



RUTLAND
SAILING CLUB

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SPECIAL OLYMPIC SAILORS REVEL IN TESTING RUTLAND WATER CONDITIONS

Special Olympic Sailors came ashore last night with a sense of achievement at the end of a three day, twenty race regatta which tested both their skills and bravery.

The athletes normally sail in the sheltered conditions of London's docklands. But this week they competed not only against each other, but also everything Rutland Water could throw at them: heavy rain, large waves and high winds. And of course this is just the sort of weather sailors love, so a great time was had by all and the Special Olympics GB National Summer Games sailing competition hosted by Rutland Sailing Club fully lived up to expectation.

Principal Race Officer, Club Member and Olympic Silver Medallist David Wilkins said: "The conditions have been perfect really. We've always had good breezes, usually 8 to 10 knots minimum. But we have had 24 knots gusting to over 30 on Tuesday, which is a testing Force 6, so at times it has been challenging. In fact on that occasion, had the race not been underway we would probably not have started. But we had plenty of safety cover, and the competitors were handling the conditions well and enjoying themselves, so we let them finish and then brought them in."

The English Institute of Sport RYA National Training Venue

Rutland Sailing Club Ltd . Gibbet Lane Edith Weston Oakham Rutland LE15 8HJ
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And the sailors agree. "It's been quite challenging, particularly on Tuesday because of the high wind," said Michael Kennet from London. "But it's been great fun!" And his colleague Joanne Shepherd agrees: "Tuesday was rough, but I really enjoyed it."

As well as the weather conditions, the sailors had to get used to the boats provided for the event by members of the sailing club. These were a matched set of National Squibs which being 6 metre, three-quarter tonne keelboats are quite different to the Bosun and Omega dinghies in which the teams usually race.

The Squib is of course quite a technical boat to sail fast, and the Rutland Squib Fleet boats are all rigged to reflect the latest thinking in the class. So compared to the crew's usual boats, the interior looked like an explosion in a string factory. But, given the water and the conditions, the Squib was the right choice for the event. And as the Rutland Squib Fleet owners and Squib guru Tony Saltonstall were on hand to help the visitors, they had every opportunity to get to grips with this exciting new experience.

Nic Jones, Technical Delegate and Head Coach for Sailing in the Special Olympics: "It's been amazing. The club has been wonderful in supporting us and the facilities are marvellous. We were offered the choice of Squibs or Laser 2000 dinghies, but I went to the Squib thinking it was the best option. And the Squib Fleet owners have been brilliant with advice and technical help. They've been taking people to one side and saying, 'Look if you do this, if you do that the boat will go quicker' ... and so the sailors have been able to get the best out of the boats."

And so to the results.

Special Olympic sailing is organised in divisions (see the info box) and a total of twenty races took place during the three days of competition. In both divisions the racing was close and interesting, the leading positions changing often as the sailors became used to the open water, the weather conditions and the keelboats. In the end, Ian Hardwick and his crew Michael Whitehead won Division One; and Sarah Biggs crewed by Robin Thompson were first in Division Two.

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Following the large-scale Opening Ceremony at the Walker's Stadium in Leicester where the Prime Minister was present, the prize-giving for the sailing was a more modest affair. There was a simple presentation for the winners at the sailing club on Thursday afternoon, when the sailors were praised for their sportsmanship and skill by the Principal Race Officer, and thanks were given to Rutland Sailing Club and the Rutland Squib Fleet for their hard work in making the event possible.

Britain has won more medals in sailing than any other Olympic sport. Let's hope that our Special Olympic sailors continue this tradition when some of the competitors from this event in Rutland represent Great Britain at the World Special Olympic Games in Athens in 2011.

The full results were:

Division One

Rank	Helm	Crew
1st	Ian Hardwick	Michael Whitehead
1st	Michael Kennet	Ray Stead
2nd	Lee Cox	Nic Jones

Division Two

Rank	Helm	Crew
1st	Sarah Biggs	Robin Thompson
2nd	Jo Shepherd	Theresa Haddock
3rd	John Hollingsworth	John Shepherd

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Info Box

The Special Olympics offers more than 30 Olympic-type individual and team sports that provide meaningful training and competition opportunities for persons with intellectual disabilities, including age-appropriate activities and activities for lower ability athletes. It differs from the Paralympics because many of the competitors have no physical disability.

Sailing in the Special Olympics is a so-called 'Unified Sport'. This means that Special Olympics athletes and athletes without intellectual disabilities (who are called Partners) team up to train and compete. In sailing, crews comprise athletes with and without intellectual disabilities. So if a boat is typically raced by a crew of 2, one member will be an individual with intellectual disabilities. If the boat is typically raced by a crew of 3 or more, the majority of the crew are individuals with intellectual disabilities.

The competition divisions are organised as follows:

- Level I: The Special Olympics athlete has responsibility for head sail trim.
- Level II: A Special Olympics athlete member of the crew shall control the helm for at least 50 % of the race.
- Level III: The boat has all Special Olympics athletes with an on-board coach. The athletes have complete control of the boat. The coach can offer verbal assistance. If for any reason the coach becomes physically involved with the sailing of the boat, the team must retire from the race and will be scored a 'Did Not Finish' (DNF).
- Level IV: The entire team consists of Special Olympics athletes - no coach is on board.
- Level V: Special Olympics athletes compete single-handed.
- Level VI: The boat has all Special Olympics athletes with an on-board coach. The athletes have complete control of the boat, including use of a spinnaker. The coach can offer verbal assistance. If, for any reason, the coach becomes physically involved with the sailing of the boat, the team must retire from the race and will be scored a 'Did Not Finish' (DNF).

Special Olympics Sailing is governed by rules based upon the ISAF Racing Rules of Sailing as used in competitive sailing all over the world.

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