



LIFEGUARD RACING / AROUND THE ISLAND ROW FIELD FILLED WITH PAST WINNERS

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Past winning crews and several young contenders should make for a good race on Tuesday morning in the North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row.

The 31st annual, 21-mile doubles row around Wildwood island will get a floating start at 6:45 a.m. Tuesday at 15th Avenue beach in North Wildwood.

Twenty-two boats are entered in this year's race, including six-time winners and defending champions Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy of Wildwood Crest Beach Patrol. The Ventnor alumni team of Dennis Funk and George Miller, the 2004 champion and three-time winners, is also set to go.

The third former Island Row-winning crew in the race is Margate's Carl Smallwood Jr. and Rich Kugel, who won in 2002. The two also took the Upper Township Beach Patrol Six-Mile Bay Row on July 24.

The counter-clockwise row around Wildwood first goes in a northern direction to the Hereford inlet between North Wildwood and Stone Harbor. The area is known for its sandbars, and that's one reason the race is held at high tide.

From there, the crews continue past the Stone Harbor Bridge and the Grassy Sound Bridge and go south in the Wildwood backbay. After rowing past the Cape May Bridge, the crews go through the Cold Spring inlet at the bottom of the island. The final sprint is back in the ocean up to the 15th Avenue finish line.

"We base (the scheduling) on the tide, and we also like to hold it late in the (lifeguard competition) season," race director Charlie Iepson said. "If we held it too early, it would conflict with the other races.

"We always hope for good weather. The clouds don't bother us, we just want nice, flat water and no big winds."

Stone Harbor's Steve Ramsey, second last year with Andrew French, will team with Kevin Jacobs on Tuesday.

Two Wildwood boats have a chance. The crew of Ed Schneider and Ryan Meyer was third in the race in 2005, and Mike McConnell and Steve McGuinn were fifth.

Ventnor's David Funk, who won both the doubles and singles rows at the South Jersey Championships on Aug. 11, will pair with Ventnor alumnus Jim Mason.

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ROWING / AGE NO FACTOR FOR WINNERS OF AROUND THE ISLAND ROW

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The extended era of Dennis Funk and George Miller just goes on and on. The Ventnor lifeguard alumni oarsmen, who first appeared on the scene in 1973, won the 31st annual North Wildwood Beach Patrol Around The Island Row on Tuesday morning.

Funk, 54, and Miller, 55, won the slightly shortened race by five boatlengths with a time of 2 hours, 40 minutes, 21 seconds.

Wildwood's Ed Schneider and Ryan Meyer finished second in 2:40:38 and Ventnor's David Funk (Dennis' son) and alumnus Jim Mason were third, six boatlengths behind Wildwood in 2:41:01.

The row around Wildwood is a tricky marathon where older, experienced rowers who know every nook and cranny of the island course have the edge on younger, sprint-racing lifeguards.

Funk and Miller also won in 2004, and the winners last year were veterans Max Bilkins and Bick Murphy of Wildwood Crest. Bilkins, 54, and Murphy, 47, were trying for their seventh win in the race Tuesday, and they finished fourth.

When Miller, the stern, was asked how long the team will keep doing this, he smiled and replied, "As long as Dennis makes me."

Funk and Miller were third in July in both the Upper Township Six-Mile Bay Row and the Boardwalk Row, but those races weren't as important to them.

"We trained through those races and we target this race," Miller, a lawyer said. "We row every day starting at about 5 or 6 in the morning.

"We came through the Cape May Bridge (near the bottom of Wildwood) and there were three boats together, and we started to come to the realization that we could win the race. We turned the jetty (the Cold Spring inlet, a half-mile past the Cape May Bridge) and Margate (Carl Smallwood Jr. and Rich Kugel) was with us (tied for the lead). In the first two miles back in the ocean (after the turn) we were able to open up a pretty good lead.

"Dennis made a tactical change where he had me move to the left in my seat, and that helped the boat to get faster."

Funk and Miller won the South Jersey Lifeguard Championship in doubles rowing in 1973-1975. As alumni, they reunited in the 1980s to row longer races. They won the Around The Island Row in a record 2:56.06 in 1987. They outdid that in 1999 by winning in 2:55.30, the mark that still stands for a complete circuit of the island. They've won the race four times.

Dennis Funk was asked how they could do this at their age. "It's all training," Funk said. "Like Max and Bick, we train for distance. Just don't ask us to sprint. Everything has to come together. Last year we hit the ocean (with seven miles to go) and we couldn't move the boat. This year the boat jumped."

Approximately a mile was subtracted from the normally 21-mile race when it was decided to start the race at Surf Avenue in the Hereford inlet at the top of Wildwood instead of at the 15th Avenue start/finish line. The move was to avoid the sandbars in the shallow waters of the inlet.

RESULTS

1. Ventnor alumni (Dennis Funk-George Miller) 2:40.21; 2. Wildwood (Ed Schneider-Ryan

Meyer) 2:40.38; 3. Ventnor (David Funk-Jim Mason) 2:41.01; 4. Max Bilkins-Bick Murphy) 2:41.26; 5. Margate (Carl Smallwood Jr.-Rich Kugel) 2:42.0; 6. Margate alumnus/Ventnor alumnus (Jim Swift-Scott Jones) 2:43.11; 7. Wildwood (Mike McConnell-Steve McGuinn) 2:44.0; 8. Margate alumni (John Swift-B.J. Fox) 2:44.45; 9. Stone Harbor (Dave Insogna-Chris Kullak) 2:45.35; 10. Wildwood (Bill Kindle-Nate Derbin) 2:46.06; 11. Stone Harbor (Steve Ramsey-Kevin Jacobs) 2:48.31; 12. North Wildwood (John Ovelman-Steve Dingley) 2:48.48; 13. Wildwood Crest (Rick Greco-Rich Angelucci) 2:49.41; 14. Longport (Brian Duffey-Don MacEachern) 2:50.08; 15. Sea Isle City (Jim Savage-Dan McCann) 2:51.07; 16. Stone Harbor (Steve Kindle-Max Morgan) 2:51.47; 17. Wildwood (Shane Regan-Jay Arcinese) 2:52.05; 18. Longport (Mike McGrath-Sean Duffey) 2:52.47; 19. Longport (Pat Armstrong-Tom Sher) 2:53.32; 20. Atlantic City (Dave Chapman-Mike Doherty) 2:56:46; 21. Atlantic City (Joe Welsh-Patrick Welsh) 3:01.26; 22. Stone Harbor (Keith Gabor-Chuck O'Connor.) 3:10:12.

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