

Test event - pure brilliance from Ben Ainslie

Reports & Results

Ben Ainslie (GBR) produced pure brilliance on the final full racing day for Finns at the Weymouth and Portland International Regatta. Not only did he win both races in confident fashion, he also dispatched his nearest rival in an audacious match racing move before the start, sealing his regatta win with a day to spare. Pieter Jan Postma (NED) is now 19 points behind the Olympic Champion, with Jonathan Lobert (FRA) a further four behind, with just the medal race to sail.

After Weymouth threw its worst weather at the venue on Thursday, the 27 strong fleet had to get up and do it all over again on Friday to catch up the two lost races. However the conditions had significantly moderated with relatively lighter winds all day. In fact for the first race of the day the wind strength never exceeded 10 knots, with Oscar flag for free pumping only flying for the second race.

With the top of the fleet so tight, today was going to be the day of reckoning for many. The Finns were back on the Weymouth Bay West course, straight across the bay from the harbour.

Race nine started in 8-9 knots from the south after a general recall, and under black flag. The left side paid heavily with Zach Railey (USA) leading in



to the top mark from Ben Ainslie (GBR), Brendan Casey (AUS) and Pieter Jan Postma (NED). Inevitably Ainslie had taken the lead at the first gate and then extended on each leg to score a big win. After a lot of place changing at each mark behind him, Postma finally crossed in second with Daniel Birgmark (SWE) having a great last downwind to overtake Casey and take third.

Postma was starting to put together a very good series and now trailed Ainslie by just eight points. Unfortunately for the Dutchman, Ainslie had taken a dislike to this and wanted to make amends in the final race. He hunted him down in the pre-start and inflicted a penalty and then they both started, behind the fleet. Rafa Trujillo (ESP) made the best of the first beat to lead round the top mark from Jonas Hoegh Christensen (DEN), Lei Gong (CHN) – who was actually OCS – and Piotr Kula (POL). Ainslie rounded 16th and Postma last. The job was almost done, but not quite.

Trujillo held the lead until the final 300 metres of the race when – you guessed it – Ainslie came flying past to take his second win of the day. He had taken five boats on the first downwind, then seven on the second upwind and then chipped away until he was in second at the final top mark, right on Trujillo's tail. And it wasn't long before Ainslie was in the lead and taking his fifth race win of the week, so far. Trujillo crossed in second while Kula ended his week on a positive note with a third.

On the second race, Postma said, “To put it into perspective, Ben had eight points on me and I had a discard of 12 points and he had a discard of six points so it was logical for him to match race me, which is what he did. He came at me four minutes before the start and tried to push me out of the start, and I wanted to be closer to the French guy as well so the points gap didn't get too big so then we were there with the three of us together on the line. Actually it is the first time for me to do any match racing but Ben as world match racing champion was a bit more handy at it. I just didn't spend any time on it.”

“Ben had me in a corner and I couldn't follow Jonathan, so Jonathan tacked off one minute before the start and then Ben was close to me and I did a tack and he called a protest. I was a little bit in doubt but I did my turns, so Ben started and I started about a minute later. And then it was just about playing catch up.” Postma finally crossed in 15th.

“Tomorrow, I need to finish top seven to win a medal. I will try to win the silver but we are on the Nothe course so you need to have a plan because the course is changing and the wind is shifty. So I will stay close to Jonathan and try and stay in the front of the fleet and try to win the silver.”

“I am very happy with my week here. I actually wanted to be top three, so I was looking to do as well as I have done but doing it is a different matter, so it's nice. I focussed on three regattas this year, Hyeres, here and Perth and so this is confirmation I am on the right path.”

“We have worked a lot on the light stuff, but I am quite confident now in all conditions, but Ben is so much faster in the light. In the breeze I think I am as fast as him upwind. In the light he is just gone. He is the best, way ahead of the rest of us.”

Third overall Jonathan Lobert said, “I have been pretty tense over the last few races. It has turned into quite a long event and I am not so used to being on the podium all week. But slowly today I got over it and managed to take a few places and didn't have too bad a day.”

“It's always tough racing with Ben. He has so much more experience than me with four Olympics, so it's great to be so close to him, winning a few racing and being in touch. The plan tomorrow is to just do the best race I can. I am not that far away from PJ. You never know with this tricky medal race – you can easily finish in 10th.”

“I'm pretty happy with my week. It's been a very well organised regatta with good races and I learned a lot. Let's see if I can stand on the podium tomorrow.”

In sixth place, Hoegh Christensen still has a chance at a medal. “The week has been all right for me. A medal tomorrow is possible. There's a chance, and you never know. I was hoping for a top five. I am not going that fast though, not all the time, just sometimes slow in patches. Some of that is fitness, especially offwind, but a lot is just lack of hours in the boat. But Ben is so much faster than all of us it's ridiculous.”

Ainslie summed up, “It's a relief to win here today. It's good to take the pressure off tomorrow and it's also a big step forwards for selection next year. It's obviously up to the selection committee what they want to do but I have ticked all the boxes.”

“Today was hard because PJ was sailing so well and it was hard to get any points on him. If I was winning races he was always finishing in second or third and as he had a much bigger discard, the plan was to make sure he finished outside that. And that all went well and I had an opportunity to go for it and sail through the fleet. I managed to do that.”

Was he surprised he did it so easily, “It's never easy, but the free pumping was on the lower limit so the technique with that is really important. I am not as big as the other guys so maybe that helped, but you have to be able to win in all conditions as well.”

So the medal race line up looks like this:

Ben Ainslie (GBR) - five time world champion, four time European champion, twice Olympic champion, only been beaten a handful of times since 2004. Clear favourite. Has been very solid here this week apart from the second day, but wrapped it up with four race wins out of five races and now has an unassailable 19 point lead.

Pieter Jan Postma (NED) - runner up at the 2007 world championship and the 2007 pre-Olympics in China. Struggled with form for a few years and then took a big break is now back with a vengeance, faster and more determined than ever. Only sailor here apart from Ainslie to win more than one race. Thrives under pressure but still has it all to do to make sure of a medal.

Jonathan Lobert (FRA) – won a tight trials against Thomas Le Breton to get here and has had a fantastic week so far, though gained a few more points than he would have liked in the past few days. He has a good record in Weymouth, having finished as runner up to Ainslie at the 2010 Sail for Gold regatta. A fantastic sailor to watch in the breeze with a very fluent, athletic style. Will he go for silver or protect the bronze?

Rafael Trujillo (ESP) – 2004 Olympic Silver medallist and 2007 World Champion. Runner up at the World Championship in 2010 and was expected to be a strong competitor here, especially in the breeze. Can take silver if the numbers go his way, but only three boats from bronze.

Ivan Kljakovic Gaspic (CRO) – double European Champion and always one of the clear favourites for a medal. Won here in 2009 at the Sail for Gold event. Only one point behind Trujillo, so he has a bit of work to do to take a medal here but normally does well in the medal races.

Jonas Hoegh-Christensen (DEN) – world champion in 2006 and 2009. Placed sixth at the 2008 Olympics, though was a favourite for a medal. Been out of full time sailing since the 2008 Olympics, but has been sailing well recently. Consistently in the top seven or eight all week, and regularly at the front upwind. Outside chance of snatching the bronze.

Deniss Karpak (EST) – jumped in the Finn in 2008 after getting too big for the Laser. Recently placed 11th at the Europeans and is certainly capable of winning races and medals on his day. Had a great start to the regatta but dropped down a bit after Wednesday, but still a small chance at a medal.

Dan Slater (NZL) – runner up in the 2008 World Championship and then had a poor 2008 Olympics. Been suffering with illness all week so not sailing to his full potential.

Zach Railey (USA) – 2008 Olympic Silver medallist and runner up at the 2009 world championship. One of the lightest here at the moment so struggled in the windy conditions, but always a tough competitor and has won many a medal race.

Daniel Birgmark (SWE) – best result was bronze at the 2010 Europeans, though he also placed fourth at the 2008 Olympics, on equal points with the bronze medallist. Has had a bit of an up and down week, but usually performs well in medal races by staying out of trouble.

The Weymouth and Portland International Regatta 2011 is the test event for the sailing events of the London 2012 Olympic Games, as part of the London Prepares series. The Finns have sailed a 10 race series from Saturday 6 August to Friday 12 August. The medal race for the top 10 is scheduled to take place tomorrow, Saturday 13 August. There are five course areas (three offshore, one in Portland Harbour and one under the Nothe) and the fleet has raced on all the courses over the week. The medal race will be sailed on the Nothe course, starting at 1400

Results after 10 races (one discard)

- 1 GBR Ben Ainslie 17
- 2 NED Pieter Jan Postma 36
- 3 FRA Jonathan Lobert 44
- 4 ESP Rafael Trujillo 50
- 5 CRO Ivan Kljakovic Gaspic 51
- 6 DEN Jonas Hoegh Christensen 58
- 7 EST Deniss Karpak 60
- 8 NZL Dan Slater 74
- 9 USA Zach Railey 76
- 10 SWE Daniel Birgmark 88

Event website: <http://www.sailing.org/london2012/2011-test-event.php>

Full Results: http://www.sailing.org/uploads/WPIR2011/Finn_Results.pdf

Finn class on Facebook with photo galleries: <http://www.facebook.com/pages/Finn-Class/110408332633>

Finn class on-the-water with Twitter: http://twitter.com/Finn_Class