

## OPTIMIST NORTH AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIPS July 3-11, Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club, Ponce, Puerto Rico

A record 22 countries are represented at the 2006 Optimist North American Championships, sailed out of the Ponce Yacht & Fishing Club, in Ponce, Puerto Rico. In addition to the North American countries, there is a strong contingent of teams from South America, with the addition of a team each from Germany, New Zealand and Singapore. Sean Lee from Singapore is leading after three days of individual competition.

Regatta organizer and president of the Puerto Rico Optimist Dinghy Association (PRODA), Jose 'Quino' Nigaglioni, says, "I asked the permission of IODA at last year's Worlds to invite the best teams in the world point wise. My reasoning was that by raising the bar of competition, all sailors could improve. It would also be a way to encourage more Optimist sailing here in Puerto Rico."

The 189 competitors have experienced winds in excess of 20 knots during much of the competition. A course configured in a windward-leeward with reaching mark design that was a total of 4 to 5 miles in length was set in the Ponce harbor, a 10 to 15 minute sail for the kids from the launch beach to the start line. The fleet is divided into six color-coded classes and two classes' race at a time.

On the first day of the regatta, Wednesday July 5, skies were hazy, but dry, and winds ranged from 18 to 22 knots, but held steady from the east. Singapore's Lee dominated from the start and finished the day with a flawless score of four first place bullets. Puerto Rican sailor, Ivan Aponte, who won the Scotiabank Caribbean International Optimist Regatta in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, two weeks prior, ended the day in second, with last year's OPTINAM's champion, Alexander Zimmerman, of Peru, in third.

Day two, Thursday July 6, Lee faltered with a 14<sup>th</sup> place finish in the third and last race of the day, yet held onto his lead. Aponte also kept his second place position, however Venezuela's Victor Diaz de Leon jumped into the third place slot and displaced Zimmerman, thanks to the throw-out of an OCS score Diaz de Leon had on the first day. Conditions continued sunny, with winds averaging 18 to 22 knots.

Team Racing took place day three, Friday July 7. Gusty winds at the start of the competition calmed to a light 6 to 7 knots after a rain squall blew through the area just before noon. Sixteen teams participated in the team racing, with Peru emerging victorious, followed by Singapore second and Argentina third.

Competitors enjoyed a lay day on Saturday July 8. Ponce is the second largest city in Puerto Rico and a real jewel of Spanish-style charm. In spite of grand historic sites such as the Serralles Castle, home of the founders of Don Q Rum, the famous Ponce Museum of Art, and grand restored coffee plantation,

Hacienda Buena Vista, located about a half hour outside of the city, the kids all enjoyed the more playful activities this hospitable and friendly city provides such as the local water parks, beaches, malls and movie theaters.

Today, Sunday July 9, saw kids compete in the third day of individual competition. In spite of the promise of light winds, gusts hit 32 knots just in front of a squall that blew through when most of the competitors were in the middle of their second of three races for the day. Preliminary results show that Singapore's Lee continues to hold his lead, yet Venezuela's Diaz de Leon had displaced Aponte in the second place position, with Aponte third.

Racing concludes tomorrow, Monday July 10. Organizers plan for two races, then the awards ceremony later in the day.

For full results, please see: [www.optinam2006.com](http://www.optinam2006.com)