

PINECRESTED, 2007

To be “Pinecrested”: to see yourself losing a seemingly insurmountable lead without warning, in a matter of minutes, two windshifts, two lulls, four gusts, and you sit in your boat and say to yourself, “What just happened?!”

There were those that consistently hit the starting line at full speed at the leeward (pin) end. By the end of the regatta, for example, it had become common to see Bob Hrubes (11391) breaking free of the fleet at the pin end of the line right after the start. With that leeward end start and a few well-placed tacks back toward the center, Bob was in the lead group at the first mark many times throughout the regatta. Nick Nash (11515) was often with Hrubes, making a fast track up the beat on a starboard tack, near the southern shore of Pinecrest Lake, tacking back toward the center when the shifts allowed. Nick led a couple of the races... for a while. Paul Tara (11827) was also often seen at the leeward end right after the starts. In one of his best races, he hit that pin end a little early and had to re-start the race behind most of the fleet. By the weather mark, however, Tara had worked himself back into the lead group. Paul won that race. Tara’s graceful “comeback” on that first leg was not the only one of the week.

There were those that banked on the other end of the line, the committee boat end, almost every time, hoping for the big shift from the right to pop them into an early lead. Art Lange (11783), for example, was seldom seen near the middle or near the leeward end of the starting line. It appeared that he had decided that the committee boat side of the line was either the favored end or soon would be, perhaps after the first big wind shift from the right. Lange was often joined by John Pacholski (11815) and John Liebenberg (11657). Over the course of the week it turned out that the windward end of the line may not have been the place to be (easy to say now... hindsight *is* “20-20”), with most of the early leaders arriving at the first mark from either the left or the center of the course most of the time.

There were those, finally, that started more conservatively, near the middle of the line, seeking clear wind ahead and the ability to tack or hold course depending on the direction and strength of the wind farther up the first leg. Often in that group were notables Fred Paxton (11649), Gordie Nash (11500), and Dave Vickland (11768). Like the left side and the right side, the center was not the right place to be all of the time either; but those near the center almost always had a chance to stay in touch with the truly favored side and a good chance to be in the top ten at the first mark. A few times, the center of the race course *was* the place to be on the first leg. Both Tara and Vickland made it work well enough to arrive at the weather mark in first place a couple of times. Generally, in almost every race, however, about half of the fleet went left and half went to the right. Neither side was ever the completely correct way to go up the first beat at Pinecrest. Good old hindsight showed that if a competitor could be in the top five to seven places at the first mark, he or she had a very good chance of finding himself or herself in or near the lead at some point later in the race. Vicki Gilmour (11714) did that at least twice and found herself with a 100-yard lead over the whole fleet.

So, what did it take to have a good average performance on the first leg of the eight races? It took patience, speed, and some quick decision-making - and of course, to discover very quickly that one had just made a poor decision. Flexibility seemed to be the key to success at Pinecrest this year. Those that could change-up their plan and their sailing style quickly to meet wind conditions and tactical situations kept coming out on top during the four days of racing. If we were on the lifted tack and half of the fleet was lifting inside of us to windward, we just had to be patient, let our boat go as fast as it could, and wait our turn, that saving shift that might put us back into contention. If that saving shift did not materialize, we had to take our lumps, get around the mark, and remember that it was going to be a long race with plenty of opportunity for gaining or losing for all competitors.

Many times during the racing, leaders and groups of leaders lost leads of over one hundred yards, as others, singles and in groups of four or five, found some favored shift and gobbled up great distances. Vickland, for example, once led a following group by about one hundred yards about half way back to the finish line on a final leg. On the beach after the race, he was heard to say, "Those five guys gobbled me up and spit me out the back as they sailed by!" He had managed to go from first place to sixth place in less than a couple of hundred yards, often called "snagging defeat from the jaws of victory". Art Lange did just the opposite in a couple of races, coming from behind (back in the pack, around 15th to 20th place) to finish in the top five, winning one of the races. John Pacholski also had great recoveries a few times, climbing from positions worse than tenth to work himself into the top three or four by the time he reached the finish line. The week of racing is full of stories of great gains and great losses. Most of us experienced both at some point in the regatta. All we could really do was to never give up. No race was ever over until it was over. No lead was ever big enough; no finish position ever guaranteed until the finishing whistle was heard.

Every competitor experienced incredible good luck at times. And, surely every competitor had some horribly bad luck, as well. Every competitor made some great decisions, correctly scoping out Pinecrest Lake and heading toward that next favored wind shift. But, every competitor also made some really bad decisions, heading for the wrong side of the course with a will, perhaps, or tacking on some fantasy wind shift, one of those wish-shifts that we all like so well. All any of us could do was to make the best of both good and bad situations and wait for our turn... again and again. Those that came out on top, or just a little better than others, perhaps beating a friendly rival by a point or two overall at the end of the regatta, did it, I think, with patience. There was no way that any of us could ever control what any other competitor or group of competitors might do on any leg. Anything could happen, and as often as not, anything did happen. The winners simply made the best of every situation that came to them. It was a wonderful competition, the final outcome in doubt (for almost all of us) until the final leg of the final race of the series.