

2015 Nor' Eastern Regatta Report

By Chris Hawk

The 4th weekend in August is one of the most beautiful times of year in the Finger Lakes of Upstate New York, if you are a tourist. If you sail, it can be one of the most challenging. This year was one of those challenging years. Friday's wind was spectacular blowing 8-12 all day. But as many competitors caroused through the evening Friday night at the club, the high pressure system settled in.

Saturday morning began with the very predictable thermal breeze that lasted until the skippers meeting. Then the 29 sailors watched as the wind dropped below the 5 mph minimum. But the respite was short lived as the breeze filtered in from the north, northeast, northwest, or somewhere in there. The challenge for the PRO was to choose to sail poorer quality races but actually sail, or wait for better breeze and have quality sailing. In the end the competitors "voted" with their boats as almost all took to the lake before the PRO decided to try to sail.

Race 1 was started in 5-7 mph winds from the North. To try to get more racing in without pulling the 250 feet of anchor line, a 4 leg 2 lap race with a downwind finish was planned for the first race. With a large right shift just before the start a number of boats found themselves well out of position including Zack Clayton who took many sterns crossing the starting line near the back of the fleet on port. But the wind continued to clock to the right and those early port tackers won the leg with Zack rounding just ahead of Ron Baerwitz. Close behind in third was Scott Cioe who was making his first MC-Scow start in 6 years and Guy Lovejoy also making a homecoming of sorts. Scott was one of the founding members of the Keuka fleet and benefited from the medical withdrawal of Chris Hawk using his boat for the regatta. All of us at Keuka were happy to see him back on the water.

The skies were full of ominous cumulous clouds separated by bright blue skies. As each cloud line passed the winds reacted. The RC struggled in the shifting winds placing the leeward marks west of the original line, and new windward marks for an east wind, 90 degrees off from the original starting line. However the race ended up being decided by the last shift, a stiffer breeze (enough to break Bob Wynkoop's halyard) that came in from the Northwest too late for the RC to react. The last 2 legs were reaches. Ron picked up on the shift first and led to the finish. The same shift swung around the committee boat and made the finish line ginormously long confusing everyone as to what was the actual "downwind" finish, and challenging the RC to read sail numbers ¼ mile away as boats finished at the pin. The confusion also led to Zack Clayton's retirement with Mark Grinder coming in second ahead of Richard Blake who passed Scott Cioe to push him to 4th.

While the breeze was up race 2 (5 legs finishing to windward) was started with a good length first leg. As the breeze faded the RC reduced course length. The fleet stretch out over a full leg as the wind faded to nothing. Zack was well ahead. When asked later he said "It is never good to be that far ahead in conditions like that." Actually he used much more colorful language regarding the conditions so we will call that a paraphrase. The new breeze filled in from the Northeast allowing big changes in positions. Chris Norman who is highly skilled in these Hopatcong-like conditions found his way to the front along with Guy Lovejoy, who is also a long-time Keuka sailor making a homecoming of sorts, and Richard Blake. But also being rusty, Guy neglected to sail the 5th leg of the course thinking the course change signal was a finish signal. Chris Norman won the race followed by Richard Blake and Ron Baerwitz. Zack slipped to 4th followed by Steve Callison.

The big mover of the race was brand new MC owner U.S. Congressman (ret.) Randy Kuhl who rounded the first leeward mark near last and passed a large chunk of the fleet to round the next mark in pretty good shape. He finished 19th in the race but at the end of the day was still in contention with John Kimball for the Mega Master category. Randy sailed M-16s as a youth, and was making his regatta debut in his spiffy new MC-Scow.

At the end of day 1 Ron Baerwitz led Richard Blake by a solitary point with Scotty Cioe and Chris Norman tied for third. The keg was tapped and sailing was abandoned for partying. Keuka Yacht Club put on their renowned Saturday night party with a spread of food, drink, and live music. The party went quite late, except for Ron Baerwitz and Richard Blake who got a good night's sleep. Everyone knew the regatta was going to be decided during the early morning thermal Sunday, but many did not let that stand in their way of a late night.

But the cool Sunday morning broke with fog, big heavy fog that rose from the warm water. Even for those of us that live here, it was a beautiful rare sight to see fog that dense. The PRO set the course farther south where the fog had already lifted enough to sail. Race 3 was started in 5-7 south winds with good competitive shifts. With a forecast of 0-2 mph, the RC actually was able to sail 2 races Sunday with only one change of course for shortening the course.

Ron Baerwitz and Richard Blake ended up in a battle for the regatta all day, each with a win and a second place resulting in the one point lead from day 1 being enough for the regatta win. The fight went to the last leg of the last race with Ron getting the edge. Chris Norman and Scott Cioe both struggled in race 3. Will Hendershot had a good race to take third followed by Mark Grinder and Guy Lovejoy. This made it a 2 point difference between 3rd and 5th place among Scott, Will, and Mark. Everyone was pretty sure race 4 would be the final race of the day. Scott Cioe took the final podium place with a third place ahead of Andre Marcotte and Mark Grinder.

Many thanks to Steve Bender and the Keuka fleet for putting on a good, fun event regardless of the wind. And many thanks to the folks who drove from quite a ways away to sail regardless of the forecast. Much of the reason we all do this is the camaraderie and this regatta has a lot of it. Next year will be better. I can guarantee that.