

Surf City makes it a clean sweep



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman

The Surf City Beach Patrol made things look easy during last week's Epic Lifeguard Tournament, as it swiped first in every event and won its third tourney title with 40 points. Above, Chris Bigos (left) and Mark Dileo (in boat) cruise to victory in the Run-Row event. Below, Alan Bakes relays to Jeff Hahn en route to victory in the Surf Dash race.

Dileo's crew wins all events en route to title

By **DAVID P. BIGGY**
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SURF CITY — During the previous four Epic Lifeguard tournaments, there always seemed to be a tight race somewhere along the line.

Last Tuesday, in the 5th annual Surf City Epic tourney, the host team led the way from start to finish and ran away with the championship plate.

It was such a dominating performance that team captain Mark Dileo had trouble finding words to describe it.

"I never would have predicted this type of finish," Dileo said of his squad's title, in which Surf City took first in all five events to score a perfect 40 points. "We trained hard for this tournament, but I didn't think we'd win every event. Things definitely went our way tonight."

As is the case with all Epic tournament rosters, Surf City consisted of six top-notch guys. Besides himself, Dileo's crew consisted Chris Bigos, Ross Reynolds, Alan Bakes, Darren Podo-

lak and Jeff Hahn.

"Taking first in every event is nice," Reynolds said. "It certainly wasn't planned."

But that's exactly what happened, and right from the start it looked as if Surf City would be a force.

During the Epic Run-Swim event, in which two members of each team make a two-mile beach run, followed by an ocean swim, Bakes, who won the event last year, and Hahn finished first and second, respectively, to give Surf City an immediate lead in the standings.

The Beach Haven duo of Phill Lloyd and Chris Esibill finished second in the Epic event, followed by the tandem of Matt McGraw and Zach Kohl in third, and the Long Beach Township team of Pat Doyle and James Mulski.

But once Surf City got the lead, it never looked back.

During the Run-Row, in which one competitor from each team runs a mile on the

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to catch about 150 feet from the beach.

After Bigos handed off the paddleboard to Podolak, he maintained the lead and easily paddled into shore despite Lloyd cutting the gap a bit. Podolak easily trotted to the finish line, and was met by happy teammates as they clinched the tournament title.

Lloyd finished second for Beach Haven, while the Ship Bottom crew of Whalen, Aniski and Sam Candro took third, and the LBT trio of Matteus Kiski, Sean Kelly and Wall placed fourth in front of the team from Ortley Beach.

After four events, Surf City was way out in front with 32 points, 18 points ahead of second-place Beach Haven. The only question remained with one event left was whether Surf City would make it a clean sweep.

And at the front end of the Iron Man Medley, it looked as if the teams from Ortley Beach and Barnegat Light were hoping to spoil Surf City's fun, as the first competitor from each team emerged from the swim ahead of Bakes.

But Reynolds, being an excellent paddler, took over the lead during the paddleboard leg of the race and later caught a wave to push his lead even fur-

ther. By the time Reynolds tagged Dileo, who was set to row to victory along with Bigos, Barnegat Light remained in second, but Ortley had dropped to fifth, while Ship Bottom and Beach Haven pulled into third and fourth, respectively.

Dileo and Bigos rowed out to the marker buoy and, despite getting pushed northward a bit, were able to safely bring the boat to shore and run to the finish together to close out a mammoth effort.

Barnegat Light's foursome of Kohl, Elwood, and the Humberston brothers stayed in second, while the Long Beach Township crew of Doyle, Kelly, Wall and Brearly took third and Beach Haven's quartet of Lloyd, Esibill, Lawrance and Coler placed fourth. The Ship Bottom bunch of Chris Hemmerle, Candro, Whalen and Charlie Klink grabbed fifth.

"These were epic conditions," Reynolds said. "It was windy. We had cold water (about 60 degrees). We had a tough current. It's awesome to be able to win every event in these kinds of conditions. Our guys trained really hard."

Dileo chalked up the winning effort to the great enthusiasm of his entire beach patrol and the support they receive.

"We have something extraor-

dinary here in that we have a lot of enthusiasm," he said. "All of our guys and girls really enjoy doing this. For us, this isn't just about tournaments, it's about lifesaving in general. We take a lot of pride in the way we do things, and we have a lot of support from not just community but our entire beach patrol."

Following Surf City in first with 40 points, Beach Haven and Barnegat Light tied with 17 points, but Beach Haven took second based on having more second-place finishes, while Long Beach Township, the only other team to win back-to-back Epic titles, finished fourth with 16 points, and Ship Bottom was fifth with 13 points.

Ortley Beach and Island Beach State Park — the only two off-island teams competing — finished sixth and seventh, respectively, with 10 and two points.

"I'm really thankful for all the teams who take the time to show up for this tournament," Dileo said. "It's early in the season. The conditions aren't great. But they all do a great job here."

Of the five Epic tournaments competed to date, Surf City had won the first Epic title, then won the last two, while Long Beach Township won the second and third.

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beach, before he is joined by another for a 2,500-foot row, the tandems from Surf City and Long Beach Township were locked in a battle for the front spot for much of the race.

After Colin Brearly finished the mile run, he and Township captain Josh Wall hopped in the surfboat and were sent out into the water in first place. Dileo finished the run a short time later before he and Bigos were shoved off.

Wall and Brearly made their way around the marker buoy and headed for shore still in first, but Dileo and Bigos gradually cut the distance between the two boats. And while Wall and Brearly rowed a bit more northward as they headed toward the beach, Bigos and Dileo managed to take a straight, westward shot despite a tough current.

As Wall and Brearly rowed within a 100 yards of the beach, they got turned around, then spun around as they battled the breaking waves. Meanwhile, Dileo and Bigos caught a wave and pulled even with the other boat.

Wall then hopped out of his

boat and began to run through the water in an effort to win the race, but had a much further run than Bigos, who beat Wall to the finish line by a few strides. The Barnegat Light team of Josh and Nate Humberston took third, while Ship Bottom's Nick Whalen and Matt Aniski finished fourth, and the Beach Haven duo of Mike Lawrence and Mike Coler placed fifth.

After two events, Surf City was out in front with 16 points, while Long Beach Township was second with nine, and Barnegat Light was third with eight.

But while the tournament was far from over, Surf City appeared to be in command.

During the Surf Dash event, Ortley Beach jumped out to the front during the first leg of the beach run and swim, with Ship Bottom and Surf City's Podolak not far behind. During the second leg, Bakes surged to the front midway through the swim and extended Surf City's lead by quite a bit before emerging from the water and then tagging Hahn, who then maintained that lead and easily jogged to the finish once out of the water.

"I was coming back off a year of not swimming, but Jeff had really worked hard on his swimming, so it worked out for

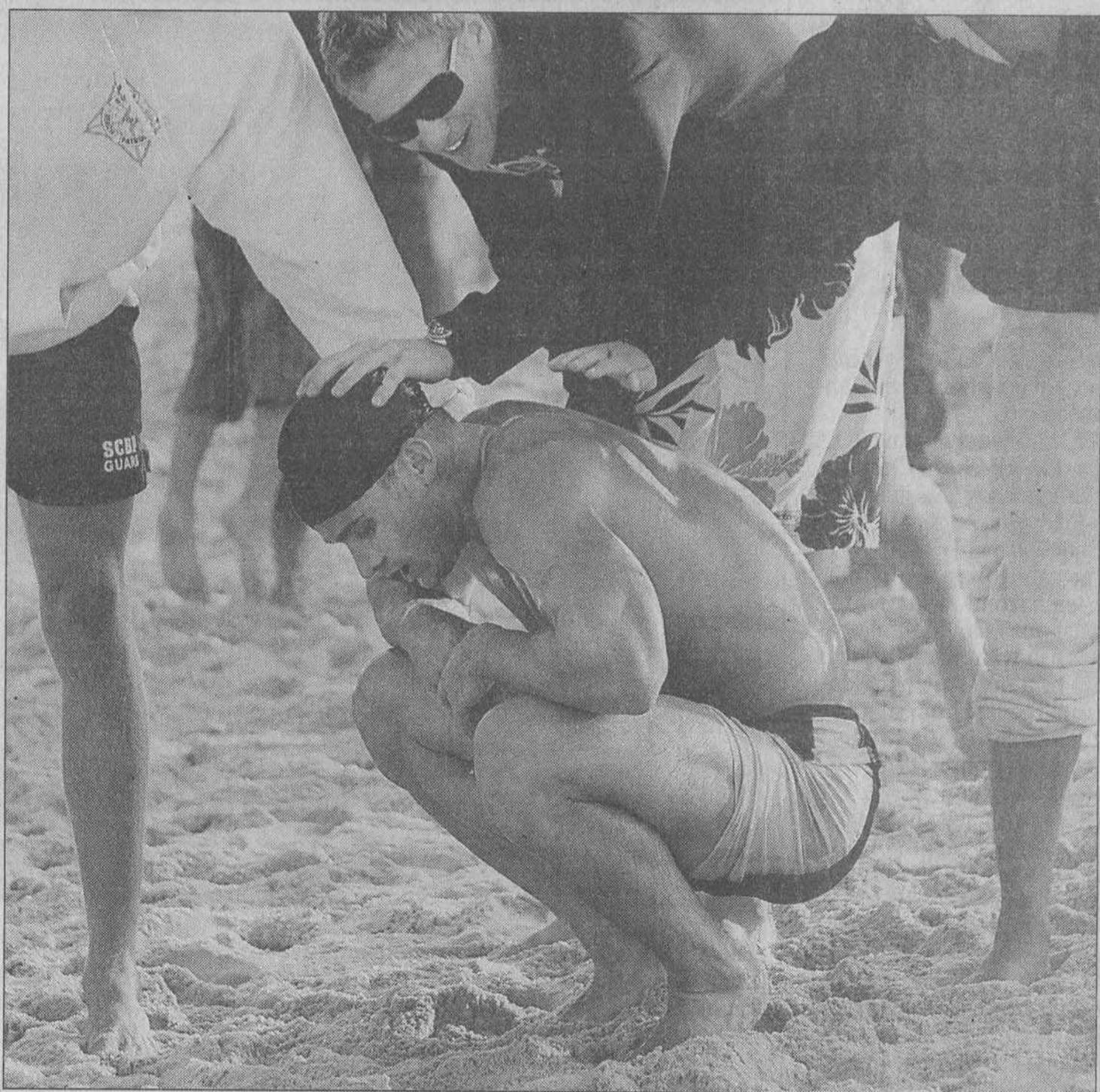
us in the swimming events," Bakes said. "The week before the season started, we began training for this. Jeff really stepped up big for us today. Our swim relay has gotten a lot stronger because he's worked so hard."

Ortley ended up second in the Surf Dash, followed by Ship Bottom's trio of Tracey and Chris Hemmerle and Whalen. Barnegat Light's Humberston brothers and Brian Elwood finished fourth in front of Beach Haven's Esibill, Lloyd and Sean Lukasiewicz.

At that point, only a miracle would have prevented Surf City from winning its third Epic tourney title, as it had 24 points with two events left. Still, anything was capable of happening, and at least one team, Barnegat Light, was still within range of overtaking the defending LBIBPA tourney champs.

Surf City then sealed the deal during the Paddle Relay, when Reynolds, Bigos and Podolak teamed for an easy victory.

At the start of the race, Esibill paddled out to the front as Reynolds trailed him around the marker buoy and to the beach. But Bigos passed Beach Haven's Jared Temple on the paddle out to the buoy, then cruised into shore as Temple got dumped by a wave he tried



Times-Beacon photos by Peter Ackerman

The fifth annual Epic Lifeguard Tournament may have been a blowout for Surf City, but there was plenty of action. Clockwise from below: Beach Haven's Chris Esibill (right) cruises toward the beach on the paddleboard, before handing off to teammate Jared Temple (at left); Beach Haven's Mike Lawrance and Mike Coler try to row their way into the mix during the Iron Man Medley; the Surf Dash event gets under way; Surf City's Ross Reynolds (center) and the rest of the competitors get started in the Paddle Relay; and Surf City's Chris Bigos is congratulated by teammates after he and captain Mark Dileo won the Run-Row event.

SPORTSWEEK