CALIFORNIAN BIG IN FLORIDA

Earl Elms Tops, Augie Diaz 2nd, Jeff Lenhart 3rd

The WINNERS - No 30001, 1911, 18327. Earl Elms, Augie Diaz and Jeff Lenhart as they appear with their trophies from the 34th Annual SCIFA Midwinter Regatta. - Clearwater Sailing Club Photo.

Midwinters

Thirteen states and Canada provided 30 Snippers to make the 34th annual SCIFA Midwinter Championship at Clearwater the largest ever. Only four races of the scheduled six were sailed in what the locals described as the windiest weather yet.

World and National Champ Earl Elms, after missing last year, came on strong to take the Midwinter title as well as his first Zimmerman trophy. The latter is awarded to the best scorer for the race. Miami and Clearwater regattas, and was donated by Paul Connors of Carl Zimmerman. Augie Diaz of Miami was second, closely followed by Californian Jeff Lenhart.

The regatta started on Tuesday after a long trek to the Gulf. The pass is always hot but it is possible to get out. The fleet was divided into four groups, each with a guide and after much sailing everyone reached the starting line. Sharply winds caused some delays but the first race got under way in northwesterly winds at about 12 knots. The waves were plain dumpy and presented problems to the late sailors. The Floridians stated that there was never such a chop for this wind.

RACE 1. It was Jeff Lenhart from almost the beginning. A good start put him at the windward mark ahead of Dick Tillman. He continued on to a relatively easy win. Elms put on a charge, gaining two boats in two legs of the race and eventually took a second. Augie and third followed by Gonzalo and Don Cochran, Jr., in fifth. Tillman dropped to sixth while Marion Servy, defending champion and eight-time winner was seventh. Francis said he just couldn't get his boat going. "She's got a flat bottom and we just need a little more than the others to move out."

RACE 2. The winds dropped to around 8 in the second race but the chop didn't. However, it didn't bother Elms as though it was not an easy win. He had a lack of wind on the third leg and just did edge out Gonzalo Diaz at the line. Lenhart came across next with Augie right behind. Tillman was fifth and Frank Richardson, forgetting the many obligations he regretted chairman, was sixth.

Buzz Lehman and Tom Raithe broke records in the second race and spent quite a time waiting for a tow. The rescue boats were busy trying to rescue Dick Edwards who capsized and his borrowed boat sank.

The standings after these two races was Elms, Lenhart, Gonzalo Diaz, Augie Diaz and Dick Tillman, all looking forward to the next day's races. Everyone enjoyed the wonderful fish fry that evening.

On Wednesday the winds picked up to over 20 knots and the race committee decided that it was marginal, especially if continued to build as predicted. It would have been a long way to South Bay and even tougher beating back into the northwesterly. There were many boats from the heavy-weather boys but with two more days there should not have been any problem in getting four more races.

The prediction for Thursday was too much wind to sail in the Gulf and there was until everyone got to South Bay. But the wind never got over 15 and occasionally dropped to almost a drifter.

RACE 3. With another display of fine sailing, Elms won with an almost unbelievable margin of over three minutes. Tillman was second boat across, just edging out Don Cochran while Augie was fourth and Gonzalo fifth.

RACE 4. The finish of this race was much closer. On the second half of the triangular course a tremendous shift enabled the boats on the port side of the course to round the windward mark without tacking. It also put a number of boats down the drain. Augie won this one with Earl second and Steve third. Lenhart took a fourth and Terry Lynn a fifth.

Friday morning greeted the skippers with winds out of the south west well over 20 in the protected area of the dock. The day's races were called and not a howl was heard. As it turned out, after a brief rain shortly after noon, the wind dropped to 10 but by that time the party under the shed was in full swing.
TO THE GULF - Route appears as if sailing on land. Actually the camera was located on the west side of the northern tip of Clearwater Beach. It illustrates the circuitous route through Biscuit Pass. The pass was closed by a hurricane in 1968 and has not been dredged since.

- Clearwater Sun Staff

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