



It's never easy to get out of work in San Jose before 3.30 every other Thursday in the summer. But it's (almost) always worth it. Especially today... The view from Golden Gate is spectacular as usual, but i'm in a hurry to make the 5pm committee boat departure.





Cressy (the start boat) is a little delayed, but there is plenty of time to make the start time - after all, Robbie Dean is running the show today. As 600 ponies are pushing 3 Protectors to their positions around the race course, I'm regretting the decision to be on the race committee on this day. The weather is just as perfect as it gets for San Francisco - unseasonably warm, with a nice breeze, and butter flat (for Crissy at least). The fleet is on mostly on 9-11 size kites, and as they all sail by with big grins on their faces, I can tell everyone is enjoying the beautiful day.





Smile John!

Top racers in the world (Johnny, Bernie, Adam, Joey...) are joined by the strong group of local riders led by the legend himself - Chip Wasson. Of course, Erika Heineken is there to challenge the top guys. And the top female Bulgarian rider is also at stake - as Boriana and Eugenia take the course. There are newcomers as well: the youth - high school student Nicolai Sponholtz, is joined by the experience - UCSC professor, James Shanahan.

Robbie Dean is a master conductor, and as he goes thru the starting sequence with meticulous precision, the riders slowly mass into a starboard, and a (smaller) port fleets. The top riders are in the port starting fleet, and the wind favors it throughout the event. There is a catch though - the pin is about 30 feet from the rocky shore, and forces the riders into tricky maneuvering to make the start line. Port was the right call, and as the gun signals the start of the race, the starboard fleet is clearly beaten. Easy conditions do not allow for any mistakes - and Johnny Heineken is not about to make any. He leads start to finish, distancing himself from Joey Pasquali. Erica runs a superb race to take 3rd. They are followed by several groups, as everyone finds someone to race against - it seems like there are several photo finishes.





Bret Herscher, Tobin Fisher, Sandy Parker in a tight finish

Nicolai finishes his first (as well as the next two) race well within the qualifying time - a huge success. As James (Shanahan) makes his final approach, we are counting down the time. He is about to make it within 5 seconds of the time limit, only to be denied by the tour boat cutting across the finish line. Ahh, the agony!



Denied by the boat!

Second race almost repeats the first, with a slight difference in the order after Johnny. The story of the day has to be Brian (Bernie) Lake on a foil, mounted on his skimboard. It seems the first 2 races were a bit of a struggle, as he was dialing in the gear, and only occasionally making clean tacks (and jibes).

As in the first two races, the fleet splits, and this time more than half the riders are attempting the port start. That is probably more than the pin bottleneck can handle, and to make things worse, Kevin Gowney times his (starboard) start perfectly at the middle of the start line, effectively cutting off the entire port fleet. Everybody, that is, but Bernie, as he demonstrates extreme upwind performance (and his skill), squeaking over Kevin, with nothing but clear air all the way to the windmark. The rest of the top riders are fighting through the starboard fleet, in a futile attempt to catch Bernie. Even with an iffy tack on the layline, Bernie leads Johnny by about 100 yards as they round the mark. Looking from the start boat, it seems like Johnny is comfortably taking the lead, furiously working his kite downwind - furiously compared to Bernie's kite. It seems the green Velocity is just lazily floating down by Crissy beach. As they approach the start/finish line, I realize that the difference is not that great. Johnny is leading, but not by much. He also has to jibe away from the finish line, effectively giving Bernie the lead. As they approach the leeward gate, Bernie does a couple of 'imperfect' turns, which is all Johnny needs to take the lead. He claims his third bullet of the day, with Bernie comfortably in second. As the rest of the fleet stream through the finish, on the way to some well deserved beach refreshments, and the post race SFYC social, Johnny hops on Bernie's foil for a late evening session. Are we witnessing a new revolution in kite racing?