

2011 Tiller Trophy Results: Connor Winn takes Tiller Trophy

For the first time in recent memory, a Senior (albeit barely a Senior) won the Tiller Trophy, the long-running match-racing competition begun in 1991 to determine the best helmsman at Manchester Yacht Club. (The actual tiller came from the 55' center-board ketch "Alice", owned by Henry Howard of Marblehead, and was donated in 1991 by Mr. Howard's grandson, Tom Townsend.) On June 19 the MYC floats were crowded with spectators present for the Sunday Social who witnessed aggressive starting tactics, close finishes and near capsizes. They were also treated to family rivalries and frequent upsets.

Connor Winn, who will shortly be racing for the University of Vermont sailing team, bested a field of 14 Seniors and eight Juniors to win the coveted trophy. Connor needed to overcome a field of determined and experienced sailors as well as difficult wind and current conditions. He captured the Tiller by topping the victor on the Junior side of the bracket, Mimi Leggett.

The highlight of the day was Winn's effort in the finals of the Senior bracket, in which he needed to overcome perennial Tiller Trophy winner, James Collins. Collins had the disadvantage of not sailing in his yacht of choice, the eight foot Optimist Dinghy, but rather competing in the 15 foot Megabyte. In that race, Winn and Collins crossed the starting line perfectly matched and battled in the shifty air up to the weather mark, where Winn managed to take the inside rounding position. Winn extended his lead to two boat lengths halfway down the leeward leg, but a new breeze brought Collins into an overlap as they approached the finish. The margin of Winn's victory was a mere half boat length.

This year's competition was also noteworthy for intense sibling rivalry -- three Winns, and two Byrnes -- and two inter-generational pairings -- with Lowell Reeve facing off against his father Abbott, and Gary Stirgwolt challenging his father Ted. In each case youth prevailed despite it being Father's Day.