



## 2006 Alcoa IFDS World Championships—An Athlete’s Perspective

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I was very excited about coming back to Australia. At the Paralympic Games in Sydney, I was very impressed about the great interest in disabled sport and sailing. Although Perth is more than 4.000 km away from Sydney, I met the same friendly people.

After arrival in Perth we walked down to the Royal Perth Yacht Club to see if the container has arrived without damage and to have a first look around at the club. Unfortunately, our coach has misunderstood the friendly lady at the reception at our hotel—it was not 2 km to walk to the club but 7 km. We found the container undamaged but also locked. Because the British container had some more leaves imported than the customs were willing to accept, we had to wait another two days to open it. This was enough time to visit Fremantle at the seaside and to get the first impression of the Fremantle Doctor (the regular daily sea breeze) and, of course, the first sunburn.

The wind (and sun) were impressing and I was able to understand the reason why the event was held on the Swan River—blue sunny skies over a white rough sea.

Two days later I learned that the Swan River has nothing in common with rivers we know. First, the water is salty, lots of jellyfish and some dolphins were in this river. After three days of sailing in these waters, I grounded on a sandbank and together with my coach managed to pull the boat back in deeper areas. Thank God that there are no sharks in this river!?! Two days later, I found an article of the local newspaper at the blackboard “Bullsharks on the Swan” – a cold fear ran through my veins and I made the decision not to ground anymore!!!



Photographer: Kevin Lucas



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The Royal Perth Yacht Club with lots of helping hands worked very hard for this event and I think I can say on behalf of all competitors, that we all felt warmly welcomed at this place. If somewhere there was a problem, it lasts not very long until it was solved. Lunch and diner was served every day.

Racing on the Swan was very tricky. While the Sonars sailed on Melville Water (which was less covered by the shoreline), we had our racecourse just a stones throw away from the club. Lots of wind shifts and short rough waves made it very difficult to find the best way to the upwind mark. Because of a big



storm in the north the regular wind system (less wind in the morning and a developing sea breeze in the afternoon) was disturbed and we had very strange wind directions. As you can see in the results, the competition was very close and every small mistake was hardly penalized.

The day before the final racing day we started with AP. The sky was grey and cloudy. Around 1230, racing was postponed to the next day as a thunderstorm with 50 knots and hard rain was expected to arrive at the racecourse in the early afternoon. I took the opportunity to visit the maritime museum at Fremantle to see the 12mR "Australia II" and the gold medal of Noel Robins.



The next day was one of the most exciting days in my sailing career. Everything was possible where three races were scheduled. If we sail all three races we have two races to discard if not only one. The rain was gone and the sky was blue with some clouds. At half past 11, we left the harbor and went to the racecourse. After one hour with shifty winds, the wind died. The latest possibility to start a race was 1700 in the evening. After 2 1/2 hours, the RC decided to prepare for a race. There was still no wind but they told us that the sea breeze is developing and runs up the river. Fifteen minutes later the wind arrived.

The first race was won by Nick Scandone (USA), I became 2<sup>nd</sup>, Helena 6<sup>th</sup> and Björnar 9<sup>th</sup>. I was able to win the 2<sup>nd</sup> race, Helena was 2<sup>nd</sup> and Björnar was 7<sup>th</sup>. While crossing the finishing line I saw that they want to sail another one. At this time, I was leading by one point, with Helena second. With a safe start, I was able to climb to the lead after a while and defend it until the end. I really like those days when my sailing fits my tactical plan.

The price giving ceremony was scheduled for the next day: Australia Day! During and after the ceremony, hundreds of club-members arrived and we all learned how to celebrate the Australia Day in Perth. Everybody told us that RPYC has the best view over the bay and the fireworks. Well, the club has as well as a fantastic great red wine... We all had a great night with lots of fun, dancing and a few drinks.

The next day I left Perth. After 3 weeks of summer, sun and sailing it was strange to return to Germany...no sun, no summer and no "g'day mate".

All photos courtesy of [www.aussiesinaction.com.au](http://www.aussiesinaction.com.au)