

Noble Marine Laser Standard Qualifier at WPNSA, 18–19 February

By Harry Blowers

Mild temperatures and a light breeze greeted 34 Laser Standard sailors to the first Qualifier of 2017 at the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy.

All of the big names were attending, including current World Champion Nick Thompson as well as recent World Cup Miami bronze medallist Lorenzo Chiavarini.

After a short postponement onshore, the sailors were released out on the water and headed down towards the Committee Boat which was positioned a few hundred metres from Castle Cove SC. After about an hour of waiting around with the wind fluctuating in speed and direction, as it struggled to move around Portland, the Race Committee moved the race course out into the bay.

In Race 1, there was a lot of interest in the pin end of the line with Nick Thompson and Elliot Hanson both having good starts at the port end. It was Jack Cookson, however, who started in the middle of the line and tacked off early who led at the windward mark after playing the shifts well up the beat. He was followed by Thompson and Hanson with Lorenzo Chiavarini not far behind. Due to the waiting around earlier in the day, the course was shortened and the race was finished at the bottom of the downwind. Cookson managed to defend his lead after a very light, tricky downwind leg. Chiavarini sailed past a few boats to come in second followed by Hanson and Thompson in third and fourth.

The wind dropped and became slightly more inconsistent after the first race, but after a bit of waiting around, one general recall and some black flags the fleet got underway with the second clean start of the day. The breeze was very light up the first beat and the leaders initially came from the pin end of the line. The last third of the beat turned into a tacking duel for the top ten and it was Chiavarini and Thompson who did the best job up the beat and led the fleet along the reach and down onto the run. Positions remained fairly steady down the run and it was still Thompson and Chiavarini battling at the front up the second beat where the wind

had increased slightly to allow some sitting on the side at times. Chiavarini managed to keep Thompson behind him down the final run to take the win in the final race of the day. Jack Wetherell claimed a solid third place with Hanson in fourth and Michael Beckett claiming his second fifth place of the day. The sailors then began the long light-wind sail back to the harbour with the sun setting over Portland – could be worse!

On Sunday, the breeze was in more of a westerly direction in comparison to the southerly from the day before. The wind was ranging between 8–11knts as the sailors launched. The Race Committee had decided to position the start line at the bottom of the harbour in between the two entrances with the top mark positioned back up towards Chesil beach. In the first race of the day, the big names all started at the pin end and 90 per cent of the fleet had flicked onto port tack within two minutes of the start gun being fired; the wind then wound left making it very difficult to come back from the right-hand side of the course and a lane on port was essential. It was Nick Thompson who sailed the best on the flatter water inside the harbour in Race 3 and managed to win the race fairly comfortably in the end with Chiavarini coming in second and Hanson third.

The second race of the day was fairly similar except the left-hand side of the course was even more favourable and it was Sam Whaley who did a great job to sniff this out and spent the majority of the race in the lead before being passed down the final run by Jack Aitken, who took the bullet after sailing a fantastic race. Jack Wetherell had another solid result finishing third. The overall leaders struggled in this race and were deep at the first mark, Thompson managed to surf on the wake of a passing motorboat and made huge gains down the first run and came back to finish fifth.

With the start line slightly more square in the final race of the weekend, there was a bit more of an even distribution. Chiavarini made an initial move out to the right-hand side of the course, but it was Whaley once again on that left-hand side who led at the top mark. Whaley was chased hard up the second beat by Thompson and Hanson but kept a loose cover on his nearest rivals on the shifty outer loop which was seeing a lot of different patches of pressure due to the effect of Portland. Whaley held onto the lead this time and crossed the line to take a well-deserved win. Hanson managed

to get past Thompson on the last downwind relegating Thompson to second overall and allowing Lorenzo Chiavarini to take the overall win on countback.

Results:

1 Lorenzo Chiavarini, 10pts

2 Nick Thompson, 10pts

3 Elliot Hanson, 12pts

Full results:

<http://www.kbsuk.com/laser/events/showrace.asp?EventID=93&RaceURL=%5Bresults%5D/stdwpnsa1.2017nh.html>