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White-winged sailors

## ***Inland regatta draws 130 to West Lake Okoboji (2005)***

By Greg Drees, Journal correspondent



*These sailors competed in the E Class division of the Inland Lake Yachting Association's Championship Regatta recently on West Lake Okoboji. Another regatta is slated for Sept. 24-25 on West Lake Okoboji. (Photo by Greg Drees)*

OKOBOJI, Iowa -- Sailors, compelled to compete against fellow mariners, convened on West Lake Okoboji for the Inland Lakes Yachting Association Annual Championship Regatta last week.

Hosted for the first time in six years by the Okoboji Yacht Club (OYC), the regatta featured class C, E, I20, MC and M16 sailboats.

About 130 sailors representing more than a dozen clubs throughout the Midwest participated in the six-day event. Moored in Miller's Bay in front of the OYC when they weren't in competition, the boats offered the appearance of an intriguing flotilla to curiosity seekers and a fleet of tactical racers to experienced sailors.

On the water -- depending on the day and the class of racing -- the spectacle of ivory sails and rainbow spinnakers was breathtaking.

To the novice spectator, the races were aesthetically surprising and filled with winds that either seemed fickle, perfect or too strong. To the seasoned sailor, every nuance of the sport was in full play as the races unfolded, each day bringing into play a mixture of elements and strategies. A good sailor studies the wind like a prognosticator, searching for just the right zephyr that will breathe life into a race.

"Reading the wind, anticipating patterns that come down the lake and getting in sync with almost indiscernible puffs are skills of a good sailor," said Jim Jensen of Arnolds Park, who began crewing at age 6 on West Lake Okoboji. Jensen shared his expertise in the analysis of the regatta, watching the C boats in a race impaired by capricious

winds.

"The first leg of the race is directly into the wind and is about a mile to a mile-and-a-half long," Jensen said. "And officials like to have competitors sail six or seven miles to the finish buoy. The boats will usually sail the course twice and then make the final leg to windward."

He explained that in each class the preferred six-race format requires three races to be completed before it is considered an official regatta.

Unfortunately the C boats were only able to finish two races, unlike the other classes that all finished six-race cards. "It's unfortunate, because there are some world-class sailors out there," Jensen said.

Jensen said the ideal sailing wind is about 15-18 miles per hour and steady as opposed to gusty. Winds in excess of about 25 miles per hour are hard on sailors and their boats.

Jensen said West Lake Okoboji, buoyed by the presence of the historic OYC in Miller's Bay, is steeped in sailing tradition. "However, I think the interest in sailing nationwide is waning," he said. "The sport demands parents with the time and patience to teach their kids and it requires sustained interest to achieve the learning curve to become skilled. There are just too many other diversions out there for kids today."

Jensen was quick to add that sailing for pleasure and competition will always have a place in the Iowa Great Lakes and elsewhere. "It's just natural to look out over this lake and see the beauty of white sails against blue water," he said.

Trophies were awarded at the OYC to the top three finishers in four classes following the competition. The Inland Regatta Championship will now rotate to venues at five other sites before returning again to Okoboji. Another event, the Laser District 21 Grand Prix Regatta, will be hosted on West Lake Sept. 24-25, 2005.