



PISTOL RIVER

SHOOTOUT

» BY JOSH SAMPIERO

SAILORS WHO LIVE FOR THE WAVES KNOW THAT SCORING A GOOD SESSION IS DIFFICULT. YOU NEED WIND. YOU NEED WAVES. YOU NEED TIDES. YOU NEED TO BE AT THE BEACH AND RIGGED WHEN ALL THOSE AFOREMENTIONED THINGS ARE IN CONGRUENCE. NOW TRY TO SCHEDULE A CONTEST DURING THAT? CRAZY. BUT ONE WEEKEND IN JUNE ALL THOSE THINGS CAME TOGETHER – AND SOME OF THE BEST SAILORS IN THE WORLD WERE THERE TO PLAY.



o you've decided you want to run a windsurfing contest. The first thing to do is pick somewhere that's windy – often.

The southern coast of Oregon is known for its tree-covered hills and rocky beaches – and for being awfully hard to get to from either San Francisco or Portland. It's also known as one of the most consistently windy places in the country, with winds reaching 20-25 knots in side-to-side-onshore conditions. Sam Bittner had never

been to Pistol River or its neighboring town of Gold Beach – she just knew it was windy, and it was the last place a major wave-sailing event had been held in the continental United States. Thus, the Pistol River Wave Bash, which hadn't been run since 2000, was resurrected.

Once you've got the spot, you need the people. Sam was lucky – she lived on Maui, and her outgoing personality and enthusiasm for windsurfing had quickly garnered her a reputation on the island. When she started asking if

anybody wanted to do a contest, people had a hard time saying no. When she asked if people wanted to sponsor a contest, the industry was eager to say yes.

Buzz before the event was good. Rumors started to circulate about the Maui pros that had mentioned making an appearance. Then

Kevin Pritchard registered. Then Francisco Goya. Maybe even Robby himself. As the entries started to come in, so did the sponsor dollars – but it wasn't without stress. Right up until the day the event started, Sam was nervous. But she pushed ahead with unbridled energy and enthusiasm, and word spread fast.

Every wave sailor at every beach on the West Coast was asking another, "Are you going to Pistol?" The only thing Sam needed? Pistol River to fire – and she needed it to fire big.

The Monday before the contest was to start, Sam stepped foot into the sleepy town of Gold Beach for the first time. It was already windy.



DEFENDING THE RIVER

This daring sailor you see flying high over Pistol River's iconic Haystack Rock is Nathan Mershon, a quiet, unassuming sailor who splits time between the Gorge and working his family's fishing boat in Alaska. He was also the defending

champion of Pistol River, having won the last event here over a decade ago, when he was just 19 years old. So how did Nathan do this year? Well, his quarterfinal heat had one former world champ (Cisco

Goya) and one veteran world-traveling pro (Kai Katchadourian). He didn't advance, but he did sail against some damn good competition. He's just happy to have the Wave Bash back.





The Stick That Shaped the Shootout

As evening approached on Saturday, after the competitors had been sailing all day, head judge Matt Pritchard was presented with a dilemma: push forward to finish the double elimination final in light winds – which would favor challenger Francisco Goya – or hold off for stronger winds tomorrow, which, if they delivered, would favor single-elimination winner Kevin Pritchard (who, you know, also happened to be his brother). In the interest of

sportsmanship, these three seasoned competitors simply decided to talk it out. Cisco – who had never beaten KP – pushed to wait for more wind. “I don’t want to claim a win in conditions where our fins won’t even get out of the water,” he said – and so they waited. The next day, the wind filled in and the competition was on. Each sailor threw huge back loops and double forwards, and had great wave rides – but it was this one-handed, one-footed back loop that sealed the deal for KP to take home the honors.

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Will Wave Sailing Contests Return? (and Why They Should)

A murmur has been growing in the sport of windsurfing for quite some time. It started with a contest in Florida known as the Florida Wave Jam, and was followed up by the Hatteras Wave Jam. The contests were small but successful – each one attracted more than a handful of sailors, including some very good ones, and brought some old windsurfers out of the woodwork and got them sailing again. They undoubtedly raised enthusiasm locally, and maybe even helped get some new gear out on the water. Then the Pistol River Wave Bash came along and generated so much excitement, everyone wondered why we hadn’t been having wave-sailing contests all along.

We hadn’t had them because it’s true – historically, wave-sailing contests are hard to pull off successfully. So what’s the point of doing them? Because everybody – every windsurfer, everywhere, for all time, on some level great or small, wants to be a wave sailor. And with the arrival of sailable SUPs and strapped longboards made for waves, we’ve got the equipment to pull off wave contests in a greater range of conditions than ever. So now is the time to make that push – it’s time to make a break for the waves, shoot for the swell, aim for the sky. So will it happen? Word has it that Pistol River planner Sam Bittner has more in store for us next year. All we can say is, bring it on.

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Go ahead. You tell us the last time Kevin Pritchard, Francisco Goya, Kai Katchadourian and oh, yeah, Robby Naish had been windsurfing at the same spot. At the same time. At a beach that wasn’t somewhere in Maui. We’re pretty sure it hadn’t happened anytime in this millennium. In addition to the rock stars, a healthy crew of Gorge pros made the trek down to the coast to see how their freestyle skills would measure up to the Maui pros’ in the waves.

But the pros weren’t the only people who showed up. More than 60 competitors registered for the event – rivaling in numbers the fleets of many recent racing regattas – and included amateur competitors from as far away as Santa Barbara, California, Memphis, Tennessee, and even Italy. Kids as young as 13 – including the ripping-est young lady you’ve ever met, Hood River’s Fiona Wylde, filled out the fleet to make for an impressive showing on the beach. With the official kickoff party on Wednesday night, action started immediately on Thursday with the Junior sailors kicking it off, followed by Men’s, Women’s and Masters divisions. Four judges, including wave sailor extraordinaire Keith Teboul, assessed eight-minute

» Crowds gather for the skippers meeting before competition on Friday. BELOW: Fiona Wylde



heats of four sailors in incredibly windy conditions that had most sailors on a 4.2 or smaller. The wind blasted for more than 30 heats with just a quick break for lunch, at which point the judges declared the single elimination complete. KP was in the lead for the Experts, Zane Schweitzer was leading the Juniors, Ingrid Larouche the Women’s, McRae Wylde was ahead in Masters and former Pistol River event organizer Lars Bergstrom in Amateurs. Competition was held off on Friday with light winds and small waves, then returned on Saturday with moderate breezes for the completion of the double elimination in all but the Experts bracket, with Zane Schweitzer, Lars Bergstrom, Ingrid Larouche and Attila Tivadar taking home honors in their respective divisions. With dwindling winds on Saturday evening, head judge Matt Pritchard consulted with the competitors, and with everyone in agreement, elected to hold off on the Experts division final – which proved to be a good decision when the predicted wind returned full force on Sunday for the epic showdown between KP and Cisco (read more at far left.)

In the end though, the contest wasn’t about the winners, or about sponsors – there was no prize money, only pride – it was about a wave-sailing community that’s been sailing solo for a decade coming together again to celebrate the thing they enjoyed the most. On the beach, at the campground, during the parties – the level of stoke was something that hadn’t been felt among the wave-sailing crowd in years. Everyone had spent almost a week being blasted with sand, huddling in parkas and squeezing into clammy wetsuits only to get uncontrollably blown off their smallest sails – and there was no question they were in windsurfing paradise.

» Want more on the Bash – like videos and final results? pistolriverwavebash.com

