

## **Noble Marine Laser Radial Qualifier, Stokes Bay SC, 10–11 March 2018**

**By Ben Elvin**

It was a great relief to the 72 Radial sailors who gathered at Stokes Bay SC for the first Qualifier event of 2018 that we had temperatures the right side of 5 degrees, and a forecast for a southerly breeze of 10–16knts. It had the potential to be a good weekend sailing after a testing few weeks at the end of winter. The rain was falling as sailors started to arrive, but spirits were high and the fleet eager to get racing.

Unfortunately, although the rain stopped soon after launching, so did the wind, and there was a bit of waiting around for the breeze to fill in again and let racing get under way. It eventually settled on the forecasted southerly direction with a strength of about 7–12knts, and much to everyone's surprise, the first start got away cleanly first time. With the wind forecast to swing right throughout the day, the bulk of the fleet opted for the Committee Boat end and the right-hand side, but a patch of pressure was appearing on the left and it was Hannah Snellgrove, who had started at the pin, who reached it first, tacking onto a lift to start the long drag over the fleet. A rain squall moved in and it started to get rather windy towards the top which worked in Snellgrove's favour as she rounded the first mark in heaps of pressure, closely followed by Ben Elvin who was second to tack from the left. In the following group, there was a guest appearance from Dan Belben, coming out of retirement to join the Radial fleet this year for some racing instead of just coaching. Unfortunately for the chasing pack, Snellgrove and Elvin were able to extend significantly with the increased pressure and it finished Snellgrove, Elvin and then Belben.

Tactics in the second race of the day were slightly confused by the passing of a huge container ship whose wind shadow threatened to come into play, but thankfully, it had passed by the time the fleet were nearing the top of the beat. With a slackening tide and right shift, Chloe Barr was footing down from the right-hand side, closely pursued by Elvin and Snellgrove, but it was Youth sailor Tom Renny who had called the layline perfectly and rounded clear ahead. Barr and Snellgrove worked the right-hand side of the run to overhaul Renny by the bottom, and the two then began trading tacks up the second beat. Down the second run, it was still marginal between

Snellgrove and Barr, with Barr eventually taking the win and Jon Emmett coming in third.

For the final race of the day, the tide had turned and was pushing the fleet gently towards the Committee Boat. This caused a few general recalls as people adjusted to the new conditions, but after enough people had been removed and a short AP, the race got underway. Youth sailor Matt Beck, who had been quietly putting together a strong series just behind the leading bunch, started to cross the fleet from the left with a third of the beat to go. The right then came in strongly and it was Henry Beardsall who led a large group of boats from that side into the top mark. Snellgrove and Elvin, who had been trading tacks in the middle and managed to hold on long enough to make a port layline approach work, punched into the middle of the leading group. Matt Beck and Daisy Collingridge used some good downwind speed to break free, with Elvin arriving shortly behind them having ridden the edge of a patch of pressure to pull away from the boats around him. It was a close battle between Collingridge and Beck up the second beat, with Collingridge getting past Beck near the top, only to lose out to Elvin in the final few boat lengths, and that's the way it stayed until the finish, with Youth sailors Tom Pollard and Tom Higgins successfully holding off Emmett and Snellgrove to take fourth and fifth respectively.

Sunday morning brought a tactically different day, with the wind blowing almost parallel to the shoreline and the tide starting to flow upwind. The question of whether to look for land effects from the shore on the left or try and find more tide in the channel on the right was a tricky one to answer, with not even the locals in agreement on the answer.

As the start approached, Elvin made a late attack on the pin and set off left. It was looking like a long port tack to the mark, first noticed by Collingridge who had made a solid start a few boats up from the pin. As soon as Collingridge tacked, the whole fleet started taking wherever there was a lane, with Elvin taking a transom to get on the right tack. With a short chop directly on the bow, it was a long and challenging drag to the windward mark, with boat speed differences coming into play. At the top mark, it was Elvin, followed by Collingridge and then a gap back to a strong group containing Snellgrove, Belben, Emmett and Beck. It was Snellgrove who showed

mastery of the downwind conditions, not only breaking out of the group, but crossing the gap all the way past Collingridge and Elvin. The Jury were as surprised as everyone else at her remarkable pace, so they came to take a closer look but could find nothing wrong. The second beat was a drag race much like the first, with Snellgrove holding on for the win, followed by Elvin and then Emmett.

With the tide pushing the fleet over the line, Race 5 brought a general recall. Tactically, it was much the same as the first race, meaning that a good start backed up by good upwind speed and the ability to hold your lane on port (should you get one) was the key to doing well. The fleet was close at the windward mark with Snellgrove leading and Matilda Nicholls coming in strongly. With the wind dropping slightly throughout the race, Snellgrove couldn't produce the same outrageous downwind speed, but she comfortably held her position to take the win, followed by Elvin and then Nicholls.

For the final race of the event, the fleet was clear on what the tactics were. Emmett won the pin end and gave himself enough room to take a fast-footing angle on the long port tack, to roll over first Elvin then Snellgrove, who were holding a higher mode. Visiting Irish sailor Peter Fagan, however, had sailed the shortest distance and got to the windward mark first. Emmett showed good speed to overhaul him down the run and open a gap but was yellow flagged near the bottom and only just managed to maintain his lead. It was Elvin who made the most of the limited options on the second beat to take the lead by the final windward mark, but with more pressure coming from behind, Snellgrove was able to put her foot on the gas downwind once again and closed the gap, gaining an overlap at the bottom of the run and taking the win, with Emmett in third and Fagan in fourth.

With such a strong showing on Sunday, the overall win (and first Lady) went to Hannah Snellgrove, a great start to the year for her as she kicks off a new self-funded Olympic campaign.

*Results:*

1st Hannah Snellgrove (6pts)

2nd Ben Elvin (9pts)

3rd Jon Emmett (19pts)

1st Youth – Matt Beck (4th)

1st Youth Lady – Matilda Nicholls (10th)