

Maxwell returns to the helm

From F1

mittee boat.

"It was time to let somebody else put their spin on it, and I want to take my kids sailing because that's what my father did," he said. All of Maxwell's children are accomplished sailors. Maxwell estimated his father, Ed, sailed the race for at least 40 years, the last one in 1995.

Today's course takes the fleet around the island.

Following are the top three finishers in each class Friday with boat and skipper:

■ **Class A1** — 1. Tynaje, Peter C. Ross; 2. Spindrift, W. Rich Jr.; 3. Rogue, Seville Simonds.

■ **Class A2** — 1. Legacy, John P. Read; 2. Our Tern, Jack Washburn; 3. Piper Too, Robert J. Almeida Jr.

■ **Class B** — 1. Just Friends, Ed Purcell; 2. Watercolors, Bill Drinkuth; 3. Eala, James S. Brown.

■ **Class C1** — 1. Split Decision, Dave Nickerson and Dana Seniff; 2. Secret, Bruce Kuryla; 3. Snow Bird, Paul von Maffel.

■ **Class C2** — 1. Tao, John Nevin; 2. Orion, Robert Norton; 3. Foxfire, Peter Brechter.



Robert Patterson/The Day

■ **Watercolors**, skippered by Bill Drinkuth, finished second Friday in Class B on the first day of the Off Soundings Club's Spring Series.

■ **Class C3** — 1. Dirty Harry, George Cochran; 2. Balance, Jim Ohleiser; 3. Risky Business, Douglas Scott.

■ **Class C4** — 1. The Cat Came Back, Lincoln Mossop; 2. Wavewalker, Dave and Ron Walker; 3. Fun, Paul D'Arcy.

■ **Class C5** — 1. Beth, Steve Sammis; 2. Brer Rabbit III, Bill

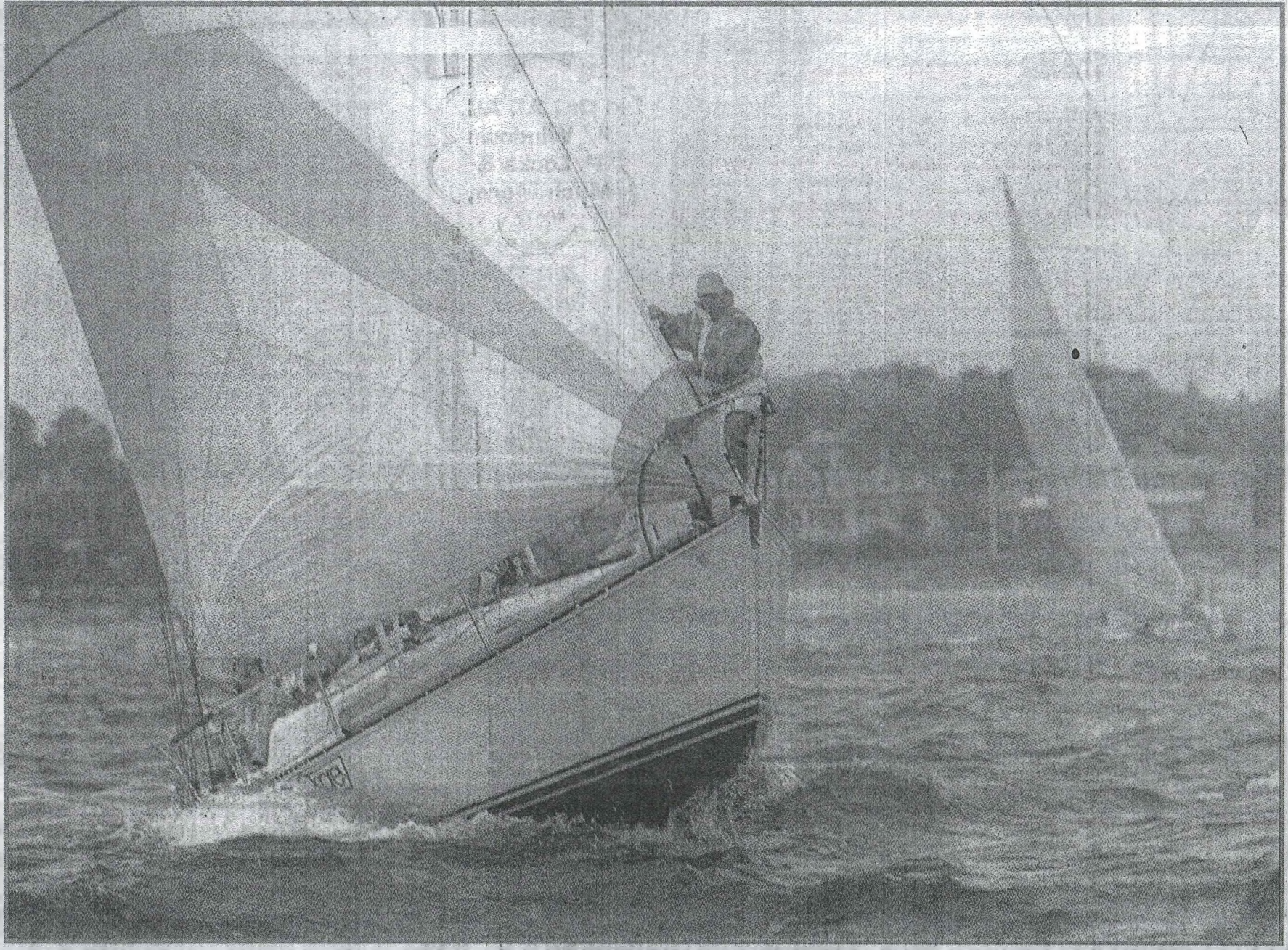
Loweth/Dave Strang; 3. Mentor, Mark Kondracky.

■ **Cruising Canvas 1** — 1. Das Bear, John Locher; 2. Banshee, Robert Almeida; 3. Amazing Grace, Walter Carucci.

■ **Crusing Canvas 2** — 1. Un Bel Di' John Messek; 2. XapiΣma, Robert Welch; 3. Bryan Station, Stuart Craig.

A gray day

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F 1



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Robert Patterson/The Day

■ A crew member of Osprey maneuvers in rough seas Friday during the Off Soundings Club's Spring Series off Watch Hill.

or the race, Earmhardt will have to
rove to the rear of the 43-car field.

Conditions cause some sailors to stay home

From G3

not compete on Saturday.

As the weather turned more severe, some boats reported problems.

"It turns up the intensity level when you get people calling in with dismastings and people going over," Granbery said.

"It certainly changes your perspective from who's getting the gun (first in class) and protests."

Granbery said he tried to keep an eye on the anemometer inside the committee boat, Nor'Easter, and saw readings of about 28 miles per hour sustained.

"They may have been registering 35," he said of the fleet, which was sailing farther away from the island and was therefore less protected.

The course sent the boats from outside New Harbor 3.2 miles north-east to the buoy that marks the entrance to Block Island, then 2.8 miles west to a marker dropped by the committee, then 3.5 miles back to the committee boat outside New Harbor.

The original course was to include two additional legs, but Granbery ended the race when boats made their first return to the committee boat.

The crew aboard the 33-foot Brer Rabbit III, sailed by David Strang, his sister Adrienne Loweth and her hus-

band Bill of Noank, said Saturday's conditions were among the worst for an Off Soundings race, but did not appear to be dangerous.

As their boat climbed to the tops of waves and surfed down the other side, David Strang, 37, said he had sailed in similar conditions, but with colder temperatures.

George Moffett, skipper of the Mystic Seaport's 70-foot schooner Brilliant, said conditions were among the heaviest he's seen for an Off Soundings race, but that Brilliant was able to plow through the rough seas with all the canvass he had set.

Brilliant was a picture of grace amidst the turmoil. With full sails set she at times bared half of her undersides, but maintained a steady course while the smaller, fiberglass hulls around her pitched and jerked with each wave.

Following are the top three finishers in each class according to combined results for the two day-race:

Class A1 — 1. Tynaje, Peter Ross; 2. Spindrift, W. Rich Jr.; 3. Irresistible, James Slimmon Jr.

Class A2 — 1. Legacy, John Read; 2. Our Tern, Jack Washburn; 3. Piper Too, Robert Almeida Jr.

Class B — 1. Just Friends, Ed Purcell. (The other seven did not start).

Class C1 — 1. Split Decision, Dave Nickerson; 2. Abracadabra, Bryson Hall; 3. Hooligan, Peter Brinckerhoff.

Class C2 — 1. Tao, John Nevin; 2. Osprey, George Martin; 3. American Pie, Ray Gincavage.

Class C3 — 1. Dirty Harry, George Cochran; 2. Balance, Jim Ohlheiser; 3. Risky Business, Douglas Scott.

Class C4 — 1. The Cat Came Back, W. Lincoln Mossop; 2. Wavewalker, David and Ronald Walker; 3. Prophet, Don Wilkinson.

Class C5 — 1. Brer Rabbit III, Bill Loweth/David Strang; 2. Beth, Steve Sammis; 3. Mentor, Mark Kondracky.

Cruising Canvas I — 1. Das Bear, John Locher; 2. Banshee, Robert Almeida; 3. Petard, William Lieber.

Cruising Canvas II — 1. XapiΣma, Robert Welsh Jr.; 2. Bryan Station, Stuart Craig; 3. Starchaser, Dick Steinhilber.



Robert Patterson/The Day

■ Wes Maxwell, left, sails his J-30 Fifi in Friday's Off Soundings Club race from Watch Hill to Block Island. Wind and waves marked the club's 61st-annual Spring Series, which concluded Saturday.

It's a perfect day ... to stay ashore

Off Soundings race cut short by rain

By **DAVID TRANCHIDA**
Day Staff Writer

Block Island — A stinging, wind-driven rain pelted sailors as they rounded the course on the second day of racing Saturday in the 61st annual Off Soundings Spring regatta.

Before the rain storm hit, which served to flatten the seas, steady winds of about 30 miles per hour sent torrents of seawater over the decks as the helmsmen fought the waves to keep the rudder on course.

Soon after the start of the race, crews were as wet from seawater as they were from rain the day before.

Saturday's course is traditionally a race around the island, but the race committee decided to keep the fleet in the lee of the island and set a short course of about 15 miles for smaller boats and 18 miles for larger boats. Those courses were further reduced during the race, however, as conditions grew more severe.

The masts on two boats, Fun and Snow Bird, broke under the stress Saturday, and one broke Friday, but no injuries were reported.

Even larger boats in the fleet spent most of the day baring their bottoms despite crews of anywhere from four to 12 perched on the windward rails trying to keep the vessels from keeling over too much, thereby losing efficiency.

OFF SOUNDINGS

A fine line

Race committee chairman Kim Granberry said he was caught in a tough position Saturday morning between ensuring the safety of the fleet and giving sailors the chance to compete after they had committed to two days of off-shore racing.

"It was blowing hard, but not that hard. A lot of the big boats didn't have any problems," said Granberry, standing on the dock in his foul-weather gear complete with old-style sou'wester rain hat. Granberry shortened the race course to nine miles for everyone, based on the deteriorating conditions.

"You have a bunch of big boats that love heavy air and if you call the race because of the smaller boats which may not really be equipped for it, it's not fair. It's a tough call to make between safety and competitiveness," Granberry said.

Rules for the Off Soundings club make it clear that each skipper is responsible for making the decision to sail. Many did not leave their slips Saturday.

"A large number elected not to race, which is a good decision instead of getting out there and getting into trouble," he said.

43 no-shows

A fleet of 122 boats raced from Watch Hill to Block Island Friday. Of those, 110 finished the course Friday, but only 65 finished Saturday. Granberry said 43 did

See **CONDITIONS** page **G6**

Boats sustain damage during Off Soundings

From G3

distance, the island's role as a shield from the wind was reduced, and that is where most boats found it the most stressful.

The committee boat, which was anchored in the lee of the island, recorded steady winds of 25 miles per hour with gusts to 35, but out on the course, farther from the protection of the island, racers said they recorded speeds of 28 to 30 steady, with gusts over 35.

The 55-foot mast on Snow Bird broke in two places, first about one third of the way down from the top at the spreaders. The stress of the top portion folding over then led to a break about five feet from the top of the cabin.

"The first thing you do is count heads," Farrell said. "Then we got the rig out of the water and lashed it down to the deck so it wouldn't poke a hole through the deck or hurt anybody."

They hoisted the rig aboard by attaching lines to the mast and using winches to pull it in.

He said everyone on the crew stayed remarkably calm and performed their assigned tasks perfectly. The boat is owned by Paul von Maffei of Guilford, who raced Friday but left the island Saturday to attend a wedding. As of mid-afternoon, the crew had yet to call and inform him of the situation.

Aboard Fun, the elder D'Arcy, who started sailing when he was 50 and has sailed in the race from Marion, Mass., to Bermuda, said the incident

was not particularly disconcerting. When asked how many Off Soundings races he'd sailed, he replied, "not enough."

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[1998/6/12-13 G3]

And their masts came tumbling down

By **DAVID TRANCHIDA**
Day Staff Writer

Block Island — “The first thing you do is start counting heads,” said Michael Farrell, a member of the crew aboard Snow Bird, one of two boats that sustained broken masts Saturday, the second day of racing in the annual Off Soundings Spring regatta at Block Island.

Fun, a J-24 owned and sailed by 79-year-old Paul D’Arcy of Lyme, also lost its mast when the main shroud on the port deck was ripped from the bulkhead below. Friday, the mast on Schwingg came down. Strong, steady winds, rough seas and rain made both days a challenge for the fleet of 135 boats.

No injuries were reported in the mishaps. Snow Bird, a Shock 35, came back under her own power, but Fun was towed into New Har-

bor by Encore, a powerboat assisting the race committee.

“It just came down — bang, over the starboard side,” said Ed D’Arcy, on the dock after the race describing the situation, as other sailors still in foul-weather gear walked by and examined the boat. Aside from where the shroud tore a small hole through the cabin top, there was no other damage to the boat.

They were expecting to have the boat repaired in time to compete in Race Week next week, also at Block Island.

Need for cool heads

Members of both crews said once the initial shock of the event passed, they methodically went about securing the rig back onboard.

“It’s just unscrew this, unscrew that, taking things apart,” said Paul D’Arcy, who was sail-

ing with his son, Ed, and his two grandsons, Brendan and Justin.

“I wasn’t scared until it looked like it was going to come back up on board,” said Justin D’Arcy, 21. The wind at one point started filling a portion of the mainsail even though it was in the water. With the wind behind it, the sail started coming out of the water with the mast and rigging.

“The wind was trying to pick up the main and it would have picked up the whole rig and sent it back up flopping on top of us,” D’Arcy said. Fortunately they were able to maneuver the boat to avoid such a situation.

Both accidents happened soon after the boats rounded the second mark, which was positioned 3.5 miles north of the island. At that

See **BOATS** page **G6**

‘The wind was trying to pick up the main and it would have picked up the whole rig and sent it back up flopping on top of us.’

Justin D’Arcy,
crew member aboard J-24 Fun

Sailors weather the elements at Off Soundings

By **DAVID TRANCHIDA**
Day Staff Writer

Block Island — It was classic Off Soundings weather: rainy and rough with a stiff, steady wind.

An easterly wind at the start line off Watch Hill changed to southeasterly early in the race and those who sniffed the change earliest went on to do well at the end. Wind averaging between 18 and 20 miles per hour combined with what one competitor called a "confused sea," to make even the hardiest sailors a bit queasy. One skipper was overheard saying three members of his crew got sick on the way over.

The race committee reported that the mast came down on Schwingg, a J29 sailed by Jack Neades. No injuries were reported.

The weather mattered little to Wes Maxwell of Stonington, however, who was racing for the first time after chair-

ing the race committee for six years. He was aboard his Evelyn 25, Fifi, with his friend Sid Petry and Maxwell's sons J.R., 16, Henry, 13 and their friend Justin Dieckerhoff, 17.

Maxwell still had fun

Standing at the post-race party in his full foul-weather gear, Maxwell said the rain did little to dampen his spirits.

"It was a lot of fun. I always enjoy it. I haven't tacked up that beach in 20 years," Maxwell said, referring to the Rhode Island coast from Watch Hill to near Charlestown, generally the first leg of Friday's course. This year, the course was slightly different, but most boats stayed along the shore to get out of the current, which was flooding at the beginning of the race.

"I missed the change in direction. The kids were telling me to go out (away from shore and toward the island) sooner, but ... once you miss it

you're finished," Maxwell said.

"They did a great job with the drop marks. They set a great course," Maxwell said of the race committee.

This year, Kim Granberry of Stony Creek is committee chairman and Maxwell congratulated him after the race for his course selection.

Maxwell is responsible for changing the way the courses are set. For decades the courses were determined well in advance of the race regardless of wind direction and weather conditions on race day.

Maxwell urged club members to approve his method of letting the committee set the course the day of the race depending on conditions. Considering an average Off Soundings fleet these days is anywhere from 130 to 150 boats divided into 10 classes that start five minutes apart, the course selection becomes a mental challenge done on deadline.

Granberry said the change forces the

committee into "mental gymnastics," but it is worth it for the competitors.

"You have about 20 to 30 minutes and it gets pretty tense. You don't want one class rounding a mark one way while another class is approaching the mark from the opposite direction," Granberry said.

A good challenge

"Wes made it a lot more interesting for racing and he made it tactically challenging," he said. "It gives you a chance to give people a real race course. It used to be a lot of reaching, it was a real parade," he said.

"It hadn't changed much in 40 years," Maxwell said. "I was racing with my father in the 50s when I was in junior high."

Maxwell said it was time for him to get back into racing and off the com-

See **MAXWELL** page **F3**

Who will be the toast of the Sound?

Ed Purcell was the toast of the party last year. He took first place in his class during both days of racing in the Off Soundings Club's annual Spring Series at Block Island.

Purcell, of Mystic, takes credit for only one of the victories, however, attributing the other to the whim of the sailing gods. Purcell will be among the fleet of 135 boats that races to Block Island from Watch Hill today and then around the island Saturday in the 61st annual Spring Series regatta.



On the Docks
David Tranchida

Last year's spring race consisted of a nasty Friday, with a downpour that didn't let up until the Race Committee decided everyone had had enough of waiting and made the decision to motor to Block Island where a short course was set. Problem was, the fog set in shortly thereafter, and finding the final mark proved troublesome for many in the fleet.

Until that day, I'd always wondered why sailors referred to rainy weather as "foul weather" and not simply as "rainy" or "bad" like most people. The reason is that when you are on a boat in the rain for hours instead of ducking in and out of buildings and cars as you would on land, the weather is worse than bad. It is foul.

Saturday, fortunately, was beautiful for the race around the island.

"The first day we had a good start and we were able to find the mark by jibing to committee boat and going to where they said the mark was. That was skillful. The others tried to sail blindly to the mark," Purcell said.

"The second day was the luck. After we cleared IBI (the buoys that marks the start of the channel into Block Island harbor), it went

from a tight reach for us to a beat for them. We had a direct line to the finish and they had to tack for another half hour. We finished just far enough ahead of the class on a reach and as soon as we got the gun the wind shifted and they had to sail 40 percent more distance."

That change in wind was key, because in the formula-laden world of sailboat racing, Purcell had to win by a lot to truly win.

"We owed everybody because we're 30 feet and they're all smaller," Purcell said, explaining the system of rating boats so all are as even as possible. In addition to owning smaller, slower boats time, Purcell was carrying a 10 percent penalty from his previous year's success, a system unique to Off Soundings and intended to prevent one boat from winning every year.

Purcell and his friend, Grace Smith, have been sailing together for some 20 years and the name of their boat is Just Friends. They sail in Class B, which is comprised of older boats with centerboards and anywhere from 24 to 30 feet.

Purcell describes the boats as having "the old style underbody as opposed to the fin keel and spade rudder" of the newer, faster boats. His Pearson Wanderer was built in 1966 and was among the earliest of fiberglass boats.

Like most of the others competing this weekend, Purcell has been a part of the race for many years. It is the camaraderie and the challenge that draws them, he said.

"I have been sailing against these guys forever. One of the big differences with this race is that you are offshore in very exposed water, especially on the other side of the island. One year, the committee boat couldn't hold anchor at Watch Hill. We had seas of six to eight feet and it was blowing 50 knots. That was sometime in the 1980s," he said.

Another race left a nearly indelible mark on his memory.

"It was June 7, 1977. We were sailing to Shelter Island because back then it was flip-flopped, we sailed to Block in the fall series. At the peak of the race, when people were going through The Race, the airport at Groton had clocked the wind at 72 miles per hour and many sailors recorded 60 on their anemometers. That was probably the most extreme wind we ever saw, but nobody was injured. We all made it," he said.

"It's a great challenge to race in these waters, and the camaraderie of seeing the same people for 40 years is wonderful."

David Tranchida is a staff writer for The Day.