

SPORTSWEEK

The trend-breakers



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman and Robert Ward

Following a long Sunday evening of competition, the Surf City Beach Patrol got to celebrate (above) its first victory in the Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association Lifeguard Tournament since 1980. After just three events were contested on the first night of competition, Ross Reynolds (left), below, edged Long Beach Township's Travis Grant in the 1,500-foot Paddleboard race to kick off Surf City's title run with seven first-place finishes during the last 13 events.

Surf City snags first tourney title since 1980

By **DAVID P. BIGGY**
Staff Writer

BRANT BEACH — For the past 17 years, the Barnegat Light and Long Beach Township beach patrols have owned the Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association Lifeguard Tournament.

That trend finally has been broken by Surf City.

"It's exciting," said long-time Surf City guard Rip Wagner, after he and Collette Pretre clinched the title for Surf City by winning the Mixed Doubles Row. "It's been a long time coming for Surf City. This is my 27th year, and I think the last time we won this tournament it might have been 28 years ago."

Wagner indeed was correct



Title

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in his recollection. Surf City last won the island-wide lifeguard tourney back in 1980, when it successfully defended its only other championship from the year before.

"I've been here for 24 years," said Surf City captain Mark Dileo. "We've been close to winning this tournament on a couple of occasions, including last year, but have never been able to get by either Barnegat Light or Township."

Since 1980, the only other beach patrol to win the big tournament was Ship Bottom, which captured the tourney title a year later in 1981, won two straight in 1983 and 1984, and last won 18 years ago in 1989.

In every other year since 1980, the title has been won by either Barnegat Light or Long Beach Township, which has won all of its 14 championships since 1985.

Barnegat Light has won the tourney crown 13 times during the tournament's 46-year history. Ship Bottom has 10 titles, while Harvey Cedars and Barnegat Light State Park, which won the first three tournament titles from 1962 through 1964, each have three. Harvey Cedars won all three of its titles from 1972 through 1974.

Beach Haven has yet to win the island tournament.

"We added a couple of good competitors this year," said Dileo, whose squad won with 68 points, won seven events and was even disqualified during the Buoy Rescue. "Those competitors have made a big difference for us, and we felt it was our year."

Following Surf City, Barnegat Light, the defending champion going into this year's big event, swiped second place with 62 points, while Long Beach Township took third with 74 points. Ship Bottom was a close fourth with 70 points, while Beach Haven and Harvey Cedars finished fifth and sixth, respectively, with 39 and 27 points.

Slow start to tourney

As a cold front moved through the area last Friday, the status of the tournament was up in the air until shortly before the 6 p.m. start time.

But with powerful waves pounding the shoreline and lightning out on the water, tourney officials and team captains agreed to start the tournament on Saturday evening.

Still, things weren't much better the next day, as a three-foot cliff along much of the start line between 67th and 68th streets was the result of the pounding from the day before. In addition to the eroded beach, the wind was tough and the shorebreak even tougher.

As a result of those conditions, tourney officials and team captains decided not to run any of the surfboat events the first night, leaving just three events — the Women's Paddle, normally the second event, the Buoy Rescue, normally the third event, and the Paddleboard Relay, which normally is the fourth event of the first day.

But rather than run the events in order from second through fourth, officials opted to run them in reverse order, starting the tournament with the Paddle Relay.

Surf City got off to a great start despite the heavy wave action, as Matt Holloway and Ross Reynolds burst through the surf with relative ease and put Surf City in front by a solid margin heading into the third leg.

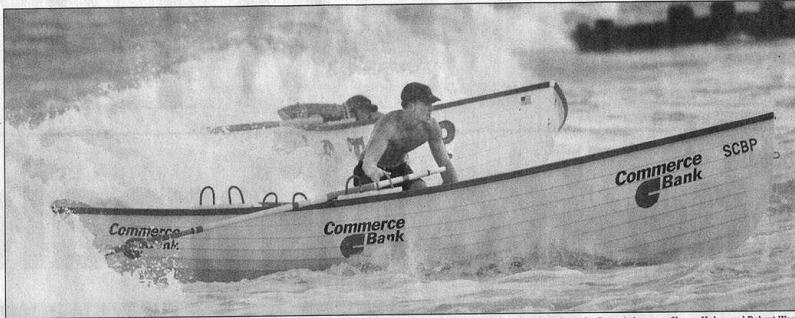
But right after Reynolds handed off the paddleboard to teammate Kyle Gronostajski, Long Beach Township's Mike Dancha took the board from Travis Lepley and headed out soon after. Dancha then caught and passed Gronostajski during the last 200 feet of the leg, as Gronostajski had some difficulty with the rough waves.

Dan Payne then took the board from Dancha and extended Township's lead, rounding the buoy marker first and headed for the beach with a comfortable lead. Payne then caught a big wave that steered him right onto the beach for an easy run to the finish.

Ship Bottom and Surf City ended up second and third, respectively.

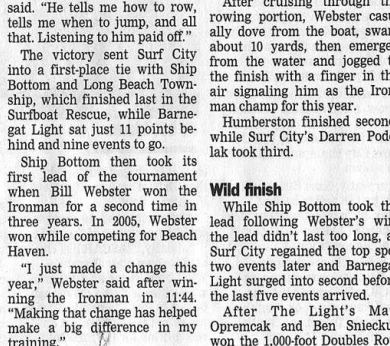
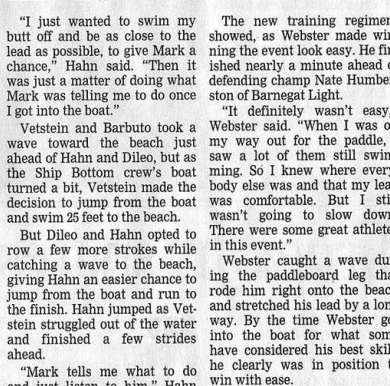
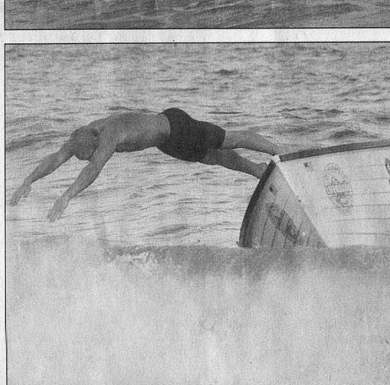
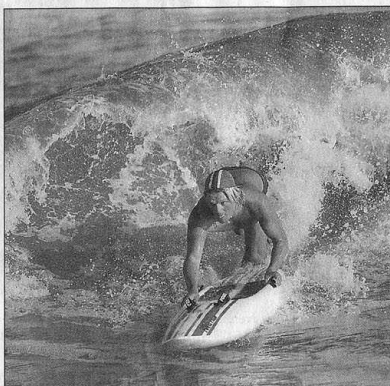
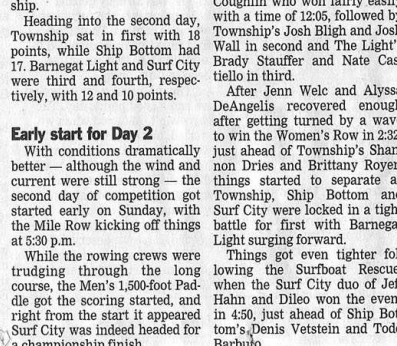
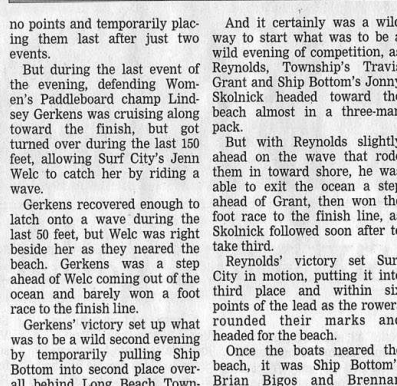
After taking fifth in the relay, Barnegat Light pulled itself into the leading mix of teams during the next event, as Brad Reeser and James Polito won the Buoy Rescue in 3:57, followed by Township's Gordon Peeler and Chris Stutz in second and Beach Haven's Chris Esbill and Ama Barry in third.

Surf City was disqualified during the event, giving them



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman, Shawn Huber and Robert Ward

It was a rough and tumble type of weekend for the Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association Lifeguard Tournament, and following the second day's 13 events Surf City emerged as the champion, marking the first time that a team other than Long Beach Township or Barnegat Light captured the tourney crown. Above, Surf City's Steve Welc heads for the beach in the Singles Row. Clockwise from below: The women take off for a rough Atlantic Ocean during the Women's Paddleboard event; Township's Dan Payne catches a wave during the Paddleboard Relay; Beach Haven's Bill Webster dives out of the boat en route to a first-place finish in the Ironman; Township's Josh Wall makes the leap for the finish during the Mile Row; and Barnegat Light's Brad Reeser (left) and James Polito head for the finish line during the Buoy Rescue.



in 2:26, ahead of Beach Haven's Ted Johnson and Mike Coler. Alan Bakes gave Surf City the lead by winning the 1,000-foot Open Swim in 4:22 ahead of Barnegat Light's James Lovelless.

From there, Surf City and Barnegat Light plowed ahead in a battle for the title, and were separated by just two points after Surf City's Ashley Morris edged The Light's Meaghan Brown in the 1,000-foot Women's Swim but Surf City finished last on the Paddleboard Rescue while The Light's Scott Livsey and Mike Pantzer took first and Township's Pat Doyle and Brian Ring grabbed second.

The Light then took the lead when Doug Adams and Castiello pulled Reeser through the Atlantic during the Line Pull, easily winning the event in 3:52.

"We were trying to make a comeback here, so we needed to come through," said Reeser, who reached the marker and was pulled halfway to the beach before the Long Beach Township and Surf City swimmers touched the marker buoy.

"When I was coming in, I was able to look to my right, and I saw a lot of people still swimming, so I knew we were good."

Adams and Castiello have pulled a swimmer to victory each of the last four years.

"Nate and Doug are the best pullers on the island, and I'm really thankful for them. I'm about 205 pounds, and it's tough to pull a guy at my weight. It really shows the character of those guys who pulled me in."

The Line Pull victory sent The Light into first with 68 points, just ahead of Surf City, which took third in the Line Pull, with 66, and eight points ahead of Township, which placed second in the Line Pull.

But a two-point lead wasn't a safe one, and while The Light's Don Adams took third in the Singles Row, and Bob and Kristen Seifridge finished fifth in the Mixed Doubles Row, Surf City received two big efforts from Steve Welc, Wagner and Pretre, as Surf City regained the lead, this time for good.

Welc was the beneficiary of a big wave that carried his boat to shore, right alongside the boat of Long Beach Township's Tom Duralek. But while Duralek's boat was turned sideways just a bit, that gave Welc the little advantage he needed as his boat cruised the extra 30 feet to the beach, where he jumped out and streaked to the finish line a few strides ahead of Duralek.

Welc's victory in 2:19 sent Surf City back into a two-point lead with two events left, before Wagner and Pretre clinched the title with their first-place finish.

Wagner and Pretre got off to a great start, despite taking on a stiff southerly wind at the south end of the course. After turning the buoy marker first, Wagner and Pretre used a short-stroke method to cruise through the choppy ocean.

"With the ocean conditions as they were, it was best to go with shorter strokes," Wagner said. "You usually use longer strokes in flat conditions. The wind wasn't too bad. It wasn't as tough as it was the past two nights."

With the Ship Bottom duo of Webster and Gerkens, as well as Township's Ann Hodalik and Jared Angellozzi, coming up behind them quickly, Wagner and Pretre rowed into shore just as Webster and Gerkens caught a wave that nearly pushed them ahead.

Wagner then leaped from the boat and ran his way to the finish line ahead of Webster.

"I wasn't too graceful getting out the boat," said Wagner, who hit the sand and fell to one knee before righting himself. "It was a rough way to end the race, but it's always nice to repeat."

The trio of Hahn, Paul Dunge and Podolak finished off the team championship by placing second in the Surf Dash Relay behind the Barnegat Light crew of Polito, Lovelless and Stauffer, who won the final event in 7:31.

"I knew it was going to be tough and nail," Dileo said. "Barnegat Light is always near the top, and you can never count Township out of anything. And Ship Bottom always brings a tough team. But we won seven events tonight and received a total team effort from everyone. We're always strong the second night, and once we started having fun that's when we started winning."

Dileo said his team has been a consistent bunch all summer.

"Once we won the Orley Beach tournament, which is one of the premier tournaments around this area, we knew we were doing well. We were one or two swimmers away from winning this tournament in previous years, and this year we got some big efforts from the swimmers we added to our patrol."

"We have had a lot of fun this summer."

"I just wanted to swim my butt off and be as close to the lead as possible, to give Mark a chance," Hahn said. "Then it was just a matter of doing what Mark was telling me to do once I got into the boat."

Vetstein and Barbutto took a wave toward the beach just ahead of Hahn and Dileo, but as the Ship Bottom crew's boat turned a bit, Vetstein made the decision to jump from the boat and swim 25 feet to the beach.

But Dileo and Hahn opted to row a few more strokes while catching a wave to the beach, giving Hahn an easier chance to jump from the boat and run to the finish. Hahn jumped as Vetstein struggled out of the water and finished a few strides ahead.

"Mark tells me what to do and just listen to him," Hahn said. "He tells me how to row, tells me when to jump, and all that. Listening to him paid off."

The victory sent Surf City into a first-place tie with Ship Bottom and Long Beach Township, which finished last in the Surfboat Rescue, while Barnegat Light sat just 11 points behind and nine events to go.

Ship Bottom then took its first lead of the tournament when Bill Webster won the Ironman for a second time in three years. In 2005, Webster won while competing for Beach Haven.

"I just made a change this year," Webster said after winning the Ironman in 11:44. "Making that change has helped make a big difference in my training."

The new training regiment showed, as Webster made winning the event look easy. He finished nearly a minute ahead of defending champ Nate Humberston of Barnegat Light.

"It definitely wasn't easy," Webster said. "When I was on my way out for the paddle, I saw a lot of them still swimming. So I knew where everybody else was and that my lead was comfortable. But I still wasn't going to slow down. There were some great athletes in this event."

Webster caught a wave during the paddleboard leg that rode him right onto the beach and stretched his lead by a long way. By the time Webster got into the boat for what some have considered his best skill, he clearly was in position to win with ease.

After cruising through the rowing portion, Webster casually dove from the boat, swam about 10 yards, then emerged from the water and jogged to the finish with a finger in the air signaling him as the Ironman champ for this year.

Humberston finished second, while Surf City's Darren Podolak took third.

Wild finish

While Ship Bottom took the lead following Webster's win, the lead didn't last too long, as Surf City regained the top spot two events later and Barnegat Light surged into second before the last five events arrived.

After The Light's Matt Opremack and Ben Snieckus won the 1,000-foot Doubles Row