

The Virgin Islands Consortium

St. Thomas Regatta Ends With Nail-Biting Finish

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ST. THOMAS -- Several classes were too close to call going into the final day of racing at the 44th St. Thomas International Regatta (STIR), held March 24 to 26 out of St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands. The reason? A mix of STIR-signature round-the-island courses combined with conditions that ranged from near breathless calm to blustery gusts over three days of racing that kept competitors on their toes and trading places on the scoreboard with classmates right down to the last finish. Of course, warm weather, picture-perfect turquoise seas and the regatta's STIR up the fun Caribbean vibe brought out the best in everyone.

"We went into today knowing there would be two races," says St. Thomas' Peter Corr, who helmed his King 40, Blitz, to victory in Spinnaker Racing 1 with a crack 10-person

crew that included talent from as far away as Australia and New Zealand. "We wanted to win both races, so our goal was to be careful, to not make any errors or get protested. We did just that, and the win was thanks to a great combined effort and team work."

The BVI's Henry Leonnig, racing his Melges 24, Firewater, topped the Spinnaker Racing 2 class after tying on points with Canada's Rob Butler's J/88 Touch2Play racing team.

"I got up early this morning and said to myself we have everything to lose," says Leonnig. "By the time we headed out to the race course, the thought was to just relax, go sailing and have fun. Then at the start of the last race I began trying to overthink it. I stopped myself and went back to doing what we'd done throughout the regatta: get windward and get off the line fast. It worked. It was so incredible to be out in front of the class on that last race. Just phenomenal."

In the Non-Spinnaker Racing class, there were lots of happy faces on crew members aboard Varuna, a VAr 37, which bested St. Thomas' Kevin Gregory's Beneteau First 44.7, Odyssey. "We both had seven points going into today," says Martin van Breems, founder and owner of the Sound Sailing Center, in Norwalk, CT. "Odyssey is a local boat and it sailed well. In the last race, we were slated to finish second. Then, Odyssey ended up not sailing the course properly and retired. It was a thrill for us to win. I've been sailing here for sixteen years and this is the first time we've won our class."

The one-design C&C 30 and IC24 classes reveled in the razor-sharp competition.

In the C&C30's, the Cottonwood Heights, UT's Sandra Askew's Flying Jenny bested Julian Mann, from San Francisco, CA, aboard his Don't Panic by four points.

"We've come together over as a team over the last few months, having had a practice session together in the fall and then doing Key West Race Week," says Jason McShane, crewmember aboard C&C 30 Class winner, Flying Jenny. "The boat was really well set up for the conditions. We have a sail program that's awesome, both quality and set up wise and that helped us a lot."

Puerto Rico's Fraito Lugo won the IC24 Class for nearly the dozenth time aboard his Orion. After twelve races over three days, there was only a five-point difference between Orion and second place finisher, Sembrador, sailed by Puerto Rico's Ramon Gonzalez.

"We came into the last day as the defender," says Lugo, whose crew included his 14-year-old son, Alejandro. "Sembrador really came on aggressively and were on the offense. They won two of the five races today. But in the last race we finished second, ahead of them, and were able to put points between us."

It came down to a tie-breaker to decide the winner in the Large Offshore Multihull Class. In the end the HH/MM Nala, bested the St. Croix-built Bieker 53, Fujin, owned by Greg Slynghstad from Sammamish, WA.

"This is the first regatta we've done on the boat since we launched her late last year and were extremely pleased with how the boat performed," says Gino Morrelli, president of Newport Beach, CA-based, Morelli & Melvin, who designed and crewed on Nala.

Meanwhile, in the Beach Cat class, St. Thomas Teri McKenna, placed first with nearly all first-place finishes aboard her Nacra 17, Flight Risk.

“We have lots of experience. Both Sandra Tartaglino and I have each sailed beach cats for over 30 years. Today’s races were distance races offshore with the spinnaker boats. That made us really need to think about tactics. For example, we didn’t want to get in the wind shade of a large yacht,” McKenna says.

Class winners received Swiss-made, limited-edition, Island-styled timepieces from Cardow Jewelers, as well as other great prizes such as high-quality duffle/backpacks from K3 Waterproof Gear.

STIR is a world-class event renowned for its fantastic round the buoys and round the islands racing, first-class race committee, superb shoreside festivities and friendly can-do attitude towards its competitors.

The 45th edition is set for March 23 to 25, 2018.

STIR first sailed in 1974, continues into its fourth decade with an exceptional program of serious world class yacht racing that has earned it the status of the 'Crown Jewel of Caribbean Yacht Racing'. STIR is renowned for its serious racing reputation that attracts both the latest yacht designs and hottest one-design classes as well as the greatest skippers and crews from across the globe as well as the Caribbean's hottest rock stars.