105 sub-fleet, "Special K" swept all three races sailed Friday, displaying polished crew work which "Flying Colors" was unable to match, since emergent repairs to her rudder bearings kept her in the boatyard throughout the spring series.

On Saturday, the weather was pretty much the same, with a light (and dying) westerly breeze apparently setting up a downwind spinnaker reach on the first leg of the predetermined course. In contrast to Friday's postponement, the Race Committee elected to start on time, although with only 3-4 knots of wind, and a significant current setting unwary boats across the starting line early. All four PHRF fleets and the two cruising fleets started, but chaos ensued, as boats variously sailed into wind holes, chased cats' paws on the water, or drifted immobile, except for the effects of the current, and fleets became intermingled on the course. After a bit over 30 minutes, the sea breeze arrived, and as it reached them, the spread-out boats on the course put up their jibs, took down their chutes, and sailed on a close reach to the first mark in about 10 knots of breeze. With their smaller class sails, the two J/105's did not fare well versus the rest of the A Fleet during this initial lull, but they ended up waging a pretty good match race, with several lead changes and a 43-second margin of victory for "Special K" at the finish, after a course of 17 nautical miles. When the results were posted, however, it developed that "Special K" had been set across the start line early, failed to re-start, and was scored OCS for the race. Race 4 to "Flying Colors."

As the Fleets motored out to the Day 3 race course off Ocean View in the Bay, there was an 8-10 knot breeze out of the southwest, and Race 1 was completed as scheduled, in just under 45 minutes for both boats. Race 5 to "Special K," by a margin of just under two minutes. As the

non-spinnaker fleet was finishing, however, the wind began to die, and the Race Committee was unable to set a drop mark course for Race 6. Although everyone expected the lull to presage the arrival of the sea breeze, it never came, and after a delay of more than an hour, the Race Committee elected to start the race on the original heading when the wind came up to six knots. The first time around the course was without incident, but just before the boats rounded the leeward gate, the Race Committee posted a course change and the wind died to under 5 knots. The result was a melee of more than 20 boats clustered around the windward mark, as the intermingled fleets explored the intricacies of Rule 18. After a series of adventures by both J/105's, the race mercifully ended, after a duration of about an hour and 13 minutes and a 25 second margin of victory for "Special K."

Official regatta results (J/105's racing with the PHRF A Fleet) can be found via a link on the Results page, which also shows the J/105 One Design Series results (extracted from the overall results). With 6 races sailed at Southern Bay Race Week, both "Corryvreckan" and "Shamrock" have some catching up to do in the series. The series continues with Leukemia Cup, to be hosted by Fishing Bay Yacht Club 10-12 July. A link to the Notice of Race and online entry procedures can be found on the Schedule Page. I hope to see everyone there. Note that the deadline for early bird entries is 10 June 2015.