



LIFEGUARD RACES / AROUND THE ISLAND ROW MAY NOT BE HELD NEXT YEAR

Press of Atlantic City, The (NJ) - Wednesday, August 17, 2005

Author: GUY GARGAN For The Press, (609) 272-7210

This year's race will take place early Thursday morning, will be shorter than usual and won't go entirely around Wildwood island because of conditions in Hereford Inlet.

The North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around the Island Row, which will be held Thursday morning, has a smaller field this year, and a shorter course.

The 30th annual counter-clockwise row around Wildwood island, which usually begins at 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood, will start at 6:30 a.m. Thursday in the Hereford Inlet at the top of Wildwood island at a spot to be determined.

That will shorten the 21-mile course by approximately a mile or more. Since the race will still end at the 15th Avenue beach, the two-man crews won't actually make a complete circuit of the island.

"We'll be starting in the Hereford Inlet this year because of the conditions of the water entering the inlet," race director Charlie Iepson said.

"Not every day, but on some days the sandbars make waves and the boats would be flipping.

"We'll be starting past that point to stay away from the waves and swells, just for safety purposes. It will probably take about 10 minutes off the race. We usually start about 6:45 a.m. and we'll be going 15 minutes earlier to get a favorable tide."

The Around The Island Row, which often had a field of more than 30 boats in past years, and totaled 42 in 1997, had only 16 crews entered as of Tuesday.

Young lifeguard oarsmen now usually skip the race, perhaps because the alumni and patrol veterans who've rowed the tricky course many times, usually are the top finishers.

Due to declining interest, the event may not be held next year.

The Ventnor Beach Patrol alumni crew of Dennis Funk and George Miller, ages 53 and 54, respectively, returns this year.

Funk and Miller won for the third time in 2004, beating 20 other boats in 3 hours, 6 minutes, 7 seconds.

Other contenders Thursday are Carl Smallwood Jr. and brother Greg Smallwood of Margate, and Ed Schneider and Ryan Meyer of Wildwood, who won the Upper Township Six-Mile Bay Row in July.

Five-time Around The Island Row winners Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy of Wildwood Crest, Cape May veterans Geoff Rife and Jim Wadlow, and Wildwood's Steve McGuinn and Mike McConnell will also go.

To e-mail Guy Gargan at The Press: GGargan@pressofac.com

Caption: The Ventnor Beach Patrol alumni crew of George Miller, 54, (left) and Dennis Funk, 53, won last year's North Wildwood Around the Island Row and will return for this year's race on Thursday morning. Staff photo by Dale Gerhard

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But it was like old times Thursday as Bilkins and Murphy won the annual row around Wildwood island for the sixth time.

The Wildwood Crest duo steadily gained ground in the backbay and pulled to the lead in the ocean sprint. Bilkins and Murphy held off the Stone Harbor crew of Andrew French and Stephen Ramsey to win by eight seconds or three boat-lengths.

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The race, usually about 21 miles, was shortened Thursday due to waves at the entrance of the Hereford Inlet that might have flipped the boats.

The row had a floating start in the inlet, instead of the usual spot at the 15th Avenue beach, making for an unusual winning time of 2 hours, 39 minutes, 56 seconds. Stone Harbor crossed the line second in 2:40:04.

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The crowd at the 15th Avenue finish line applauded the Wildwood Crest pair as they rowed to shore after the race.

Bilkins got on his cell phone and called his family. His wife Sondra was in Pittsburgh visiting their daughter Nicole and their grandson Luke. Two other daughters, Tara and Brianna, were in Wildwood Crest, and they came to the awards ceremony at the fire station on 15th Avenue an hour later.

"We were really excited to hear the news," Tara Bilkins said. "I thought he was kidding when he told me they won."

Bilkins was in the first Around The Island Row in 1976 when the North Wildwood team of Jim Troy and Harry Zander won. Troy and Zander repeated in 1977, but then Bilkins gained consecutive wins, with John Greenwood in 1978 and with Dave Koper in 1979. His other victories were with Murphy.

"It's still a thrill to win. The age factor is not as much as you'd think. Dennis (Funk) and George (Miller) won last year and a lot of other older crews are competitive. It's a matter of putting in the training time," Bilkins said.

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To e-mail Guy Gargan at The Press: GGargan@pressofac.com RESULTS

Age is just a number to Bilkins, Murphy

Pair wins Around the Island Row for 6th time

By BRIAN CUNNIFF
Staff Writer

NORTH WILDWOOD — Max Bilkins insists that age is not a factor when it comes to winning rowing races on the South Jersey lifeguard circuit.

He and his rowing partner are living proof of that theory.

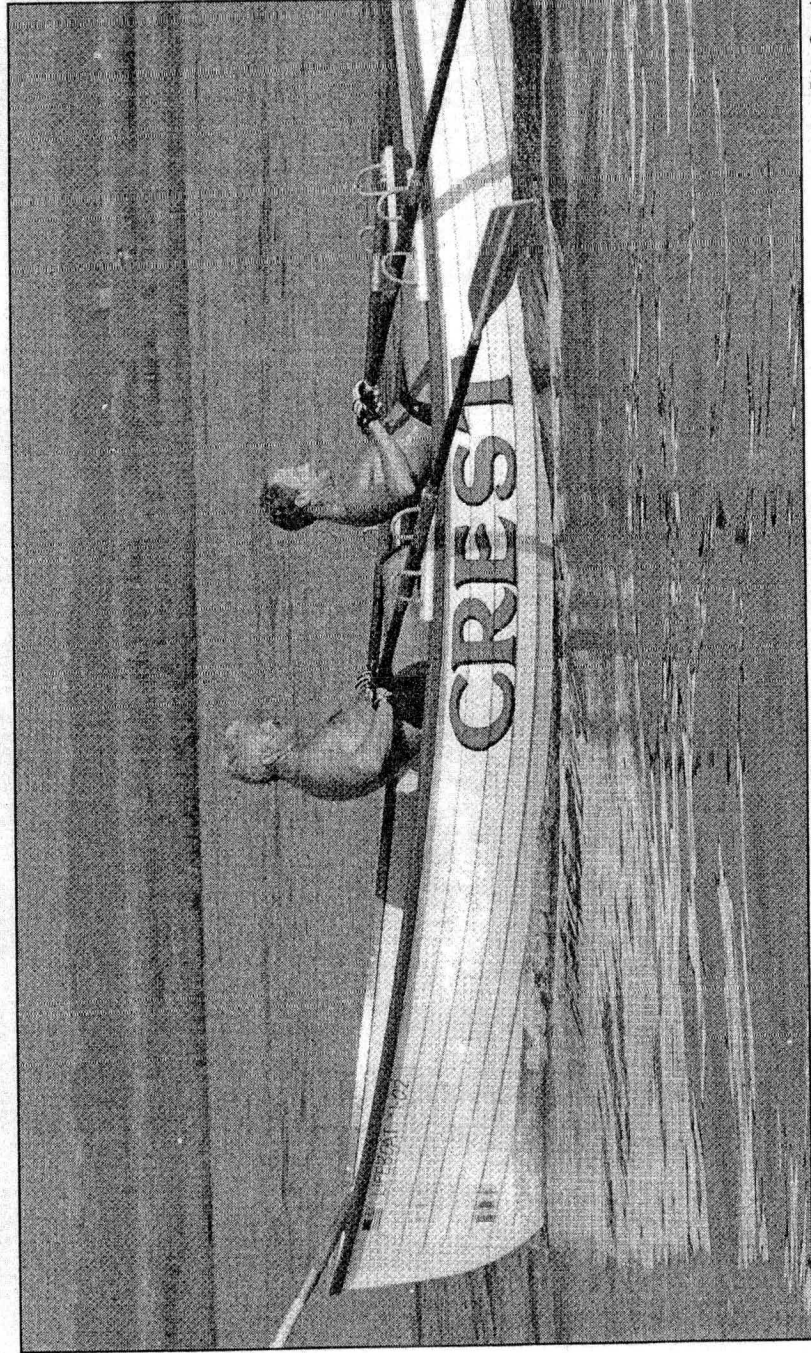
Bilkins, 53, and Bic Murphy, 46, captured their unprecedented sixth victory as a crew in the North Wildwood Beach Patrol's Around the Island Row Thursday morning when they outlasted a strong charge from Stone Harbor's Andrew French and Steve Ramsey in the final mile.

The venerable Wildwood Crest crew finished the race in 2 hours, 39 minutes, 56 seconds. The time was the best in the history of the event, albeit this year's race was shortened by perhaps as much as two miles.

Bilkins, who has also won the event twice more with different partners, became the first rower to win the event in four different decades with Thursday's performance.

He and Murphy have won the competition together in 1985, 1992, 1993, 1995, 1996 and 2005, while Bilkins also won with John

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Brian Cuniff

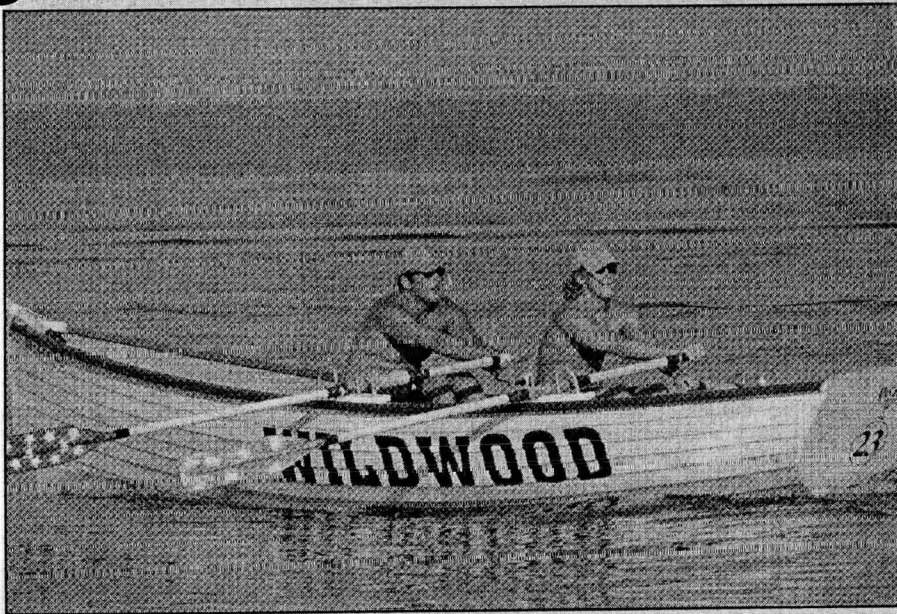
Wildwood Crest's Max Bilkins (left) and Bic Murphy stroke through the back bays about midway through last week's Around the Island Row. The crew held off a strong challenge near the finish to win the competition for the sixth time, more than any other crew.

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Greenwood in 1978 and Dave Koper in 1977.

"I think too many people make too big of a deal about the age thing," said Bilkins, a 34-year lifeguard who is the athletic director at George Washington High School in North Philadelphia. "I think in my case it just

comes down to training properly. If you put the time and effort in and you have a good partner – and my partner is in great, great shape – then I think remaining competitive is something you can do for a long time. I don't think you can expect to win it all the time, but you can at least be competitive."



Brian Cunniff

Wildwood's Ed Schneider (left) and Ryan Meyer led for a good portion of the Around the Island Row. They finished in third place.

Bilkins, Murphy win another Island Row

AROUND THE ISLAND ROW CHAMPIONS

Year	Crew	Beach Patrol
2005	Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy	Wildwood Crest
2004	Dennis Funk and George Miller	Ventnor
2003	Andrew Funk and David Funk	Ventnor
2001	Rich Kugel and Carl Smallwood	Margate
2001	Darrick Kobierowski and Tom Lake	Stone Harbor
2000	Tom Lake and Rob Lythgoe	Stone Harbor
1999	Dennis Funk and George Miller	Ventnor
1998	Mike Alton and Ted Frankel	Atlantic City
1997	Mark Wachlin and Craig Whitehead	Avalon
1996	Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy	Wildwood Crest
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1994	Steve Mogck and Jim Wadlow	Cape May
1993	Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy	Wildwood Crest
1992	Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy	Wildwood Crest
1991	Bob McGinty and Cliff Murray Jr.	Ventnor
1990	Chuck Dunn and Ted Evans	Ocean City
1989	Stu Grant and John Kelly	Margate
1988	Chuck Dunn and Ron Kirk	Ocean City
1987	Dennis Funk and George Miller	Ventnor
1986	Dan O'Malley and Bill Sieck	Avalon
1985	Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy	Wildwood Crest
1984	John Milar and Tom Morrison	Ocean City
1983	John Herron and Ron Kirk	Ocean City
1982	Tom Morrison and Rick Shoyer	Ocean City
1981	Dan O'Malley and Pete Soderman	Avalon
1980	Dave Kerr and Dan O'Malley	Avalon
1979	Max Bilkins and Dave Koper	Wildwood Crest
1978	Max Bilkins and John Greenwood	Wildwood Crest
1977	Jim Troy and Harry Zander	North Wildwood
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With conditions in Hereford Inlet growing increasingly unpredictable over recent years, race officials decided to cut that part of the race out. Rather than starting at the same point as the finish in front of North Wildwood Beach Patrol headquarters at 15th Avenue, the race began past Hereford Inlet in the bay.

Wildwood's Ryan Meyer and Ed Schneider, who won the Upper Township Six-Mile Bay Race earlier this summer, led for much of the first half of the race, holding a slight lead over Ventnor alums and defending champions Dennis Funk and George Miller. But Meyer and Schneider couldn't hold their lead

once the crews turned out of the bay and into the ocean at Cold Spring Inlet.

"No matter what we did we couldn't get the boat to go faster," Schneider said with a frustrated smile. "We felt good, we were swinging nicely, our oars were in the water nicely, but we just couldn't get the boat to move. Ryan and I thought we were rowing the perfect race. We hit all our points, our route was good, but we just couldn't get the boat to move the way we wanted."

Funk and Miller took a brief lead from there, but Bilkins and Murphy quickly gained ground. As far back as fifth when the crews passed the West Wildwood area, Bilkins and Murphy moved up to third place by the Rio Grande and Middle Thoroughfare bridges, before eventually passing first Meyer and Schneider and then Funk and Miller in the ocean.

By no means, however, were Bilkins and Murphy in the clear. French and Ramsey, rowing just their first race together and first and second, respectively, overall, came hard at the leaders.

"I said to Max right at the rockpile that the Stone Harbor boat was going to be the one to beat," said Murphy, who teaches at Emory University in Atlanta. "Every time we caught someone, they'd pass the same boat soon thereafter. And then it just turned into a dogfight."

Bilkins and Murphy said they held a short lead over French and Ramsey from about Wildwood Crest Beach Patrol headquarters to 26th Street in North Wildwood. It was then that they decided to try to shake the Stone Harbor boat for good.

"That was tough, it was really hard at the end," Bilkins said. "We could see them charging and then it's just a matter of, Do we have enough left to hold them off?"

"We knew it was going to be close. The last 50 yards were a flurry. We were in full sprint mode, all out. We just wanted to keep



Brian Cunniff

Wildwood's Matt Godfrey (foreground) and Jay Arsenis finished in 14th place in the 30th running of the Around the Island Row.

our oars in the water as much as they did. I give them a ton of credit for being able to come on like that at the end."

French, 25, a special education teacher who resides in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., and Ramsey, 20, a Flourtown, Pa., resident who's a junior at St. Joseph's University, finished just eight seconds behind the winners in 2:40.04.

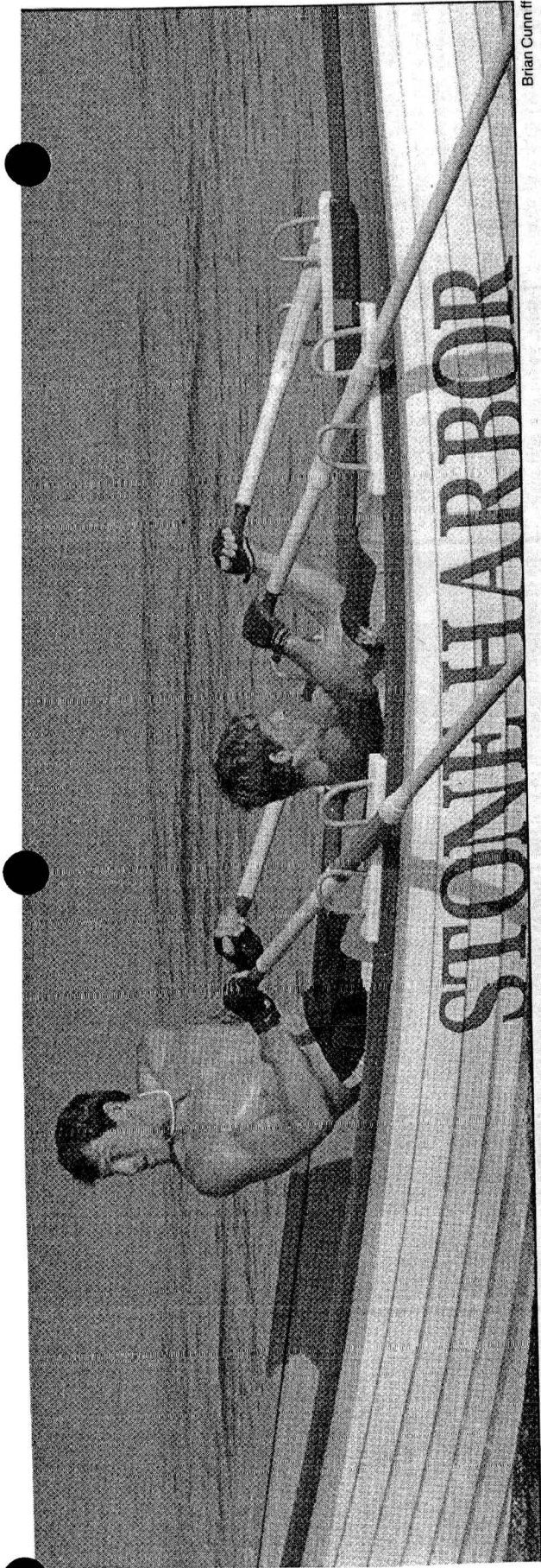
"We're pleased with our result, but we were definitely going for the victory," French said. "We thought we were moving pretty well the whole race."

Said Ramsey, "We had high expectations, especially since (a) Stone Harbor (crew) has won here a couple times in the last five or six years. We thought we had a good chance at the end. We just ran out of time."

Meyer and Schneider finished third in 2:41.00, the highest finish for either lifeguard in their combined years of participation in the event with various partners. Funk, 53, and Miller, 54, were fourth in 2:41.58, with another Wildwood boat, comprised of Mike McConnell and Steve McGuinn, placing fifth in 2:42.57.

Just 17 boats competed in this year's race. As many as 42 participated as recently as 1997.

RESULTS: 1. Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy (WC), 2:39.56; 2. Andrew French and Steve Ramsey (SH), 2:40.04; 3. Ryan Meyer and Ed Schneider (W), 2:41.00; 4. Dennis Funk and George Miller (V alumni), 2:41.58; 5. Mike McConnell and Steve McGuinn (W), 2:42.57; 6. Jim Mason and Brian O'Shea (V), 2:44.18; 7. Carl Smallwood and Greg Smallwood (M), 2:44.19; 8. Scott Jones and Jim Swift (M), 2:44.52; 9. Geoff Rife and Jim Wadlow (CM), 2:45.06; 10. Tom Killian and Steve Stocks (W), 2:45.47; 11. Steve Dingley and John Ovelman (NW), 2:45.57; 12. David Funk and John Swift (M), 2:46.30; 13. Rich Angelucci and Rick Greco (WC), 2:47.33; 14. Jay Arsenis and Matt Godfrey (W), 2:51.39; 15. Brian Duffey and Greg Smith (L), 2:53.16; 16. Jim Gibbons and John O'Neil (UT), 2:54.23; 17. Lou Dwyer and Bill Kindle (NW), 3:00.04.



Brian Cummins

Stone Harbor's Andrew French (left) looks over his shoulder at the leaders as crewmate Steve Ramsey lays back in his stroke. The pair rallied from the back of the pack to finish in second place, challenging winners Max Bilkins and Bic Murphy at the finish.

Don DeJaco and Jim Conroy pulled out in the lead.

Row 'kings' get first win since 1996

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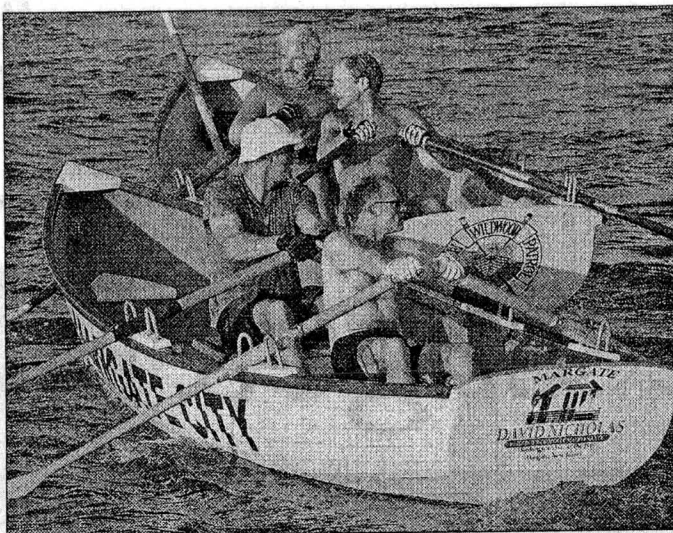
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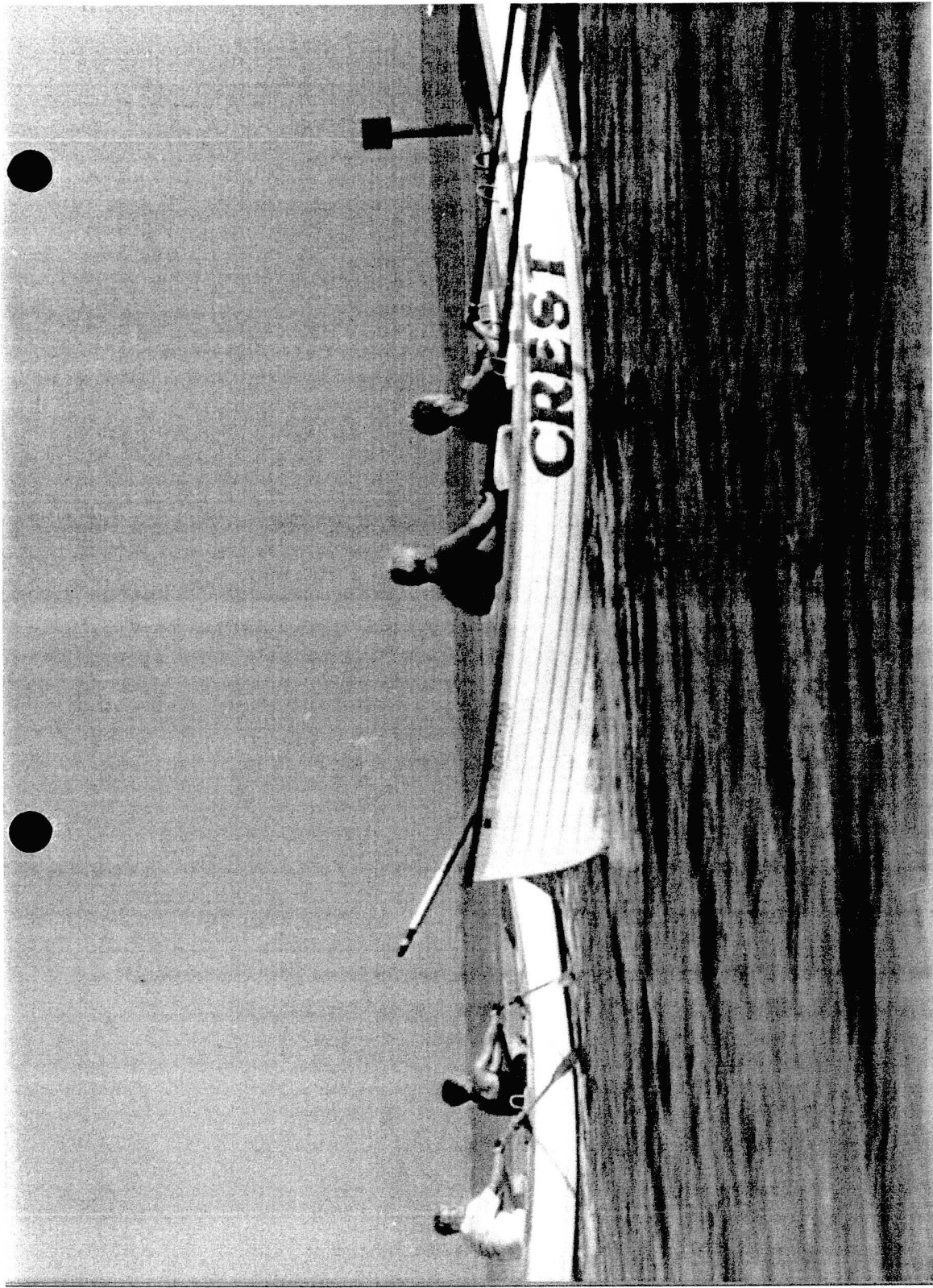
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Caption: 1. Just out for an early-morning row Carl and Greg Smallwood Jr. from the Margate Beach Patrol row through the early morning sunshine on Thursday as they compete in the North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around the Island Row. The Smallwoods finished seventh with a time of 2 hours, 44 minutes, 19 seconds. Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy won the race for the sixth time, but their first since 1996. Officials say this year's race might be the last because of the small turnout. Color photo from page D1 2. Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy of Wildwood Crest lead Jim Swift of Margate and Scott Jones of Ventnor through Grassy Sound during the Around the Island Row Thursday morning. Staff photos by Dale Gerhard

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Funk - Miller

Bilkins - Murphy

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