



2006 Alcoa IFDS World Championships—A Silver Lining?

by Helena Lucas Kroeger, GBR 75
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Wow what a regatta. Feels like I have been away an age, but I guess I have been away a month. This is certainly one I will not forget. The setting was great, the club awesome, the sailing very tricky and shifty, and the regatta full of ups and downs. My preparation and training before hand was World class thanks to Adam May my coach and Steve Thomas my Partner and technical support. Unfortunately Steve could not stay out for the full duration, had to go back to work and earn some money, but he certainly earned his keep out there.

My Championship got off to a cracking start, winning both races on the first day in a 15-20 knot breeze. The conditions were extremely shifty especially at the top mark which was laid just off the club, fantastic for the spectators, not so good for the competitors with 30 -40 degree shifts.

The second day, similar conditions but the wind was gusting over 20 knots. A 2nd in the first race just behind Heiko Kroeger from Germany and things were looking good. Heiko and I had a large lead over the rest of the fleet in the first race and I guess we both thought the day would be between the two of us. Heiko had already shown me he meant business, putting close covers on me and starting tacking duals up the first beats. Unfortunately, we got a little too focused on each other, missed a couple of big shifts and allowed our fellow competitors to get the better of us. I came out best rounding 3rd with Heiko back in 7th. Unfortunately, I messed up at the bottom mark, and ended up doing turns. Not quick in 25 knots of breeze, I dropped to 11th throwing away an excellent opportunity to gain points on the Heiko. I was pretty angry at myself that evening and with the next day being a lay day, needed a big distraction to refocus my mind and forget the race. Adam decided a Surf lesson would be a good idea. What an awesome day, we sat in a café, knackered, reflecting on the waves we had caught and not a thought about the racing. The next day with only one race planned in a lighter easterly breeze I was ready for action. I won with a comfortable lead with Heiko back in 5th, thus proving Surfing is a great activity to do on your lay day.



Photographer: Kevin Lucas

Monday was probably the toughest day I have ever had at a regatta. Leading the Championship I was becoming a bit of a target. Rumors were flying that I was going to be protested for my gybing / pumping strop, we managed to address that problem. The racing was tough but I had the best results of the day with a 2nd and 4th, and had taken more points on Heiko. Bjornar Erikstad from Norway had been a little dark horse, not winning a race but constantly finishing in the top 3 and had moved in to second pushing Heiko in to third. Then things started to go pair shaped. The American who had won the first race of the day decided to protest me on an incident he believed we had had on the start line. He was laying 9th overall



with no chance of finishing in the top 3 and nothing to gain from the protest apart from harboring my chances of winning the championship. We looked through the video of the start, which greatly enhanced my defense and clearly showed no incident. Unfortunately, the protest room is not the place you ever want to find yourself, as it is always fifty-fifty when you step in and this time the decision went against me and I was disqualified from the first race of the day and dropped to 3rd overall. It could have got worse as I found out the next day, when one of the classifiers took me aside and informed me that she had prevented a protest against my classification from a sailor last night.

It seemed to be the minority that was trying to make life difficult for me as the majority of my competitors were angry and disappointed by the protests and were willing me to win despite what had happened. I also had the full

support of the volunteers and helpers at the club who were also routing for me. (That's got to be a first the Aussies supporting the pomes).

I was determined to bounce back, but had to wait as Tuesday's racing was cancelled, due to 50 knot winds forecasted. Of course they never appeared and the day was a perfect 15 knot steady breeze. I really needed 10 races so the second discard would come in to give me a real shot at winning. I was relieved to hear we would be starting at 12:30 and three races were planned.

Unfortunately, the wind did not want to play ball and we sat on the water for two hours, becalmed waiting for the sea breeze. At 2:30, it came in and racing commenced. Bjornar was in a good position with six points on me and five on Heiko, but if the second discard came in it was all open. Adam was seen furiously scribbling on bits of damp paper trying to work out the points. Bjornar was having a bad day and soon was out of the running. I was having an average day, but a disappointing 6th in the first race was not doing me any favors. Heiko unfortunately was having a great day. It came to a last race show down between me and Heiko, whoever beat who won. Down the first run we were neck and neck. Heiko was heading for the right hand gate. I had soaked in side and was heading for the left gate mark. It was time to split and pray the shifts went my way. They did not and Heiko took the lead, and the Championship.

I was disappointed at first, so close to winning even after a difficult patch in the middle, but as Adam pointed out there is only one regatta that really matters and that's not until 2008.

All photos courtesy of www.aussiesinaction.com.au

