

# New Zealand Optimist Nationals 2006

Tim Hannah

Back in February I won the Victorian Optimist Champs and first prize of a trip to New Zealand to compete in their National Championships thanks to Steven Bond at **OziOpti**.

## Preparation

**OziOpti** lent me a boat to practice in, but the timing of Sabot State titles in the two weeks before New Zealand did not help, and I had only done 6 Opti races before leaving for NZ

## The Regatta

There were 230 boats from NZ, Noumea, Tahiti and 5 from Aus.

The schedule included four races a day, with lunch on the water. Up to 8 hours on the water. Which was OK except when each boat I asked denied having my lunch!

Target times were 50 minutes, with a maximum of 80. Apart from the first race where no boat finished in time conditions were generally in the 10 to 20 kts range, increasing through the day. The wind was on-shore, bringing some large waves, which made down wind lots of fun.

It was crowded on the water. Much bigger than anything in Aus. The gate marks were very close so there was barely enough room for every one to fit. Lots of yelling .I should learn French.

I think my sail may have been a bit flat and had the fullness too far forward or may be its my upwind in waves in an Opti technique, but I couldn't point as high as others. If I started in the middle of the line I fell into dirty air. So I kept to the pin, and got some really good starts (and one OCS). In the last race I crossed the fleet on Port. I couldn't really keep up with the top boats upwind, unless it was quite windy. I got to the first mark in the top 10 once and in the top 20 quite a few times. I went better in the stronger breezes. There was plenty of starting practice with 15 races and a lot of general recalls. Most races were started using the "Z" flag. Jury boats were right in the start, blowing their whistles. Optis seem to skull up to the line, go backwards and skull up again. There were more than 60 on the water penalties handed out.

I had a few top 20 and top 25 finishes, but an OCS, a capsize and a couple of not so good races, finishing in the 50's.

## I have learned

I would like to do the regatta again. It was a great experience.

Next time I would be more familiar with the boat and the equipment and have more time to practice Opti techniques.

I would organise a support boat. There were about 50 support boats on the course. I was lucky the people from Kohimarama YC took care of us. Major clubs all turned up with large tents as home base, with their coaches and up to six Ribs

Junior sailing in NZ is taken very seriously. The sailors I met trained with coaching support four times a week. Lots had taken time off school in the weeks prior. They have fitness programs, on the water training and sports psychology all for Optimist sailors.

Nearly all of the top 20 had been to overseas regattas before.

Next time I would make an arrangement with a well-known local coach. I tried this but the people I knew were all at the NZ Youth Regatta.

I was lucky to have met Laurence Fauchelle from NZ Sailing Academy on the first day and he helped with my rig set up each day and on the water.

The NZ Optis sail in club fleets of 30 plus. They get over 100 in the Auckland Champs and again at the North Island Titles. They have lots of experience at big fleet racing and in performing in big races. That is something we cannot do in Victoria in any class.

## Conclusion

I knew that with my lack of time in an Opti I would not be at the front. I aimed to get some good starts in the big fleets and to improve my big fleet sailing. I think I succeeded. I was ranked 163<sup>rd</sup> and finished 71<sup>st</sup>, having learned heaps on the way.

All in all it was great fun and a worthwhile experience. I am grateful to **VIODA** and **Ozi Opti** in particular for the opportunity.

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