

Township Runs Away From Rest of Field In the Surf City Epic

But Home Team Fights Until the Last

By RICK MELLERUP

Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. In last year's inaugural version of the Surf City Epic lifeguard tournament, the host team had stunned the world – OK, at least that part of the world that follows lifeguard competitions on LBI – by winning! More importantly for the ego perhaps, the SCBP had defeated the mighty Long Beach Township Beach Patrol to capture the championship! What upstarts! It was almost as unimaginable as, oh, the New York Jets beating the Baltimore Colts in Super Bowl III!

Surf City Beach Patrol Captain Mark Dileo admitted earlier this spring that his squad had sort of pulled a quick one on the Township and the rest of the competition

last summer. The Epic is quite different from most tournaments in that it only features five events spaced over the course of one evening, instead of 10, 12, or 14 spread over two nights. But its events are longer and more grueling than those found in most tournaments – the Epic run-swim that gives the tourney its name, for example, consists of a 1.6-mile run near the water's edge, followed by a four-tenths of a mile swim. The Epic is also the first major competition on LBI during the course of the summer. Finally, only six athletes from each participating beach patrol are allowed to compete.

Dileo figured the six-athlete rule would cut down on the advantage that a much larger patrol like the

Township's naturally has. He was also banking that some of the athletes on other squads might not be fully in training at such an early date and that because of the length of the races, would tire, allowing Surf City to emerge victorious. Needless to say, Dileo figured and banked (my God, I'm making him sound like an accountant or a bookie) correctly.

Alas, as Rip Sewell learned when facing Ted Williams in the 1946 Major League All-Star Game, you can only go to the ephus pitch so many times. Just as Williams took Sewell downtown, the LBTBP earned its revenge on Monday.

The Township took command of the tourney during the very first event, the aforementioned Epic within the Epic. Each of the participating squads – Surf City, the Town-

ship, Ship Bottom, Barnegat Light, Beach Haven, Harvey Cedars and Ortley Beach, sent two racers to the starting line. Cross-country scoring would be used – in other words, both racers' scores would be added to give a team its final score. Well, the LBTBP took no chances, with veterans Mike Vile and Josh Law finishing first and second overall. Vile and Law not only won, they also both finished well under 20 minutes, while no other team had two competitors who could break the 20-minute mark. Visiting Ortley Beach took second place in the team competition; Surf City was third.

Ortley Beach took the second event of the evening, the surf dash relay, in which three competitors



FIRST AND SECOND: The Surf City Epic is the first major lifeguard tournament on LBI this summer. This year's edition, the second, was won by Long Beach Township, although Surf City's Mike Dunn (top), sprinting to the finish in the ironman medley, members of the Havey Cedar team (above) who are launching their boat in the same event and all of the competitors at the start of the paddleboard relay (below) all did their best to deny the township.

Photographs by Jack Reynolds

from each team run 300 feet and then swim 1,000 feet. But LBT took second and Barnegat Light third, with

Surf City slipping to fourth.

Now, eight points were being awarded for a first, six for a second, four for third, three for fourth and two for fifth. That meant that the Township and Ortley had accrued 14 points each after two events, doubling Surf City's total of seven.

Surf City, of course, was still within striking distance, but not after the third event, the paddleboard relay, in which three athletes for each team paddle approximately 2,000 long and tiring feet. The Township's entry of the aptly named Steve Winner, and Wall and Brad Mexan, took first ahead of Surf City's Taylor Henderson, Mike Dunn and Ross Reynolds. The win gave the Township 22 points to Ortley's 18 and Surf City's 13, which meant that the home boys would have to mount one hell of a comeback to repeat as champs.

It wasn't to be. The fourth event was the iron man medley, in which one competitor from each team would swim 900 feet, another would paddle 900 feet and two more would row 2,000 feet. Mexan was the Township's swimmer, Winner its paddler and Wall and Chris Hawk its rowers, and they clinched the tourney title with a win. But although the Surf City squad could not repeat, it

was still fighting for dignity and finished second in the medley, giving it 19 points and closing to within three of Ortley Beach.

Sure enough, in the final event of the night, the run-row, in which two runners must both finish a 1.5-mile footrace before rowing off together for 2,000 feet, Dileo and Reynolds finished in first to give Surf City 27 points for the night. Surf City fans were suddenly rooting for the Township: If the LBTBP could beat out Ortley for second in the final event, the home team would win the silver (well, actually the china or the stoneware of the something, considering the trophies were wonderfully hand-painted plates donated by Paint A Pot). The Township did, as did Harvey Cedars, which finished in third and Barnegat Light, which finished in fourth. And Surf City had clinched second place for the evening.

The win in the final event sent Surf City residents home happy. Organizers such as tournament director Collette Pretre were also smiling considering the weather for the tourney had been almost perfect, with a flat and fair sea that made winning races much more of a matter of skill and

SPORTS RAP



Continued on Page 40

Sports

Continued from Page 43

endurance than the luck of catching a wave.

But in the end you've got to figure that the biggest smiles were on the faces of the Long Beach Township competitors.

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