

## **BERMUDA JUNIOR GOLD CUP 2007**

On Monday Dad came home from work saying he had received a phone call from Kevin Brown President of NZIODA asking if I wanted to go to Bermuda to compete in the King Edward VIIth Junior Gold Cup next week. Did I What!! We also received an email from Peter Montgomery saying we had hit the jackpot and were sure to have a great time. He said that Dad should watch out for the 'Dark and Stormies', On Sunday we were on the plane.

Bermuda is a small series of islands, 22 square miles in total, approximately 600 nautical miles off the east coast of North America, and 800 miles North East of the Bahamas, and 32 degrees north of the equator. Actually it is way out in the Atlantic, seemingly a million miles from anywhere. The islands form part of the ring of a volcanic crater atop a 13,000 foot underwater mountain. Wow!

31 hours after take off and a four hour sleep at a JFK Airport hotel we arrived in sunny Bermuda to be met by Dede Cooper. It turned out that Dede's son MacKenzie had become friends with my brother Sam at the North America Opti Champs in Mexico earlier this year. What a small world!

We headed to the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club (RBYC) for lunch and to watch the professional crews training for the King Edward VII Gold Cup match racing event which was due to start the next day. This was to be the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gold Cup, first sailed in 1907. The cup has a great history with many famous skippers winning the event. Russell Coutts holds the record for winning the event seven times. The crews of four sail in the old fashioned 6 metre International One Design class. There were several Americas Cup sailors competing including Magnus Holmberg (Victory Challenge), Paolo Cian (Team Shosholozza) and Ed Baird (Alinghi).

We spent the afternoon at our billet's house (Beth and Tom Miller) lazing by the pool overlooking the harbour, the town of Hamilton and the match racing boats, and recovering from the long flight. We had certainly hit the jackpot! It turned out that Beth and Tom had hosted Paul Snow Hansen three or four years earlier and along with the Coopers were personal friends of Peter Montgomery. Small world!

The next day we caught the ferry for the 4 minute ride across to the yacht club, met Paul, the RBYC coach and spent the morning prepping the boat. It turned out Paul was a 12<sup>th</sup> generation Bermudian who had descended from pirates in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. In the afternoon the international sailors went for a training sail near to where the IOD boats were match racing. I kept picturing Paul with a patch over one eye and a parrot on his shoulder as he blew his whistle for us to perform yet another 720. After school we were joined by some of the local sailors for a couple of races in the light and shifty conditions.

Racing got underway on Thursday with 32 sailors in the fleet. We were all towed (half an hour) through a group of beautiful islands and past some amazing houses to the Great Sound where racing was to take place. Day 1 was sailed in 8 – 14 knots offshore breeze with partly cloudy skies, and was closely contested all day. Race 2 saw four boats crossing the line for 1<sup>st</sup> with only half a boat length separating all of them. My best race for the day came after I was forced out at the pin, crossed the line early and had to return, starting last. I picked the right side of the oscillating breeze and came back to finish 7<sup>th</sup>. That, together with another 7<sup>th</sup>, and an 8<sup>th</sup> had me placed 10<sup>th</sup> at the end of day 1. James Anfossi, a local boy who finished 5<sup>th</sup> at the 2007 Worlds and 2<sup>nd</sup> at the North Americans was leading by a narrow margin from Jes, one of the Danish boys at the regatta.

Day 2 dawned much greyer with a forecast of 15 – 25, but it was still warm. The first two races started in extremely light conditions with the breeze oscillating up to 30 degrees. I went left in the first race and I finished 4<sup>th</sup>. In the second the separation in the fleet was huge as the breeze dropped to less than three knots. I went right and looked dead for all money until a new breeze appeared out of the right and took me to the top mark in 3<sup>rd</sup>. On the final beat the rain came down in bucket loads and we could hardly see more than 50 metres in front of us. Dad and the race committee lost sight of the entire fleet...was this the Bermuda Triangle at work? When the rain cleared I was ahead of the Portuguese sailor and finished 2<sup>nd</sup>, my best result for the regatta.

With the passing of the rain the wind came and we started race 3 in 22 - 25 knots and building. It was then that I realised how unfit I had become after my accident earlier in the year. End of day 2 and I was still lying 10<sup>th</sup>.

That night we were invited to my new friend MacKenzie Cooper's for dinner. On the way there we drove past the home of actors Michael Douglas and Catharine Zeta Jones. The surprise guest at dinner was Ed Baird. Wow, even my Dad thought that was pretty cool! Ed was through to the semi finals but it was interesting to hear that even he was a superstitious yachty. In his previous three appearances at this regatta he had made it through to the semi finals which were sailed on a Saturday, but had always lost. Tomorrow was Saturday and he really wanted to be playing golf instead.

Day 3 and the front had passed, the wind was now blowing from the opposite direction and the sun was shining again. Racing was sailed in glorious 12-18 knots with a 2-3 foot chop which the locals considered to be pretty big.

Paul Allen (ex Microsoft) cruised by in his 400, yes 400 foot super yacht Octopus with its 50 foot tender, private submarine and jet helicopter – Wow! Rumour had it that Bill Gates was also on board. Bermuda sure does attract some famous people!

End of day 3 with 12 races sailed, seven sailors had received bullets showing how close the sailing was. With one race to sail there were still three sailors that could take out the event. Back at the yacht club the daily press conference revealed that Ed Baird had once again lost his semi final, leaving Mathieu Richard from France and Bjorn Hansen from Sweden to battle it out for the Gold Cup. Like Ed Baird, I hadn't had a great day either, but was still lying 10<sup>th</sup>.

Final day and only one race was scheduled. It was to be held on the Gold Cup course in front of 500+ spectators, between the petite final Ed Baird (Alinghi) vs Blyth Walker (Bermuda) and the final. Unfortunately racing was delayed due to a lack of wind and we had to be towed back out to the Great Sound to sail the last race in 3 – 5 knots. And even more unfortunately I slipped to 12<sup>th</sup> overall for the regatta. Never mind. However the main results were to be decided in the protest room after the two top sailors collided in the pre-start. Jes Bonde from Denmark won the protest and the Junior Gold Cup with James Anfossi 2<sup>nd</sup> and another local sailor, Brian Bulhoes 3<sup>rd</sup>. It was pretty cool to have our prize giving in front of the entire match racing skippers and their crews.

The main prize giving followed. Mathieu Richard (France) won the main Gold Cup event beating Bjorn Hansen 2-nil in the final. Ed Baird won the petite final also winning 2 nil, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> overall. The spraying of Champagne signified the end of a wonderful regatta and an even more wonderful week.

My trip will certainly provide some lasting memories. The hospitality was fantastic, the people were so friendly and our host families have now become life long friends. I would like to especially thank NZIODA, the Royal Bermuda Yacht Club, the Gold Cup sponsors

RenaissanceRe and Ron Stan, President of the Bermuda Optimist Dinghy Association, for inviting me to the event. Also a special thanks to Beth, Tom and Adrienne Miller for adopting me for the week and making me feel at home, and Dede and Sommers Cooper and their four children for also making us part of their family.

Perhaps the most lasting memory will be that if I ever get to sail against Ed Baird when I grow up, I hope it is on a Saturday!

Andrew McKenzie...and Dad  
NZL 4220

p.s. Dad said the Dark & Stormies were great too