

Formula Worlds Report

Korea, Sept.2006

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Race 1. The first day there were three attempts to start the first race, but the wind kept dropping off. There was just not enough wind to race that day. The next day we had our first race when the wind came in to a very steady 7 to 10 knots. As the start line was a little boat-biased, I started by the boat and got away very cleanly, sitting in a very good position on top of the whole fleet. Antoine and some other top guys did a port tack start mid-boat end to get to the inside of the course where there seemed to be slightly more wind. So I quickly tacked to cover them while Ross GBR-8, Julien FRA-421 and Michal POL-16 continued on the outside of the course where a stronger gust lifted them with a good angle to the windward mark, giving them a good lead over the rest of us who had gone to the beach side of the course. I rounded the mark in 5th position behind Jesper DEN-111 and closed the gap sufficiently on him on the down wind leg to pass him on the reach before the second upwind. Ross and Julien tacked to the outside of the course, hoping to get the same gust on the outside as they had on the first lap, while Michal, Jesper and I continued to the inside. I felt this to be the better option despite the first lap, and it paid off. I had a huge lead on Ross and Julien at the top mark. I had also pointed much better than Michal and continued to close the gap on him all the way to the finish line but ran out of space, finishing just one board length behind him in 2nd, with Julien 3rd, Jesper 4th and Ross 5th.

Race 2, The wind and course were very similar to the first race. So I did a very similar start, but this time continued on the outside of the course for the first upwind, covering Michal who also went to the outside. I had good speed and angle and was first to round the top mark. On the second lap everyone followed me to the inside of the course where I continued to pull away with better speed, angle and tactics to finish almost two minutes ahead of Michal in 2nd followed by Julien in 3rd.

Race 3, They adjusted the start line a little which now made the port end a little better. Although I saw Julien sail to the pin end to make a port tack start, and was tempted to do likewise, I opted to stick with a starboard start to cover Michal as we were now tied equal first on points. Julien and Ross had the best start, crossing almost the whole fleet from the pin end. The wind and angle was also now good enough and there was enough room on the inside by the beach to make the top mark with only one tack, giving them a very good lead at the first mark. Ross and Julien had too much of a lead to be caught, and Ross won ahead of Julien with me in 3rd.

Race 4, Was very similar to race 3 just with a little better wind around 9 -12 knots. So this time many guys went for the port start because of its obvious advantage in race 3, and of course I was there as well. I now had to keep my eye on Ross, Julien and Michal, all of them having a chance to take the lead with this race, with one discard from the 4 races. I had quite a good port start right on the pin end until Bora TUR-11 heard me just above him and pumped and pointed so high we both almost stop planing. So I had to go under him and, by the time I got back to speed, I had dropped into Ross's line even though he had started about 50m below me. My good start above everyone thus became very ordinary, and Ross took the lead to the first mark followed by Julien, myself and then Antoine. I closed the gap on Julien on the down-wind leg but could not get past him before the bottom mark, leaving me in his dirty air all the way to the inside. So I tacked early for the windward mark as I was getting pushed too low and felt I would not have enough room to make the top mark in one tack from the beach anyway. This pushed Julien to tack too early for the top mark and he had to double tack also. Meanwhile Antoine managed to go far enough by the beach and get a good shift to make the mark in one tack. This was good enough to get just ahead of me and right on Julien's tail. With Ross 1st and me 4th in this race, Ross would be 1st overall, so I had to give it my all on the last down-wind to try pass Julien and Antoine, now a good 20 - 30m ahead of me. After rounding the top mark, I gave a couple of hard pumps and sailed as deep as possible to make ground on them. I then jibed perfectly at the same time as Julien and on the same wave to take out Antoine and close the gap on Julien, rounding the bottom mark right on his tail for a race to the finish. As 3rd place would not be good enough to keep my overall lead over Ross, I gritted my teeth and pushed as hard as I could with my sail fully bagged for maximum power. I was slowly getting on top of Julien but had to get completely past him as we had to jibe to the finish. As I levelled with him I got a nice little wave and maybe took some of his wind to pass him clean just before the finish line and take second behind Ross with Antoine 4th. This was enough to keep me in the lead after the first day of racing.

We then had 2 days without any wind at all, with just a good forecast for the morning of the last day.

Race 5, The last day. The wind was gusty cross-off-shore from the opposite direction to the first day of racing. The first start of this race was abandoned after the first lap due to shifting wind conditions and some huge wind holes. The wind soon filled back in to around 12 to 17 knots. The start was pin end biased, so a lot of guys were going for a port tack start on the pin end. I felt it safer to start on starboard right on the pin end and then tack over to cover after a short distance. Although all the guys starting on port ended up having a huge advantage with the wind angle and strength being much better on their direction of the course. While myself and the rest of starboard tack starters had a huge knock. Antoine lead at the first mark ahead of Jesper, Ross and Julien. This put me quite deep on the top mark, well out of the top five, which was not good. I fought hard to catch up and passed a couple on the downwind. Unfortunately for Ross, he was one of those guys, and had broken his fin. I then passed quite a few guys on the second up wind. They had followed Antoine to where he had tacked, which was too far and I tacked much earlier to get into 4th position behind Julien. The leaders, however, were now too far ahead to catch and I had to settle for 4th behind Julien 3rd, Jesper 2nd and Antoine 1st. This was good enough to keep my overall lead ahead of Julien.

Race 6, Very similar conditions to race 5. So I went for port tack start with most of the other top guys as the outside of the course had much better wind. I had a good start with just Antoine above me and Hubert and Julien just below me. This was perfect as I had to keep Julien behind me in this race. I pointed hard to keep above Hubert while Antoine, who started closer to the pin, had more room to maintain more speed and passed me just before we tacked for the windward mark. Antoine and I pulled out a good lead on the second lap over the rest of the fleet. Having a safe distance ahead of Julien made me quite relaxed, too relaxed in fact, forgetting to fight harder with Antoine. It was quite hard to see the windward mark in these conditions and I just sat on Antoine's tail waiting for him to tack. So we both overlaid the top mark by a huge margin. If I had been more aggressive, as in race five, and tacked early, I could have passed Antoine and consolidated my overall lead. But second in this race was still good enough to keep a good lead over the next guys. Julien was initially quite deep in this race but made a good come back, tacking early on this leg to take out a few guys to finish 3rd and keep the pressure on me.

We were then sent back to the beach for a short break as it was not possible to run more than two back-to-back races. I did a quick calculation of the points to see that I could not be passed with just one more race. So I hoped to make the next race a good one to take the pressure off in case of an 8th race. We were sent back out and had just gone into the start sequence for race seven when the wind, as predicted in the forecast, faded out to nothing. We were sent back to the beach to wait for the wind to fill back in. Most unfortunately for Ross, it didn't. With just one more race, permitting a second discard, even an average result for Ross would have put him in the top 3, possibly 2nd, but it was not to be - it was all over.

I arrived early to train for this event, the most important contest of the year for me, and I am incredibly stoked to take this world title again after two discouraging years. I had come so close in the 2004 FW Worlds in Poland, missing out by less than one point. I had also just missed out on the PWA racing tour title that year, taking 2nd there also. Then 2005 was a huge blow to my confidence. I had struggled with illness in the FW Europeans. Then I broke my foot during the Sylt World Cup and was out of action for two months, only coming back on the water one week before the FW Worlds in Melbourne, still struggling with pain and lack of fitness.

A huge thanks to my sponsors – Benzacne, Gaastra/Tabou, Deboichet, Advertis – for their belief in me. For great equipment and fantastic support, without which I could not have had this great win. Thanks a lot. Also, to all my family, friends and supporters, your kind encouraging words and thoughts all help to give me the power I need, so thanks a lot to you all.

Equipment used; first 4 races Gaastra 12m Vapor with Deboichet R17 Soft +8. Race 5 and 6 Gaastra 11m Vapor with Deboichet R17 Soft +8