2010 Lake Erie Solo Challenge Recap

The 2010 GLSS Lake Erie Challenge saw 16 boats start on what would turn out to be a beautiful tour of Lake Erie. After a thanksgiving turkey dinner at North Cape Yacht Club the talk was about the weather, or more specifically the lack of much. The forecast read, “High pressure with variable winds.” and that was all for both Saturday and Sunday. A high pressure system dominated the area but created just enough wind to keep the boats sailing at enjoyable speeds. The start featured light southerly winds with flying spinnakers and a fly by Walt Norris’ son in his helicopter to take fleet aerials. The winds slowly filled in and then shifted to the Southeast as the skippers struggled to make Pelee Point. Walt Norris was the only boat to clear Pelee without having to tack as he escaped from the competition. The further behind the boat, the more the wind shifted and the longer the beat to pass Pelee Point. The winds were in the10 knot range and while the fleet tacked, Walt rocketed away on a reach down Lake Erie. The night breeze held as the fleet passed Pelee Point and made good miles down the course. With clear skies the fleet watched the stars and an awesome, big orange, nearly full moon. While the moon washed out a lot of stars there was no excuse for perfect sail trim.

Overnight the winds shifted more southerly and by dawn the spinnakers were back up on a beam reach that would hold the entire day in the 4-8 knot range. Light air but great sailing on a big pond. It was hot, and sunny and the only spray was from cockpit bucket showers. Sunday night the winds held as the fleet, several of which had AIS, watched the freighters come and go.

Walt Norris finished early Monday while the rest of the fleet started rounding the Buffalo mark. Monday saw the breeze hold until early afternoon. The winds went southwest in the afternoon and while the lead boats closed in on the finish in Erie, the rest of the fleet faced a long beat with out of phase slop for 60 miles. The winds finally backed to an offshore breeze that would come and go and come and go.

The winds finally went as the day heated up on Tuesday and the last 2 boats were left to struggle for every mile while the rest of the skippers enjoyed the facilities at Erie Yacht Club. ***The final results showed 3 new skippers earning GLSS membership.*** Dave Evans summed it up as on the most enjoyable GLSS sail he ever had. Make yourself a promise to be there for the 5th LESC in 2011.

Paul Nickerson, *Nicknack* T37c #168