

## Wayfarer International Championships at Heeg, Netherlands. A British Perspective.

My name is Tim Townsend. Together with my wife, Jacqueline, we competed at the Wayfarer International Championships in the Netherlands this summer. I've been racing sailing boats for several years but we acquired a secondhand Wayfarer+S in 2011 because I wanted to sail with Jacqueline who had done very little sailing. We upgraded to a MkIV in 2014. We race on the river Medway at Medway YC which is about 45-50 minutes drive from our home in Canterbury, Kent. It's not the closest sailing Club to our home but it has a strong tradition of providing one design racing for yachts and dinghies and has a relatively large and active Wayfarer fleet. Typically we will get 9-12 Wayfarers out racing on Sunday afternoons. Apart from ourselves, three other boats from our Club competed at the Championships along with two more Wayfarers from nearby Wilsonian SC.

The 16th Wayfarer World Championships took place at Heeg, Friesland from 16th to 22nd July 2016. Friesland is a province in the north of the Netherlands, about 80 miles from Amsterdam and 8 miles to the east of the enormous artificial lake of the IJsselmeer. For those familiar with the eponymous inland waterways in England, the canals in this area of the Netherlands linking the many Meers are like a pretty and more upmarket Norfolk Broads.

Heeg, itself, is a very pretty small town, with lifting bridges, pleasant streets, typical Dutch architecture, and iconic Dutch sailing barges such as skutsje. The event centred around the marina and the new club facilities at WS Heeg. The racing took place on the not especially large Heegermeer. There was plenty of room for tents and campers in the area around the marina and a nearby holiday village provided chalets and bungalows. Jacqueline and I shared one of the chalets with clubmates, Mark and Gail Penny, and the neighbouring chalets accommodated other friends. In Dubio, a large barge in the marina also provided accommodation mainly for American and Canadian competitors.

Our adventure started early on the Saturday morning with a short road trip from Canterbury where we live to the channel port of Dover, and a seventy five minute ferry crossing to Calais. This was followed by a four and a half hour drive to Heeg, initially on motorways through France and Belgium before reaching the Netherlands.

We arrived at WS Heeg to find the machinery of a major regatta in full flow. Park the car, unpack the boat, scrutineering, registration, rig, relax. I was surprised to find our two year old MkIV Hartley was several kilograms overweight (a bit like the helm), unsurprised to be required to replace a bent bolt on the handle of the centreboard so the angle of the lowered board was correct. Otherwise, our boat passed muster which was a relief.

Several of our competitors had been on site for a few days already and had secured prime spots for their tents/campers/boats etc but we eventually found some space on the beach for the four Medway YC entries. Most of team Medway had brought bicycles to Heeg and our accommodation was only a 5 minute ride from the Club which was very convenient for the various social events centred around WS Heeg.

On Saturday evening we were welcomed by a local brass band which entered the marina on one of the committee boats and then entertained us royally for the evening. The players all seemed very young but they told us they had been playing together for over 15 years since they were at school. They were skilful musicians and very energetic, and their performance was enjoyed by everybody who heard them.

Sunday morning began with a UKWA meeting on the beach to discuss the racing format, really the only controversy of the week. Most of us had been expecting all the boats to sail in one fleet, but the PRO and his team were proposing to race Gold, Silver and Bronze boats separately. Eventually, after a deputation to the organisers it was agreed that the practice race would be sailed as one fleet, but that the points races would begin with a qualification series followed by races in Gold and Silver/Bronze fleets.

The practice race was sailed in the best conditions but the race team failed to display the number of laps so some of the front boats did an extra lap of the outer loop. Fortunately the result counted for nothing, and, as an occasional race officer, I can say the race team usually need a practice race too.

Monday saw the qualification races in a pleasant force 2-3. The whole fleet was randomly divided into four groups which each sailed against the other groups. Everybody raced at least once against everybody else which was good. Based upon these results the fleet was divided equally into Gold and Silver/Bronze fleets for subsequent races.

From the beginning it was easy to see who would do well, with multiple World, European and UK National Champions McNamara/Townsend (GBR) and Olympic sailor Mogen Just and Anders Friis (DEN) heading the results. The Hartleys (GBR) and Bojes (DEN) were also performing consistently well and Challis/Johnson (GBR) also had two very good races from the three. Our target was to qualify for the Gold fleet which we achieved with good starts and three good results in conditions which suit us, and which would stand us in good stead later in the week. All of the Medway/Wilsonian boats qualified for the Gold fleet apart from Mark and Gail who just missed out. The Gold fleet was dominated numerically by British and Danish boats but there was also representation from Ireland, South Africa, and the Canadian boats of the Wierdsmas and Pilling/Romaniuk. Jim and Sean Heffernan (USA) were allocated to the Silver fleet where points were close going into the final series.

Tuesday brought the forecast light winds...and it was hot. Conditions were difficult for the race team and competitors alike. Three races were scheduled, but only one was completed, in patchy conditions. McNamara/Townsend and Just/Friis continued to lead the way in Gold fleet and the Bojes and Challis/Johnston also had a good race which strengthened their position in the top five. Quite a few of the Gold fleet boats were well placed at various times in the race but it's the finishing position which counts. Jacqueline and I gained another top ten place which we were reasonably happy with. In the Silver fleet, the race was won by Lindquist/Nielson (DEN) who undoubtedly were good enough to sail in the Gold fleet but had a disappointing qualification series. The Heffernans started their charge up the Silver fleet rankings by finishing 4th in this race, while the van Kampens finished 7th.

Tuesday afternoon's racing was a bit of a non-event. There was very little wind, but the fleet was sent out to drift around for a couple of hours while the race team prayed for the

wind strength and direction to settle, fruitlessly as it turned out. Nearly 60 hot and bothered crews returned to shore later in the afternoon after no further racing.

Wednesday provided the best sailing conditions of the week, with 20 knots plus, perfect for the heavy weather sailors and to get the race schedule back on track. Alas! Wednesday was a lay day with no racing scheduled, and no prospect of the race team doing anything to take advantage of the fantastic conditions, notwithstanding a less than favourable forecast for the remainder of the week. Undeterred, after a bit of boat bimbaling, Jacqueline and I cycled to Sneek for a pleasant afternoon including a visit to the maritime museum, before returning to Heeg in the evening for a meal at a local restaurant with our Medway friends.

Thursday dawned with light winds once again, and an optimistic four races scheduled to try and get back on track. The day's racing started badly with a general recall in the first start for Gold fleet after a mass of boats at the pin end encouraged a number to start prematurely. On the second start in what were probably the lightest winds in which we raced, the fleet reached the downwind leg of the outer loop trapezoid course we were sailing, when the fan switched off and restarted a few minutes later from a different direction. The race team abandoned the race (infuriating those who had been doing well to that point) and the fleet was sent ashore for lunch.

Thursday afternoon was much better and two races were completed, the first in a light breeze and the second in a breeze which built quickly to about 15 knots at the finish. This was the day which informed the overall results as Just/Friis took two wins in the Gold fleet while McNamara/Townsend had two second place finishes. These results would be vital in the final reckoning. For our part, we had a good result in the first of the afternoon races (definitely a "counter") but in an incredibly close second race we were briefly hampered by an incident involving two of the Danish boats which were on different legs of the course and which resulted in one of them capsizing on top of us. We recovered well and managed to regain a couple of the places we lost by this, but were beaten by several of our closest competitors.

It was a good day in the Silver fleet for the van Kampens who won the first of the day's races and finished fifth in the second, improving their position overall. The Heffernan's also had a fourth place, but the Silver fleet day was won by the Wheatlys (GBR) with two second places as they moved into contention in that fleet.

The second completed race on Thursday lasted only about 30 minutes for the leaders, and much to the astonishment of many, although the breeze stayed, and the afternoon was still young, the race committee decided to call it a day at that point, with two races completed of the scheduled four.

So it would all come down to Friday's racing with overall wins in both fleets still up for grabs. Three races were scheduled instead of the original two, so that a second discard could be applied. The forecast again was for light winds.....and the forecast was not wrong. The race committee did well again to complete three races although in conditions where they might have considered postponing or even abandoning racing earlier in the week.

Friday was a day of “best intentions” as far as Jacqueline and I were concerned. We had spent the week getting average or better starts and had managed not to get involved with other boats or end up with the alphabet (OCS, DNF, UFD, DSQ etc) on our scorecard. We launched with every intention of carrying on the same. We were lying in 6th place overall and a small points buffer on the boats behind us. We had to continue sailing clean and hope that even in the very lightest of winds we could find the boat speed to get at least one, possibly two top ten results to secure our position.

Needless to say events did not turn out as planned. We finished thirteenth in the first race of the day, which was our worst result to date, but still a result which we would have been happy with before the week began. At the start of the second race, matters took a turn for the worse. A breeze of any kind was a scarce commodity in the seconds leading up to the start. We were settled on starboard tack, about a third of the way up from the pin, with about 20 seconds to the gun, when a super competitive boat (CAN) slowly tacked in our water. We had to turn head to wind to avoid a collision before their tack was complete. The net result of this was that we were completely stationary at the start, and in last place at the first mark. The offending boat sailed away, did turns, and sailed exceptionally well to recover to an acceptable finish. We recorded our worst result of the series which we had to discard.

In the final race of the week, we again struggled to get off the start line but were placed about twelfth in close company with several other boats when we had another incident with the super competitive Canadian boat taking its chances of gaining an inside overlap at the end of the run. Initially we were upset by this, and perhaps it put us out of our stride but the truth is we didn't have the boat speed, relative to our competitors, in those ultra light and patchy conditions which we had enjoyed in the slightly stronger conditions, and we fell away on the final beat to collect our second discard. We had a friendly chat on the beach with our Canadian competitors about the incident, agreed to disagree on the facts, shook hands and took the incident no further. Subsequently I read a report by the Canadians accusing us of being dirty and aggressive which could not be further from the truth and rather took the edge off what had been a good week overall. Ah, well, that's yacht racing.

Jacqueline and I finished ninth overall and fourth GBR boat which we should have been pleased with, and exceeded our target at the beginning of the week, but there was a tinge of disappointment that we not had performed as well on the last day and lost three places as a result. Michael McNamara could say the same thing although his and Simon Townsend's performance in the lottery conditions of the final day but had still been consistently excellent; a 1, 2, 3 finish was not good enough to pip Just/Friis who had a 2, 1, 2 final day. The performance of these two boats was outstanding, and they finished well clear of the rest. Michael's summary to me was that if he made just the tiniest mistake, Mogens took advantage and never let him get the advantage back. I can recall (from a distance, obviously) watching a tacking duel between them in one of the races which showed off their top quality tactical and boat handling skills. Mogens and Anders were deservedly crowned the 2016 Wayfarer World Champions after a range of sailing conditions, with Michael and Simon just one point behind. The Bojes won one of the final day races and finished third overall with Challis/Johnson in fourth and the Hartleys fifth. Pilling/Romaniuk were the best placed of our transatlantic cousins in eighth place overall and sailed very well in a chartered boat that was strange to them, particularly in the light conditions which one would expect. The other Canadian boat in the Gold fleet was sailed by the Wierdsmas who finished twenty-eighth.

In the Silver fleet, the Danish boat of Lindquist/Nielson completed a consistent series of top results to win by twenty points, clear of the Wheatlys who also had a good last day but had to count some big scores. The Hynes (IRE) finished third. The Heffernans continued their good form in this fleet to finish fifth with the van Kampens close behind in sixth.

We had a really good time on and off the water. We were made welcome by our hosts, some of whom we knew already from races in England and in the Netherlands. The racing was generally conducted in good spirits and there were few protests. The race team set good start lines and the courses were usually laid quickly and accurately. If I had a complaint at all, and it's hardly that, it would be there was insufficient flexibility in the schedule so that the Lay Day couldn't be used to catch up with the schedule when the forecast was so good. Also the Race Officer was reported to have said that he hadn't expected Wayfarers to be so fast around the course after a very short practice race. In his defence, the speed around the course of a Wayfarer in 15 knots of wind is going to be considerably quicker than in 5 knots and the size of the available water might have prevented a suitable extension of the legs, although he might have set an extra lap.

Aside from the sailing, the Dutch organised some good social events based at the WS Heeg clubhouse. These included a karaoke evening, a BBQ (for some unfathomable reason cooked next to the "no smoking" sign) and a fish supper. The prize giving was in full swing when we had to leave to drive back to Calais for our ferry. By the early hours of Saturday morning we were safely home after a successful and very enjoyable week.