

CEDAR POINT WINS CHALLENGE CUP

By Eric Robbins and Steve Girling

On Sunday, June 6, eleven of Cedar Point Yacht Club's top sailors journeyed to Larchmont, NY, to attempt to wrest the Cedar Point Challenge Cup back from the Larchmont YC team, which was victorious in 2002. Also challenging for the Cup were Pequot YC of Fairfield, CT and Sayville YC of Sayville, NY. Noroton YC and Seawanhaka Corinthian were late dropouts, failing to field full teams.

This unique competition tests the depth of a club's sailors. One or two hotshots cannot win by themselves. Racing is conducted simultaneously in three disciplines on three different race circles. Each competing club sends three Laser sailors, racing single-handed in fleet-racing, three two-person teams in Vanguard-15s for team-racing, and a two-person team to duel in match-racing in Ideal-18s provided by the defending club.

At stake is an ornate silver cup dating back to 1911, with "Cedar Point Challenge Cup" and the names of the first three winning yachts engraved on the body. The Cup was lost for over 80 years, and put back into play in 1996 in the current format.

The day was quite cool and drizzly, with a moderate 6-12 knot easterly breeze. Match-racing skipper Steve Girling describes the action:

"Ian Gill and I teamed up for the match racing - it was Ian's first match racing event and we hadn't sailed together before the Challenge Cup. Sunday was a cool, overcast and miserable day, but the four teams that showed for the match racing promised to keep the action hot and heavy. Sayville was represented by Paul-John Patin, Larchmont by Dan Ronan and Pequot by Dave Perry - all great sailors in their own right and experienced match-racers.

"We were the first match up in Flight one from the starboard end against Sayville and immediately began to dominate in the pre-start. At the gun, we were able to tack and place a tight cover on our opponent - we won the match comfortably. In the other match Larchmont beat Pequot comfortably.

"In the second flight we faced Larchmont. We entered from the starboard end and won the right hand side and starboard advantage in an otherwise even start. Unfortunately there was a significant left shift off the line and after a minute of sailing on starboard tack, Ronin was able to cross us by a length. To our surprise, they didn't tack back immediately, so we continued on starboard gaining a little more protection from the current inshore and found a shift that put us above layline, but with adverse current, in good shape to be able to sail fast in the awkward chop towards the weather mark.

"Meantime, Ronin had tacked back (remembering that this was match-racing perhaps), but we were ahead and they tacked below us, on the layline hoping that our overstand would put them back in front at the mark. We lead at the weather mark but got out of phase on the last gybe into the leeward mark and although LYC was outside us, they managed to round wide, but bow forward (slightly ahead). Unfortunately, our own

rounding wasn't great because of a late drop and we were forced to tack away from the favored left side - from there it was game over - we were 1-1. In the other match PYC's Perry easily disposed of SYC's Patin.

“In the third flight we entered from the port end against Pequot. Perry and crew were so late that we easily crossed them (as they asked us for confirmation that we were actually racing one-another)! We had a relatively even start and good speed off the line, allowing a quick consolidation, close cover up the first beat and a good lead at the weather mark. Holding the lead down the run and up the second beat, Perry appeared to be gaining and so we became more aggressive rather than extending conservatively. Perry continued to gain, but we were ahead at every cross, but failed to switch sides and take starboard advantage at the top of the beat - with disastrous consequences as Perry was able to take the initiative at the windward mark with a starboard approach forcing us to follow them around. It was close all the way down the run, but PYC won by half a length. Suddenly we were 1-2 having led in every race.”

In the other match Larchmont beat Sayville. LYC finished the first Round-Robin with an impressive 3-0 scoreline, PYC was 2-1, CPYC 1-2 and LYC 0-3.

Meanwhile, in team-racing, there was not much to tell, as the pecking-order was quickly established. Cedar Point (Cleody Snaith with Sara Sherter, Craig Beardsley with Madeline Gill, and Chris Johannessen with Dona Menton) could beat only Sayville, and nobody, not even the Dave Dellenbaugh-led Pequot team, could beat Larchmont's national-level team with Sean Doyle.

In fleet-racing, CPYC (Marc Jacobi, Commodore Mark Foster, and Team Captain Eric Robbins) jumped out to an early lead as LYC opened with their worst race. Eric picks up the tale:

“After a good first race, Jacobi continued to dominate with firsts and seconds, but Foster and I struggled with the chop. We knew Larchmont was eating away at our early lead. I didn't handle the chop well until the fourth race, while Foster lost ground on the downwind legs. Mike Funsch came on to push Jacobi, while Andy Kaplan and John Singen were beating us.”

Steve continues from the match-racing course:

“The second round robin commenced immediately with us taking the port entry against Patin of SYC. We were unable to cross and took some time to extricate ourselves and gain control of the pre-start, but soon we were chasing Patin down towards the pin. Despite their efforts to burn time, they were not able to lay the pin at the gun as we had them locked out - outside the pin-end of the line. We tacked to port and put the clamps on to take a sizeable lead which we held until midway through the second beat when some weird pressure differences across the track enabled Patin to close back up to within a boatlength at the weather mark. Fortunately, we had a good hoist and a clean run, winning by a couple of lengths. In the other match, PYC's Perry had broken the LYC winning streak with a victory of their own.

“Our next match was against LYC, again entering from the port end. Ronin preferred not to dial-up, but rather allowed us to cross and neutralize their starboard advantage. A fairly even pre-start suddenly swung in our favor as we were able to pin Ronin on port tack at the boat end with the clock running down quickly. Critically they decided to gybe out - the start was ours as they crossed the line directly behind us. We again dominated for the first half of the race, but a snarl with the spinnaker halyard and furling gear meant that we sailed the entire second beat with a pint-sized jib. We had to burn most of our lead in order to avoid a tacking duel which would certainly have seen us quickly overtaken by LYC.

“As it was, we were able to drive down from above the layline and round the mark a length ahead of Ronin. Fortunately Ian was calm and focused while resolving our snarl (whilst also successfully hoisting the kite and rolling the jib for the run to the finish). Fortunately, we were able to extend to the favored side of the track downwind and LYC couldn't catch us - we won by a couple of lengths. Meantime, PYC had again dispatched of SYC.”

That left only one race to go in match-racing. Over on the team-race circle, Larchmont clinched first, with Pequot second and Cedar Point third. Eric describes the wrapup in fleet-racing:

“After six races we were in trouble. Although Jacobi was winning races, the throwout kicked in and put Larchmont in front. Then disaster threatened. Foster was called over-early in the seventh, and trailed the fleet. However, Jacobi won again, with me edging Kaplan for fourth, so the standings stayed tight. We did not know the scores, but our instincts told us we were trailing. We were right.

“The Race Committee announced one more race. While Foster sailed off to the side to gather himself, Jacobi and I helped each other focus. The fleet was aggressive, forcing the only three general recalls of the day. On the clean start, Foster surged away, with Jacobi and I in clear lanes. My teammates rounded the top mark one-two, and I managed to pass two boats downwind to round fourth at the bottom.

“On the final beat of the day, Foster skated away to the win, while Jacobi threw everything he had at Sayville's Ted Cremer to force him left. I recognized Marc's plan, dug right, and kept coming back to attack Cremer until I could prevent him from crossing me. I was finally able to pin him under the finish, and shoot across alongside Jacobi for CPYC's only 1-2-3 finish of the day. We found out later it was enough to overtake LYC for first in fleet-racing.”

Back on shore, the Cedar Point fleet and team-racing sailors huddled, awaiting the final match-race still in progress. Larchmont sat at another table, quietly confident. By now they all knew the stakes, and only a first in match-racing would win the Cup for Cedar Point over Larchmont. Steve reports:

“As we calculated the scores it was clear that our final match was the BIG one. PYC was 4-1 and in the lead over LYC 3-2. So if we lost to Pequot, we'd end up 3-3 and third overall assuming LYC's win over SYC in their final match. PYC would win by virtue of their win in the second round robin over LYC. However, if we were able to beat PYC,

we'd win the event despite the tied scores by virtue of our second round robin victories over LYC and Pequot. What a final match this promised to be!

“We entered from the starboard end, but the dial-up didn't last for long and we peeled away to attack for a second time. Perry was fortunate not to get a penalty on our second starboard approach, but a green flag kept them clean. A couple more circles and a slow tack from us back onto port allowed Perry to attack on starboard and put us on the defensive. Fortunately we were well above the laylines for the pin and the boat as tie counted down and so as Perry forced the action and overlapped to leeward we peeled away to start on port at the boat end - bow even.

“It's just a shame that the beat wasn't longer as we felt quick through the water, but Perry was just able to hang on during the long port tack out to the starboard layline. When we tacked for the mark, Perry was forced to tack to leeward, but were able to give us some gas (courtesy of a substantial lefty) before the weather mark to round ahead, with us right on their transom. We had an average hoist, didn't get onto that left shift (starboard gybe) quickly enough and suddenly we were losing boatlengths to PYC fast. We rounded the leeward mark 5 lengths behind, but were able to get onto port tack without a tight cover and put the bow down to get some leverage. It started to work as we both sailed through pressure ups and downs, we felt that we were making ground, we were even, but again we were running out of race-track. We tacked on the starboard layline (taking into account some residual adverse current) and Perry was again forced to tack to leeward, but unable to effect us. Unfortunately the breeze phased right and we were both safely lifted above the mark - advantage Pequot.

“Again we rounded right on their transom, had the best hoist of the day, and gybed inside onto starboard (rather than run them over). Pequot responded with a gybe and a luff, and then an aggressive luff to which we responded, just managing to keep clear as both kites collapsed. As the luffing match continued, we were able to fill our kite with the pole nailed to the forestay and sailed over the top of Perry. We were overlapped and then clear ahead - this was a big deal as they could no longer keep us outside the laylines unless they gained a length and gybed twice to re-establish unlimited luffing rights. We left the gybe to the finish line as late as possible in order to avoid their cover and the chance that they would sail over the top of us and although we gybed to the finish with them right on top of us, we managed to cross the line two feet ahead. It was so close that Ian and I assumed the worst, that we hadn't managed to hold them off.”

On shore, the rest of the Cedar Point team heard the news by phone. They donned their team shirts, and gathered at the dock where the launch would bring in their match-racing teammates. As they stepped off, the CPYC team applauded loudly, announcing victory for both Steve and Ian and the entire team. The challenge Cup was returning to Cedar Point!

All five other clubs vowed to challenge next year, when Cedar Point defends in Westport, CT. Challenges are also expected for other clubs, possibly from as far away as Boston, Newport, and Annapolis.