

# SPORTSWEEK

## Not easy, but still on top



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman and Shawn Huber

The Surf City Beach Patrol not only had reason to celebrate after winning the Line Pull event, above, and dethroning the four-time defending champs from Barnegat Light, but later earned the opportunity to toss captain Mark Dileo into the Atlantic Ocean, below, after Surf City came from behind to defend its Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association tournament title.



### *Surf City wins final event, edges Barnegat Light to defend title*

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BRANT BEACH — Throughout the summer, the Surf City Beach Patrol tournament team has been a tough one to beat.

Prior to this past weekend's 47th annual Long Beach Island Beach Patrol Association Tournament, Surf City had finished second just twice during seven other tournaments, by a combined 4.5 points, while winning the other five handily.

On Saturday, things weren't easy but Surf City managed its sixth tournament victory of the season, taking first in the last event of the tourney to edge Barnegat Light by one point and defend its title of a year ago.

"I knew some of the off-island weren't much of an indicator as to what we'd see here in this tournament," said Surf

City's Darren Podolak, who kicked off the opening leg of the Surf Dash Relay and gave his trio a lead they never relinquished en route to the tourney crown.

"Going into the last event, I was confident we could pull it off. I knew we had a good Surf Dash team. And I don't know about the other two (Harrison and Jeff Hahn), but I was looking forward to the pressure."

Heading into the final event, captain Mark Dileo's crew trialed Barnegat Light by a point, and the trio of Podolak and the Hahn brothers had to finish ahead of The Light's Nate Humberston, Brady Stauffer and Mike Taylor in order to at least force a first-place tie, which Surf City would have won in a tiebreaker based on number of first-place finishes.

See TOP, Page A10



But by finishing first or second, as long as Barnegat Light was behind it, the Surf City trio would have given its team the title.

"I never thought it was over until I was on the beach, because Barnegat Light always has really good swimmers," Jeff Hahn said after he anchored the winning effort and easily jogged to the finish. "At the last buoy, I looked back and saw that I had a little bit of a lead. When I got out of the water and got to the beach, I looked back to see if I had to run or jog. It felt good to just have to jog at that point."

Podolak trailed Humberston around the two markers during the first-leg swim, but pulled up beside him during the swim to the beach. After catching a short runner, Podolak emerged from the ocean a few yards ahead of Humberston, then ran to the beach ahead of him before tagging Harrison Hahn for the second leg.

"I know Humberston is a great swimmer, and I just wanted to stay with him," Podolak said after he and his teammates tossed Dileo into the Atlantic in celebration. "On the way in to the beach, I looked and saw him next to me, and I just went for it."

Once Harrison Hahn was in the water, he simply extended the lead to a dozen yards and maintained that distance.

"Confidence is everything," he said. "You just have to think that you're going to win. I trained my heart out for this, and for me it was just go, go, go."

Following his brother's leg, all Jeff Hahn had to do was keep a distance between he and Stauffer, who was some 15 yards behind Hahn when he turned the last buoy.

"I had a feeling we could pull it out," said Dileo, whose squad won with 85 points, followed by The Light with 84 and Ship Bottom with 73. "But Barnegat Light has been dominant in the Surf Dash for years, so we loaded our Surf Dash team with our three best swimmers, just in case winning the tournament came down to the last event.

"And our guys did a great job. They swam like I never saw them swim before."

Following Surf City, Barnegat Light and Ship Bottom were Harvey Cedars in fourth with 56 points, Long Beach Township in fifth with 49 points, and Beach Haven in sixth with 36 points.

"We've had a fantastic summer," Dileo said. "This was a dream team, and all of our guys and gals did a great job for us. I couldn't have asked for a better tournament season."

Surf City's second straight tourney title marked the fourth time it has won it. In addition to last year's crown, the only other two times Surf City had captured the title occurred during back-to-back years in 1979 and 1980.

Surf City's back-to-back titles are the first since Long Beach Township accomplished the feat with three straight crowns in 1997, 1998 and 1999.

Interestingly, all the teams which have competed or still compete in the tournament, with the exception of Beach Haven, which has never won the tournament, has won back-to-back titles at some point during the 47 years of the tournament's existence.

Barnegat Light State Park won the first three tournament titles in 1962, 1963 and 1964, with Barnegat Light winning the next three from 1965 through 1967. Ship Bottom has won back-to-back titles three separate times, first in 1970 and 1971, then again in 1977 and 1978, as well as 1983 and 1984.

Harvey Cedars' only three championships came during three consecutive years from 1972 through 1974. Long Beach Township also has won consecutive titles three times. In addition to its 1997-99 streak, Township won two straight in 1990 and 1991, after winning four straight titles from 1985 through 1988.

## First-night frenzy

On Friday, the first night of competition kicked off with some interesting results, with no clear leader establishing a surge through the first five events.

In the Mile Row, Surf City got off to a great start when Dileo and Steve Welc caught Ship Bottom's Tom Smith and Charles

Klink right after the second marker, turned for the beach in first and held off a hard-charging Harvey Cedars duo of Pete Clements and Liam Farrell to win the event in 14:02.

In the Women's Paddle, Ship Bottom's Colleen Bott paddled her way to the lead before the first turn and stayed there around the second, before heading in toward the beach with a sizable lead. After catching a wave to further distance herself from the rest of the field, Bott easily crossed the finish line in 3:14, followed by Barnegat Light's Erin McGraw and LBT's Brittany Knowles.

During the Buoy Rescue, The Light's team of Matt McGraw and Zach Kohl dominated the event to win in 3:22, followed by Township's Gordon Peeler and Chris Stutz in second and Surf City's Alan Bakes and Valerie Clark in third.

The Paddle Relay turned out to be an exciting race, as Barnegat Light's crew of Brian and Tom Elwood, Seth Livesey and Mike Pantzer held the lead right up until the halfway mark of the last leg, before Surf City's Ross Reynolds followed teammates Matt Holloway, Kyle Gronostajski and Ryan Curtain, made a pass on the final stretch, and then caught a wave that carried him right to the beach and a first-place finish in 8:59.

Coming out of the Paddle Relay, it appeared Barnegat Light and Surf City would continue to surge ahead of the rest of the field, while Harvey Cedars, Ship Bottom and Long Beach Township would battle for third.

During the Women's Row, Jenn Welc and Alyssa DeAngelis pushed Surf City into the lead with a first-place time of 2:20, followed by the LBT tandem of Shannon Dries and Brittany Royer in second, and Beth Schmid and Emily Merchant of Harvey Cedars in third.

Surf City really grabbed hold of the lead during the Surfboat Rescue, when Jeff Hahn and Dave Bonanni, who led the whole way, rowed into the beach with a time of 3:32, followed by Ship Bottom's Todd Barbuto and Chris Hemmerle in second, and LBT's Terry Dorman and Andrew Stutz in third.

Heading into the Iron Man event at the end of the first

night, Surf City was out in front by nine points over Barnegat Light, but that lead was cut into slightly and a win by Ship Bottom's Billy Webster set up what turned out to be a major confrontation during the second night of competition.

Webster wasn't the first one into the ocean for the second-leg swim during the Iron Man, but he turned the marker buoy first and led the rest of the way. He easily made his way to the beach during the paddleboard leg, then cruised to victory during the row.

"This definitely was the toughest year to be in the Iron Man because the competition was great," said Webster, who won the event last year and has won the Iron Man four times overall. "I knew I would have Phill Lloyd (Beach Haven), Humberston and Podolak right on me, because they're all awesome athletes. And then I had to worry about the guy from Township (Mateusz Kwasneiwski) after reading about him in the paper.

"I just couldn't slow down."

After Webster posted a winning time of 9:45, Humberston placed second, followed by Podolak and Lloyd.

## Tight race

Entering the second night of competition, Surf City had 42 points and held a seven-point lead over Barnegat Light (35), which was followed closely by Ship Bottom (32), setting the stage for what turned out to be a wild finish.

And immediately, the race for the title became a tight one, when Dileo and Surf City teammate Steve Welc was leading the 1,000-foot Doubles Row until they had to repeat their turn around the marker after cutting it too tightly and not turning it in the correct rotation from north to south.

"That was a colossal mistake," Dileo said. "And it's one that we've never made. We just miscalculated and cut the buoy too tight. That mistake put us in a big hole because it's something that brings the rest of the team down. Because I'm the captain, I'm not supposed to make that kind of mistake."

The mistake cost Surf City dearly, placing them sixth in an event they otherwise would



have finished within the top three, and allowing Barnegat Light, which finished second, and Ship Bottom, whose rowing tandem of Smith and Klink took first in 2:03, to draw closer in the standings.

Following the Doubles Row, only three points separated the top three squads, with a lot of time for big things to happen.

Ship Bottom made its move for the front during the next two events — the 1,000-foot Open Swim and the Women's Swim — as Chris Hemmerle and his sister, Tracey, finished first and second, respectively, pushing their squad into the lead with 54 points.

Chris Hemmerle outraced Bakes to the beach in 3:51, while Tracey took second behind Barnegat Light's Caren Guyett, who won with a time of 4:02 to send The Light in front of Surf City in the standings by two points.

Barnegat Light regained the lead during the Paddle Rescue, when Pantzer and Livesey finished second behind Harvey Cedars' Randy Townsend and Will Sweeny with a time of 2:14, while a third-place finish by Ship Bottom's Jonny Skolnick and Webster kept their team in second.

After a fifth-place finish in the Paddle Rescue for Surf City pushed them further behind in third — five points behind Ship Bottom and six behind Barnegat Light. That was when Dileo gathered his squad for a pep talk.

"Before the Line Race, I just had to say something," Dileo said. "So, I gathered them up and told them that things had been easy all summer, and this wasn't going to be as easy. I said, 'This one's going to be hard. Let's fight.'"

Not only did Dileo's crew respond, its trio of swimmer Andre Garner and pullers Nick Labida and Gronostajski pulled off one of the tournament's major event upsets by finishing ahead of four-time defending champions Doug Adams and Nate Castiello of Barnegat Light, who had pulled a swimmer to victory each of the previous four years.

Unseating the Barnegat Light crew from the Line Pull throne, the Surf City trio not only completed the Line Pull in under

three minutes (2:58), but put Surf City right back into the title hunt and in second place, four points behind The Light.

During the next event, Bonanni pushed Surf City back in front with a victory in the Singles Row, surging into the lead during the last 300 feet to the beach and easily crossing the finish line in 2:01 while other boats either got tied up or turned in the surf.

"After the pep talk, it was amazing how the team responded," Dileo said. "Right after it, we broke Barnegat Light's streak in the Line Race, then Dave had a great ride in the Singles Row. It was awesome."

But the tournament was still three events from over, and Barnegat Light was determined to keep pace with Surf City, as Don Adams and Meghan Brown snared first in the Mixed Doubles Row with a time of 2:08, followed closely by Surf City's Rip Wagner and DeAngelis.

The Light and Surf City went into the last two events tied with 75 points, and a stacked field for the first of those two events — the 1,500-foot Paddle.

Utilizing the experience of Townsend and Chris Esibill, Harvey Cedars and Beach Haven seemed content with playing a spoiler role, as the two jumped out into the lead before the first turn and stayed there to finish first and second, respectively, with Townsend crossing the finish line in 3:02.

After Skolnick grabbed third-place points for Ship Bottom, a fourth-place finish by Barnegat Light's Brian Elwood edged his team one point ahead of Surf City, which received just a pair of fifth-place points from defending Paddle champ Reynolds, with one event to go.

Still, Surf City couldn't be denied.

"We have a lot of experience on our squad," Podolak said. "Most of the guards on our squad have no less than four years of tournament experience, so that turned out to be big for us."



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman and Shawn Huber

Before Jeff Hahn, above, crossed the finish line with the tournament-winning points during the Suri Dash Relay, Suri City teammates Ross Reynolds, top right, and Dave Bonanni, right, came up with some big efforts during the Paddle Relay and the Singles Row.

