

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Callahan Wins 25th International Optimist Regatta In St. Thomas

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Mitchell Callahan was in a sweet spot heading into the third and final day of racing at the 25th International Optimist Regatta (IOR), presented by Electronic Merchant Systems (EMS) Virgin Islands and hosted by the St. Thomas Yacht Club, June 16 to 18. The 14-year-old sailor from Cape Coral, Florida, was sitting pretty five points in front of his closest competitor, twin brother Justin. Considering that Mitchell ultimately placed no lower than third in the 10-race regatta, he felt confident that he could hold on to his first place. Indeed, he did just that and was named the regatta's Overall Champion.

"Going into today, I knew I could be pretty aggressive because of my lead," says Callahan, who sails out of the Lauderdale Yacht Club. "So, my goal in the last two races

was to start in the middle of the start line and then reach to the left so that I could get the first lift, accelerate and cross in front of the fleet to get clear air. That's just what happened. I won both races."

A near-record 119 sailors from all three U.S. Virgin Islands, the British Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico, Antigua and the U.S.A, competed in the IOR/EMS. Sailors, who ranged in ages from 7- to 15-years-of age raced either in the Advanced Fleet in one of three age groupings: Red (ages 13 to 15), Blue (ages 11 and 12) or White (ages 10 and under), or in the Green or Beginner Fleet. All sailed an 8-foot long, single-sail Optimist dinghy. This boat is sailed in over 120 countries and is one of only two yachts approved by World Sailing for sailors under the age of 16.

Callahan bested the Red Fleet, while it was Sebastian Spinelli-Sax, from Bayshore, Florida, who sails with the Manatee River Pram Fleet at the Bradenton Yacht Club, that



Mitchell Callahan, from Cape Coral, Florida,

wins the 2017 International Optimist Regatta, presented by EMS Virgin Islands. Credit: Dean Barnes

"Sailing fast, keeping the boat flat in the water and getting good speed," is how 12-year-old Spinelli-Sax described his game plan and secret to success. "I also liked having a lot of wind, because I was able to control my boat where others couldn't and I was able to beat them."

In the White Fleet, it was St. Thomas' 10-year-old Tanner Krygsveld who won by an incredible nearly 200 points.

"I wasn't so much thinking about winning the White Fleet as I was about doing the best as I could in the overall," says Krygsveld. "My goal was top 15 and I finished 16th, so I'm pretty happy. What really helped was the clinic earlier in the week, where I learned more about how to handle the wind shifts and more about where to start on the starting line."

Puerto Rico's 11-year-old Roger Casellas, from Guaynabo, championed the Green Fleet.

"Having a nice start is what really helped me a lot," says Casellas. "That and trying to keep with the flow of the other boats. The big winds were tough though, but I had a lot of fun."

St. Thomas Mia Nicolosi was awarded Top Girl.

“There was a lot more competition this year having the USA Worlds Team here,” says Nicolosi, who championed the IOR/EMS in 2016 and finished fourth overall this year. “If they weren’t here, I probably would have won again. But then again, I wouldn’t have learned as much without having them here to sail against.”

In other awards, it was the USA’s Peter Foley, representing the Coral Reef Yacht Club in Florida, who earned who earned the Chuck Fuller Sportsmanship Award, while it was Justin Callahan who was presented with the Pete Ives Award, given for a combination of sailing prowess, sportsmanship, determination and good attitude both on and off the water.

“What a pleasure being the Principal Race Officer for such a fantastic regatta. Soup to nuts top notch conditions on the water and hospitality ashore. I honestly have never seen it done better,” says Bill Canfield.

The IOR/EMS is organized under authority of the Virgin Islands Sailing Association and it is a Caribbean Sailing Association-sanctioned event.

“We at EMS Virgin Islands are so pleased to sponsor this event and want to congratulate all the sailors, parents and organizers on a fantastic event,” says Cobia Fagan, owner, EMS Virgin Islands, whose 7-year-old son, Coby, raced in the regatta for the first time this year. “It made me so proud to see him out there smiling, playing and so happy making new friends.”

The week started off with the TOTE Maritime Clinic, June 12 to 14. The Clinic was run by some of the world’s top international coaches: Gonzalo Pollitzer (currently coaching the Norwegian Optimist Team), Manny Resano (California Yacht Club, USA), Eric Bardes (Team LIMA (Long Island Mid-Atlantic, USA), Omari Scott (Coral Reef Yacht Club, USA), Santiago Galan (St. Croix Yacht Club, USVI), Esteban Rocha (Sequoia Yacht Club, USA), Agustin Resano (St Thomas Yacht Club USVI), Kristopher Sarmiento (Key Biscayne Yacht Club, USA) and Mykel Alonso (Coral Reef Yacht Club, USA).

The one-day TOTE Maritime Team Racing Championships took place, June 15. The team race was won by Team USA Worlds, made up of Mitchell Callahan, Justin Callahan, Charlie Leigh, Liam O’Keeffe and Stephan Baker.

The IOR/EMS and TOTE Maritime Clinic and Team Race are also sponsored by the U.S. Virgin Islands Department of Tourism as well as K3, provides all sailors with 5-liter dry bags.

This is the sixth year that the IOR/EMS has taken part in Sailors for the Sea’s Clean Regattas program. This program, the only ocean conservation nonprofit focused on the sailing and boating community, encourages regatta participants to use the reusable water bottle provided in goodie bag throughout the regatta, keep all lunch bags and wrapping out of the water, and pick up any trash on shore, and accept drinks without straws.

Feature Image: Top Three Sailors Overall, L to R: Justin Callahan, Mitchell Callahan, Stephan Baker, at the Awards Ceremony at the St. Thomas Yacht Club. Credit: Dean Barnes

