

Boating club scores a treble

Worser Bay Boating Club was literally on top of the world last week after three of its sailors completed an amazing treble.

Greg Wilcox, Paul Rhodes and Andrew Phillips took their club to the top internationally by claiming both the open and junior titles at the world OK dinghy yachting championship in Napier.

Cresting the wave of success, Wilcox beat about 75 opponents from 11 countries to become world champion, but Rhodes and Phillips were not to be outdone by the 41-year-old sailmaker.

Rhodes made a late surge up the table to take the silver medal behind his clubmate while 17-year-old Wellington College student Phillips took out the junior world crown for a second straight year.

The three-peat is believed to be unprecedented.

"I think when they had the world champs in Australia a couple of years ago they had a couple of guys right up there but they didn't have the junior champion as well, so it's pretty unheard of," Wilcox says.

The regatta was Wilcox's 12th



By
Sports Reporter
Dylan Thomsen

time at the annual event and from early on he looked on track to beat his previous best finish of fourth.

In the first six of seven races his worst placing was sixth, and with the final event still to be sailed Wilcox already had the gold medal sewn up.

"I was pretty fortunate that I didn't have any bad races.

"(Earlier in the regatta) I kept thinking to myself I've put the time in, I've got the gear so don't blow it' basically.

"This is about as big as it gets."

The boating club welcomed back its champions with a celebration on Friday night.



BAY BOATERS: Paul Rhodes, Greg Wilcox (centre, with trophy) and Andrew Phillips of the Worser Bay Boating Club claimed the world OK dinghy yachting open and junior titles in Napier earlier this month. Image: Simon Haxton



Wellington's Greg Wilcox on his way to victory in the penultimate race of the world OK dinghy championships off Napier yesterday

BILL KEARNS

Tough sailing, but world title OK for Wilcox

KENT GRAY

GREG WILCOX says sailing away with the world OK dinghy title on New Zealand waters made his victory tougher, but all the more satisfying.

The 41-year-old Wellington sailmaker yesterday became the fifth New Zealander to win the world title off Napier's Westshore.

Wilcox led from start to finish

in yesterday's only race to give him an unassailable lead over South Korean Jin Hong-Chul.

It means he can sit out the regatta's seventh and final race today and the Worser Bay Boating Club stalwart said he would probably do so, nursing a hang-over. "I'm a very happy man ... it's a good feeling," Wilcox said last night.

Wilcox's best finish in 11 previous OK dinghy world champi-

onship campaigns came in England in 1983 when he sailed to fourth.

But he rates this week's regatta as one of the toughest he has sailed, with eight of the first 10 finishers from last year's world championships racing, including German Karsten Hitz, who has won the past two world titles.

"The last two worlds were in Europe but this is the one Hitz

said he really wanted because of the different conditions and with all the top Kiwis and Aussies here," Wilcox said.

Wilcox, a five-time national champion, follows Clive Roberts, Peter Lester, Rick Dodson (twice) and Leith Armit as Kiwi world OK champions.

Armit won his fourth world title when the championships were last hosted by the Napier Sailing Club in 1994.

It would be stretching it to call the Worser Bay Boating Club a powerhouse in New Zealand sailing, yet it produced the champion, the runner-up and the junior champion at the recent world dinghy championships sailed off Napier. BRYCE JOHNS meets one of the men who have made the club an OK place to be.

It's all OK at Worser Bay

Hard work pays off for Wilcox

HE might not like you mentioning it, but some of the greats of New Zealand sailing had a hand in Wellingtonian Greg Wilcox winning the world OK Dinghy title recently.

The championships were a triumph for the small Worser Bay Boating Club – not only did Wilcox take the crown, Paul Rhodes was second and Andrew Phillips retained his junior title.

And though Wilcox is the first to acknowledge the tightknit club and its dedication to small boat sailing were big parts in his success, he might not have even been competing had it not been for people like America's Cup icon Chris Dickson.

It was class acts like Dickson, now with the big-spending American Oracle team, who encouraged Wilcox into the single-handed dinghy class.

It didn't happen through any patient or nurturing advice though. Years ago, a young Wilcox was trying his hand at different classes of sailing, but jokingly says he was put off bigger boats by the on-water beatings he took from the likes of Dickson.

"We used to beat him occasionally, but not all the time," Wilcox says. "He was pretty good."

"We weren't really useless or anything. But we [his 470 class partner Earl Berry] thought we wouldn't get any better sailing together."

"I just wanted to go back and sail by myself; I quite liked it."

Wilcox, now 41 and an Oriental Bay sailmaker, had started in single-handed yachts as an 11-year-old.

The Wellington-born man was even with the Worser Bay club back then, 30 years ago. It started by accident through a keen Karaka Bay sailing neighbour.

"I got dragged out there to help one day," says Wilcox. It went from there.

At the start, it was only a social thing. It wasn't until 13 or 14 the typical teenager gave up mainstream sports like cricket, soccer and badminton for the water.

He started in P-class yachts, moved into Starlings and was in the two-man 470 class in his late teens.

He learned some of his most valuable sailing lessons then, thanks to the help of a wily Paremata yachting, Murray Jones. Jones, with partner Andy Knowles, was the 470 king, representing New Zealand at Olympic level. Jones has gone on to bigger and better things, sailing in the last two successful Team NZ America's Cup crews.

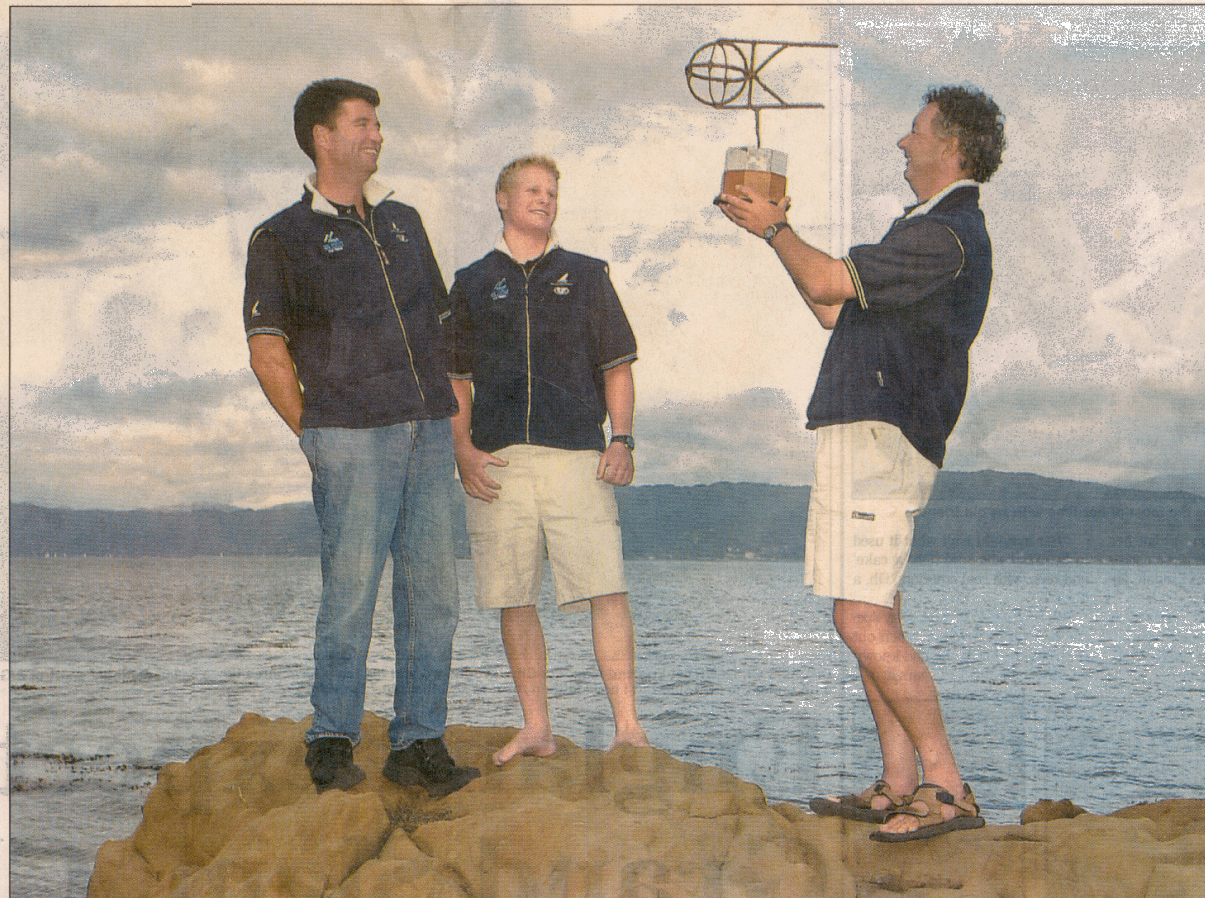
As the main competition around, Wilcox and Berry spent a lot of time on the water with Jones, learning "how to set rig up, how to make boats go faster".

"They used to drag us out to practice in all sorts of weather."

It proved beneficial when he moved back to single-handed boats at age 19.

Most of the 200 Worser Bay club members are OK sailors.

"It's only a small club. There's no facili-



SCALING NEW HEIGHTS – Worser Bay Boating Club sailors, from left, Paul Rhodes, Andrew Phillips and Greg Wilcox. Wilcox won the world OK Dinghy title recently, while Rhodes finished second and Phillips retained his junior title. Picture: MAARTEN HOLL

'It's only a small club. There's no facilities for anything bigger – you can't launch a trailer boat there. It's always been a dinghy club.'

Greg Wilcox

ties for anything bigger – you can't launch a trailer boat there," Wilcox says.

"It's always been a dinghy club."

The path to winning a world title is not easy. Wilcox entered his first world championship more than 20 years ago, has attended 11 times and had a best finish – until Napier – of fourth (England, 1983).

That wasn't enough, and Wilcox and friend and rival Rhodes hatched a plan more than a year ago to stake their claim on home waters in 2002.

"We kind of decided if we were going to do it this time, we may as well do it proper-

ly." It meant making a commitment "instead of having a good time".

"You sort of have lives to go on with – it's hard to fit in the training."

The 2001 world event in Sweden showed they were not far off the pace – Wilcox was ninth and Rhodes eighth. Phillips won the junior title.

The lessons were clear though.

"We needed to be going a bit faster when it's windy. We sort of changed our boat a bit – and sailed a lot when it's been fresh."

Through the season, a group of four –

Wilcox, Rhodes, Phillips and Joe Porebski (25th in the worlds) raced every Saturday and at least two other days a week, for at least two hours a day.

From the club, they headed out to Steeple Rock, raced the three nautical miles and back to the lighthouse at Falcon Shoal, dodging ferries and all.

Ironically, the worlds in Napier were sailed in generally lighter conditions, but it didn't slow Wilcox. He had sewn the title up by race six of the seven. Rhodes won the last race to move into second and Phillips dominated the juniors from the start.

It might not have been windy in Napier, but "I'm sure it all helped", Wilcox says, as did having such a competitive training group.

"We're all like really good friends. We go out there and try hard to beat each other – but we're sharing gear, and information."

The victory was also reward for patience.

"Out of the 12 worlds [I've been to] seven times I've been in the first 10, which isn't too bad."

"I've always been up there but never right up there."

He's been tops on the national scene though, winning the New Zealand title five times.

Wilcox says he'll have a crack at defending his crown in Goa, India, next year. Shipping is already being arranged for the boats.

Thankfully, OK Dinghies are one of the more affordable boating classes.

Yachts are about \$7000 and he bought a new one last year.

"The boat I had before that I had for 20 years."

It's part of the reason he does not regret staying out of the glory divisions people like Dickson have made their names in.

"It's bad enough being poor most of my life doing this class, without going into the more expensive ones."

Capital A-OK in world champs

By BRYCE JOHNS

The Worser Bay Boating Club's domination of the world OK dinghy yachting championships was completed on Saturday with the winner, runner-up and junior world champion all confirmed as Wellington sailors.

Breaker Bay sailmaker Greg Wilcox had already won the world championship ahead of Saturday's seventh and final race in Napier. His club-mate Paul Rhodes won the race to go ahead of Korean Jin Hong-Chul into second place.

And 17-year-old Wellington College student Andrew Phillips finished in 24th place overall, but more importantly retained the world junior title he won in Sweden last year. But for a couple of breakages on the first day, he would have finished in the top 20 in senior ranks.

Phillips said he had been placing more

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emphasis on his overall finish rather than retaining the junior title because of the low standard in youth ranks, but it was still satisfying to hold on to the crown.

He said yesterday his future would continue to be in single-handed boats.

"You've just got yourself to blame," he said. "It helps you improve your sailing."

Phillips, who finished 13th in the senior nationals on the same course in Napier the week before the worlds, said the close work of the Worser Bay contingent had been important in their success.

"We all have our battles. We're sailing pretty much all year round, that's what it's all about."

Along with Wilcox, Rhodes and another highly-ranked Wellingtonian, Joe Porebski, a lot of effort had gone into preparation.

Phillips has been sailing almost daily since December 8. He is searching out overseas opportunities for next year, where he will also look at the laser and Europe dinghy classes.

He is eligible to stay in junior ranks for another two years and said it was too early to say if he would defend his title in Goa, India, next year.

The Wellington group partied hard after their success - Phillips was one of the first to bed, in the back of his car, about 4am.

Wilcox sailed in the last race on Saturday when he didn't have to, cruising around the course in light winds to finish 14th.

He became the fifth New Zealand world OK dinghy champion after Clive Roberts in 1973, Peter Lester in 1977, Rick Dodson in 1979 and 1982, and Leith Armit in 1983, 1985, 1990 and 1994.

YACHTING

Capital sailor on top of world

By BRYCE JOHNS

A week ago Wellington sailor Greg Wilcox finished 11th in the national OK dinghy championships. Yesterday he was crowned world champion.

The 41-year-old Breaker Bay sailmaker won race six of the world championships off Napier's Westshore and in doing so secured the title without having to start today's final race. It completed a remarkable turnaround from the national champs on the same course the week before.

Wilcox, who races out of the Worser Bay club, was disqualified twice for crossing the start line early at the nationals, and though he finished the regatta with two firsts, he couldn't recover to finish higher than 11th. But he learned his lessons for the worlds.

"I was a little more cautious really [at the starts]," he said today.

The win was just reward for an OK dinghy stalwart who has sailed at 11 world championships, the first back in 1980.

The difference this time was a new \$9000 boat and top preparation with fellow Wellington sailors Paul Rhodes and Joe Porebski.

"We just sail against each other all the time and we're all very even," Wilcox said.

Heading into today's final race, Rhodes was third on the standings, and could catch second-placed Korean Jin Hong-Chul. With Wellington's Andrew Phillips looking good to retain his junior title, it was shaping as the Capital's regatta. Wilcox celebrated with a few drinks last night and there was more partying to come. "Tonight will be the big one."