

Ingate Clear Winner Of 5.5 Metre Gold Cup

Well known Australian sailing identity, Gordon Ingate, representing Royal Sydney Yacht Squadron, and his capable crew of Nev Wittey and Tony Header sailing Skagerak won two of yesterday's three final races to win the 5.5 Metre Gold Cup, and in doing so, won the berth to the Scandinavian Gold Cup to be sailed in Hanko, Norway in August this year.

By far the more experienced crew, the three won four of the six race series, second placing in two, sailed in extremely shifty westerly winds that veered south and north of west at times, ranging anywhere from 5-20 knots with gusts at any given time during each race. It made life extremely tricky for the ten boats in the series and left officials no alternative but to keep moving the windward mark throughout the afternoon.

Conditions were almost a carbon copy of the first three races sailed in the six race series the previous week, except on the earlier occasion, breezes remained light.

Hosted by Vacluse Yacht Club, the 5.5's sailed two lap windward-leeward courses on Sydney Harbour, former Olympian, America's Cup helmsman and master match race, Nev Wittey, calling the shots for Gordon Ingate, not putting a foot wrong all day.

Host club sailor, Michael Polkinghorne, sailing Antares, with son Steve and Bret Ballantyne as crew, had his moments in all six races, winning the first, finishing second in four, only to lose his jib halyard just prior to the final race for a DNC for a second overall.

Colin Ryan's Rhapsody won the final race after a spectacular Chinese gybe in Race 5, to come home third overall ahead of another local, and winner of the Silver Cup, Dave De Coster's Barragoola.

Ingate, who won the Scandinavian Gold Cup in 1969, sailing his 5.5 Metre Pam, said 'I am thrilled to be representing Australia again at the Cup after such a long time. This is my 11th Cup and I've been to eight World championships in this class too.'

The 78 year old, known to the yachting fraternity as 'Wing Nut', and is perhaps best known for his various America's Cup crusades for Sir Frank Packer commented, 'I had help from two terrific crew today – Nev and Tony. Nev won't be joining us for the Cup, it will be Mark Downer and Tony - both have sailed with me for many years in the 5.5 and Dragon classes.'

In a illustrious sailing career that spans 70 years, Ingate was chosen to represent Australia at the Olympic Games on three occasions in three different classes; the first in 1948, but was unable to go in both '48 and '52, as he was unable to get time off work – the only mode of travel in those days was by ship! However, after finishing second in the '56 trials, he did make it in the Tempest class in '72, but disappointingly finished well down the field.

Asked about the competition over the weekend, he commented, 'I expected a bit more trouble during the regatta, I thought Rhapsody would give us some hard racing, but it was Antares that gave us the harder time. The conditions yesterday made it all the more interesting; the opportunities were there for the others, particularly in the final race. We were fortunate to get home second in that one.'

It is likely that another Australian icon, Frank Tolhurst, now in his eighties and unequalled Australian winner of the Gold Cup on four occasions, may join Ingate for the Cup in Norway.

Polkinghorne, a former 16' skiff champion who has raced Antares successfully at VYC this season – unbeaten in the class on scratch, did not cover his adversary in most cases, but chose to sail his own course. This was perhaps his downfall to the wily Ingate who, along with Wittey, is the master of tactics, match racing and fleet racing – their experience telling at this series.

Dave De Coster and his crew, younger brother Ben and Rex Cameron, finished third in the final three races today to finish fourth overall – the earlier part of their series not all it could have been. De Coster had his chances, leading in both Races 5 and 6, but it was hard work against the likes of Ingate and Polkinghorne, the latter's boat had superior speed upwind, but lacked the skills of team Ingate.

Commodore of VYC, Bob Hearn, said, 'this was a great series – there were the real professionals like Gordon Ingate and Michael Polkinghorne, some club sailors and a couple of new boats entered the fray, so there was some great racing and some friendly rivalry. It was really good to see our own boats finish the series second and third too. It was great to see Mark Lutowski, a new 5.5 owner from our club, have a go too. He is quite new to sailing and did a great job with his female crew. We will probably have six or seven 5.5's sailing at Vaucluse next summer season, thanks to Dave De Coster and Rob Fielding.

'The racing was much tighter today, Gordon didn't have it all his own way, Dave De Coster from our Club led for most of Race 5 today, then Colin Ryan led the final race to the finish – it was good to see a bit of a mix-up in the top three results,' he added.

This event was a precursor to the 5.5 Metre Worlds which will also be sailed on Sydney Harbour – in January 2005. Over 50 entries are expected from around the globe.

Final Results:

Gordon Ingate (Skagerak) 6 points

Michael Polkinghorne (Antares) 8

Colin Ryan (Rhapsody) 16

Dave De Coster (Barragoola) 21

Peter McDonald (Pam) 22

David Wister (Ballerina) 28

Rob Bishop (Patricia) 28

Jabiru (Hugh Ferrar) 39

Yeoman IV (Bob De Coster) 40

Kings Cross (Mark Kutowski) 47

Di Pearson