

Optinam 2022

The Optimist North American Championship 2022 concluded on Saturday after five exciting days of world class international junior sailing.

The second time this prestigious event has been hosted in Nassau, the week began with a parade of the 20 participating nations with their country flags from Fort Montagu to the host venue, The Nassau Yacht Club, headed up by the Royal Bahamas Police Force Band who then put on a show stopping performance for the large crowd, culminating in the National Anthem. The opening ceremony followed with welcomes and remarks from Lori Lowe, President of The Bahamas Sailing Association, Alan Loane, Commodore of The Nassau Yacht Club, Leo Nardo Dean, Manager of Sports Tourism with The Ministry of Tourism and Sigrid Beckmann, Vice President of The Americas for IODA, who declared the championship officially open. The 155 little Optimist sailboats made a spectacular display out in Montagu Bay during the week. They were watched from spectator boats and the media on the water and by hundreds of people along the shoreline.

A mixed bag of weather conditions brought interesting challenges requiring tactical sailing for the young athletes. The wind ranged from only around 2 knots of wind at times on Thursday to gusts of up to 23 knots accompanied by choppy seas, torrential rain and waterspouts on Friday! Saturday's final brought blue skies and perfect racing conditions of 12-14 knots out of the east to round off the competition.

Results of the first two days of racing on Tuesday and Wednesday determined the allocation of the sailors into bronze, silver and gold fleets for the final series on Friday and Saturday. Of the 19 strong Bahamian team (5 girls and 14 boys), fifteen year old Zane Munro and 12 year old Patrick Tomlinson were thrilled to make the cut and join the gold fleet - following in the footsteps of Craig Ferguson and Joshua Weech who had previously been the only junior sailors to achieve this at this high international level. Five of their teammates made it into the silver fleet and the remaining twelve in bronze.

There was a break in the championship on Thursday for team racing, wherein the countries split their teams into groups of four boats for a series of fast paced action on a much shorter course. Team USA were victorious winners of the North American Team Racing Championship and Team Argentina won The Nations Cup. Familiarity with local weather and tidal conditions as the breeze picked up on Friday gave members of Team Bahamas some advantage in race two, with Zane Munro achieving a fantastic second place in gold fleet and Craig Ferguson and Eliza Denning a first and second respectively in silver fleet. However, it was evident that Team Puerto Rico were heading for the podiums.

The final results awarded Isabella Calzadilla-Allora and Diego Jose Marrero-Cuevas overall first and second place with Charles Julien of USA in third. Bahamas best placed were Zane Munro in 35th and Patrick Tomlinson, current National Champion, 41st. Craig Ferguson came in 7th in silver fleet with Eliza Denning closely behind him in 10th.

Team Bahamas coach, Martin Manrique, is extremely proud of his dedicated national team, the youngest of whom, Taryn McKinney Lambert, is only eleven years old and some of whom have only been sailing for about a year. They have all been training extremely hard for this event for many months and their hard work and determination have really paid off.

A poolside awards presentation took place at The Nassau Yacht Club on Saturday

evening, accompanied by speeches from Erin Tomlinson and Sean Raine, co-chairs, Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, Clay Sweeting, and Sigrid Beckmann who declared the championship closed as the IODA flag was lowered. A spectacular Junkanoo rush entertained the crowd to round off the celebrations.