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race report



On the 'podium': John Liebenberg, Will Paxton, and Jim Savattone. ©2011 Seymour Dodds

Bullship Regatta

May 4, 2011

It's been two pretty good Saturdays for John Liebenberg, who won the crewed Lightship last Saturday and the following Saturday was first to finish in a 30+ boat fleet of El Toros in the 58th Annual Bullship Race. And it only took 50 minutes to get across from Sausalito to the San Francisco Marina. John finished about 10 seconds ahead of second place Will Paxton. In third was Jim Savattone of Santa Cruz YC, sailing a wooden El Toro he built recently.



John crosses the finish. ©2011 Seymour Dodds

John shared his secret to success: "I started on the shore, stayed on shore to the point, then stayed right. Will went further left because he expected ebb and did not find the ebb that he found at other times. Will had a 20-30 second lead when we separated."



Will Paxton and Sandra Hugh. ©2011 Seymour Dodds

Jim Savatone sort of put tactics on autopilot saying, "Followed Will is what I did. You pick a mentor and stay with him." His mentor is a third his age.

Last year's winner Max Fraser put off his trip back to Connecticut (for a 29er clinic; he is national champion in that class) just for this race. "It was perfect conditions, 4-8 knots of wind and flat water. There was sun, and it was clear as a bell. You could see the Gate had no fog. I didn't have to do a single tack or jibe the entire race. My one saving grace was I stayed inside the current line. I've gotten swept out the

Gate and also won this race, so my goal was somewhere in between."

Will Paxton won the cold and rainy 2009 race and his dad Fred was second. Today Fred was way in the back of the fleet. He got stuck with Chris Nash near Alcatraz. All Fred could say was, "We looked real good for about two minutes. I didn't listen to my kid."

The Bullship is a family and friends affair, and these days word gets out fast. Even before the awards celebration, Teresa Paxton sent a text congratulations from her daughter, Julia, who is at the New York Maritime Academy, to her nephew, Will. Julia will probably then text David Liebenberg about his dad's victory, which David will then pass to his mom, sailing in the Vallejo Race. John hadn't yet called. In spite of all this instant communication the guy taking finishes didn't have a watch out, so we'll never know if John actually broke John Amen's 46-minute record.

- *Seymour Dodds*

Complete results are up at www.eltoroyra.org. No rest for the bull-riders: their next regatta is this coming Saturday, the Flight of the Bulls in Foster City.