



San Francisco Bay was not kind to the fleet on Day 1 of the 2009 SAP 505 World Championship Sunday



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Holt/Smit lead after wild & windy day on the Bay

SAN FRANCISCO, CA

Round One to Mike Holt in the 2009 SAP 505 World Championship Sunday which saw 98 boats slugging it not only among themselves but against the rough and tumble elements of San Francisco Bay, hosted by the St. Francis Yacht Club.

With chill winds building to 25 knots blowing in through the fog-shrouded Golden Gate Bridge, Holt and crew Carl Smit scored 1-2 finishes, while only 45 of the 88 entries were scored as even starting the second race. Countless boats capsized---including favorite Mike Martin twice. Some broke down, others dropped out and limped to refuge on Treasure Island on the south of the bay or Angel Island to the north. By unofficial count 14 had to be towed back six miles upwind to the Crissy Field staging area because they were in no condition to sail.

It would be a long night in the boat yard repairing boats to continue the fight Monday with a single race starting at 2 p.m., with some competitors perhaps down for the count.

Top contenders at the moment are three-time world champion Chris Nicholson of Australia and crew Casey Smith (4-3) in second place, followed by two American teams sharing third: Nick Adamson and crew Steve Bourdow (9-2) and 1999 champion Howard Hamlin and crew Ian Mitchell of Great Britain (5-6).

Mitchell was scheduled to turn over his seat Monday to the Bay Area's own Paul Cayard, just returned from Audi MedCup competition in Portugal where he called tactics that carried Artemis into first place near the windup of the regatta.

Views from the Worlds – Day 1



Martin and Nelson recovered from this flip, but not next one (below) as Holt/Smit led them in Race 2



Dennis Surtees, a local sailing veteran who had Cayard as crew when they finished second in the 505 Worlds at Durban, South Africa 30 years ago, this time is driving a press photo boat on the course. He was hurting for the competitors Sunday.

"Oh, I feel so sorry for these guys," Surtees said in all sincerity while following the carnage. "I've been in so many races like these that I know what they're going through."

A total of nine races are scheduled through Saturday, with one throw-out allowed after four races and two after eight races. Martin and Nelson already have one to toss, so their pain may only be temporary.

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Instead of a conventional starting line, by 505 Worlds tradition the fleet is using Gate Starts in which all competitors start by crossing on starboard tack behind a designated "rabbit" race boat sailing on port tack. The best benefit of that plan is that even with nearly a hundred boats, there are no general recalls.

SAP is the naming sponsor and APL is the presenting sponsor. Marine Media Alliance, Drystone Berridge Vineyard Estates, Lindsay Art Glass, North Sails, Ronstan and 505 American Section are supporting sponsors.

The wind Sunday was 17 knots---moderate by local standards--for the first race and then jumped in to the mid-20s, sweeping a cotton field of whitecaps and close-bunched rollers with five-foot troughs down to the Berkeley Circle in the East Bay.

When Holt, a native of Great Britain now living in nearby Santa Cruz, and Smit finished 17 seconds behind Martin and crew Jeff Nelson in the first race and Holt/Smit led a close duel two minutes ahead of the nearest pursuers in the second race, it appeared they were repeating their final first- and second-place results in the North American Championship last week when Martin prevailed.

But it's not going to be that easy.

Martin and Nelson had such a long lead on the second of three laps in the first 10-nautical mile race that when their boat inexplicably flipped approaching the reach mark under spinnaker, they were able to right it quickly enough to stay on the pace and go on to win comfortably.

They weren't as lucky in the second race. In the same reaching area of the course, they followed Holt and Smit around the mark by a few boat lengths and flipped again, but this time they were unable to recover.



Holt and Smit (above) speed past one of many stricken rivals (below)



Nelson said, "We hit a bad wave, I got knocked into Mike and he went over the back."

Martin: "Whatever. We got the boat back up, but then it went over again and the mast stuck."

The top of the mast was broken in the mud of the shallow East Bay, knocking them out of the race---a fate shared by countless rivals.

Holt and Smit, meanwhile, went on to win by three minutes with second place out of sight in the windy mist, but they also were hurting with a critically bent mast and the race not half over.

"It happened on the reach," Holt said. "We were just hoping it would hold, and it was getting scary. The last leeward mark we were saying, 'It's not gonna make it.' "

But it did, and both Martin and Holt had spare masts, which they'll have in place Monday, hoping to be ready for anything.

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