

Surf City provides Epic performance

Dileo's crew dominates to take first in tourney

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SURF CITY — After postponing the Surf City Epic Lifeguard Tournament once already, Mark Dileo really didn't want to have to do it again.

But despite the threat of thunderstorms looming about and the dark clouds rolling by the beach at 5th Street, the fourth annual Epic managed not only to get under way but completed as well.

"It was an interesting setting," said Dileo, Surf City's captain. "With the stiff current, wind and light rain later on, it made it all that more grueling."

As grueling as it was, Surf City Beach Patrol's squad came out on top to snare the Epic first-place trophy plate. Surf City won the tournament during its inaugural year back in 2004, while Long Beach Township has won the past two years.

"We were really good today," Dileo said. "We had some new competitors mixed in with the older guys and fought off the elements. We'll take it. Now we're tied with Township, and next year we can have a tie-breaker."

Surf City captured the tourney title by compiling 36 points, just four short of a perfect score as it won three of the five events and swiped second in the other two.

Long Beach Township took second place with 29 points, followed by Ortley Beach in third with 14, Island Beach State Park with 13 and Barnegat Light with 10 points. Upper Township scored seven points, while Beach Haven brought up the rear with six.

Scoring per event gave eight points to the winner, while the second-place finisher received six and third place received four.

"We finished second in Lavallette on July 13, and second in Seaside Park after we got disqualified in the last event," Dileo said. "So, our squad is strong and we were missing one of our best competitors, Chris Bigos, today because he was working. But still, we managed everything very well."

In the first event of the day — the Surf Dash relay — Surf City took second behind Ortley Beach after former Central Regional standout swimmer Chris Mahoney passed Ross Reynolds during the second leg of the swim and Ortley teammate Michael Molloy stretched that lead during the last leg.

Molloy came around the last buoy well ahead of Dileo and made his way to the beach and finish line to complete a team time of 11:46. When Dileo crossed the finish line, Surf City was in second with a time of 12:36, followed closely by Barnegat Light in 12:47.

But while the Surf City trio of Darren Podolak, Reynolds and Dileo were making their way through the Surf Dash, Alan Bakes and Michael Vile were already busy with the running portion of the grueling Epic Run-Swim, in which the number of points your team receives is based on which place your competitors finish.

Surf City didn't have to worry much about the scoring, though, as Bakes finished first and Vile was right behind him in second to easily win the event and give their squad an additional eight points.

Bakes, who ran cross country in high school and currently is a distance swimmer for Rutgers University, was into the ocean first after completing the run that stretched to 25th Street and back, followed by Vile.

Competing in his first tournament as a first-year guard, Bakes then chugged through the Atlantic, north to south and going into the wind, before working his way into shore and through the finish-line flags for the victory in 13:39.45. Vile, who carries a lot of experience in such tournaments, took second in 13:50.23 to complete the first-second sweep for Surf City.

"I felt better with the swim than I did with the run," Bakes said afterward. "It was a tougher event than I thought it would be. Having Mike as a teammate really helped. It's fun to train with him. Training for Division I swimming is really hard, and Mike's training is almost exactly the same." The windy conditions were no less of a problem during the next event — the Paddle Relay, in which three competitors from each team completed the long, ocean course.

Reynolds grabbed a narrow lead on the first leg, before handing the paddleboard to Vile for the second leg. Vile then stretched the gap to about 40 feet as he cruised through the course and handed off to Podolak for the final leg.

"Following those two (Reynolds and Vile) I expected a lead," Podolak said. "But I couldn't see anything out there, not until I was about 50 feet from the buoy, and I was just hoping to keep that lead."

Podolak continued Surf City's domination of the event, and paddled into shore with a team time of 17:55. He said the recent beach replenishment project altered the wave action a bit, but otherwise wasn't much of an issue.

"It changed things, but in general we're going to get used to it," Podolak said. "Now, most of the waves just flop over and close out, so it takes a little more skill to get through it. It's not as easy to catch a wave anymore."

Surf City finished more than a half-minute ahead of second-place Long Beach Township (18:28), which moved ahead of Ortley into second place following the third event.

But with two events to go, Surf City had amassed 22 points compared to LBT's 15, and Dileo's crew had to finish no less than second in either of the final two events to clinch the tourney title.

Surf City didn't wait to jump on the opportunity, as it took first in the Iron Man Medley to clinch first place overall.

After Bakes swam to shore in first place ahead of Long Beach Township's Andrew Stutz on the first leg of the medley, Reynolds grabbed the paddleboard and headed out into the ocean with LBT's Sean Kelly fairly close behind.

But Reynolds extended the lead a bit and once on shore handed over the lead to Vile and Podolak, who awaited in the surfboat. After Reynolds and Bakes pushed Vile and Podolak into the water, the two experienced guards took the newly-whipped west wind out to the second marker with relative ease.

As Township's Jay Sawczak and Jarod Angelozzi attempted to catch Surf City's boat crew, Vile and Podolak made the turn for the shore and now rowed into the wind, which made things a little more interesting once Angelozzi and Sawczak also made the turn seconds later.

The finish indeed developed into an interesting one, as both boat crews rode into shore about the same time — the only difference was that Sawczak and Angelozzi were further north on the beach by about 30 yards, giving them a further run on the beach to get to the finish-line flags.

Ultimately, Surf City won the event, as Vile was able to jump from the boat, get to the beach first and run his way to first place to complete the team time of 12:07. Long Beach Township finished second in 12:17, while Beach Haven captured its only third-place finish of the tourney in 12:57.

Meanwhile, as the boats headed to shore in the Iron Man Medley, the Run-Row event had started, as the two-member crews from each team began the running portion of the tourney's final event.

Once all the boats were back on shore and in place for the running competitors of the Run-Row, LBT's Colin Bearly and Josh Wall returned and hopped into the boat for the second leg of the grueling last event. Not far

behind were Surf City's Rip Wagner and Dileo, who between them were carrying more than 80 years of lifeguarding experience.

Bearly, most known for his running career at Southern Regional High School, and Wall, very well known for his work ethic, reached the turn marker first but didn't hold the lead by much as the much more experienced tandem bore down.

As the beach neared, both crews were nearly even. And when it came down to which team was going to win the event, it became a foot race between Bearly and Dileo. The younger track and cross country standout had the advantage at that point, and ran his way to victory for a team time of 19:13.

"I had four years of track and cross country training and I needed it," Bearly said. "It's a whole new world running on soft sand. But on that final sprint, my years of track took over. I knew I would outkick him."

Bearly, who had never rowed in competition before that event, said Wall helped him tremendously.

"Josh taught me all I knew about rowing in about two hours before the tournament started," Bearly said. "The training he does is unbelievable compared to what we did all year for track. He works harder than anybody I know."

But despite LBT's victory in the final event, Surf City was comfortably in first, and Dileo made no effort to hide why his team had been successful this time around.

"Bakes and Vile really helped us," he said. "We definitely had a good team, but those two added some big elements for us as a whole."

But what about the Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association tournament scheduled for a few weeks from now?

"Let's just say we're going to be in it," Dileo said. "I expect us to be in the mix, and I'll leave it at that."

Besides the victory, Dileo also was quite pleased that the tournament itself was able to be finished, after postponing it twice last year and having to squeeze it in late in the summer.

"I am so relieved we were able to get it in," he said. "The tournament schedule is getting crowded right about now, and because this is a low-tide event we would have had to wait another three weeks if we had to postpone it again. I'm glad everything worked out this time."