

Van den Berg wins Heineken Light CARIBBEAN LASER CHAMPIONSHIPS

By Robert Luckock

ORIENT BAY—Dennis van den Berg, a teen sailing sensation from Curacao, won the **21st Caribbean Laser Championships** sponsored by Heineken Premium Light and hosted by Club Orient last weekend with a faultless run to upstage many seasoned Laser veterans.

The 18 year old sailing for the first time with a Standard rig won five of the eight races sailed, finished in second place twice and dropped only to third place in his worst race.

Anguilla's Karl James wasn't able to get dialled in to the light air but still managed second in the Open Class (third in the overall standings) with St. Barth's Markku Harmala taking third in the Open (fifth overall)

St. Barth's Benoit Meesemaecker sailed consistently well to take first place in Masters (second overall) while St. Maarten's Frits Bus was fourth overall and second in Masters. USA's Timothy Landt finished third in Masters and placed sixth overall.

Bus, sponsored by Caribbean Liquors, was denied a higher finish after discovering at the end of the last race on Sunday that he had forgotten to put the plug in his Laser and hadn't noticed the boat filling with water, so focused was he on sailing the course.

The Radial class was won by Rodrigo Delgado, Manuel Lehoux was second, and St. Maarten's Ernst Looser third.

Van den Berg, first in Radial at this event last year, put his success down to a gruelling training regime. "I'm training to qualify for the Olympics and all I did last year was sail constantly", he noted. "Now I'm combining school, sailing and gym. I trained in Argentina for eight months, Brazil, Uruguay, and then I went to Europe where I did three big championships. It's been non-stop".

"The light wind here was perfect," he added. "I'm fit but I hadn't trained for the Standard sail. Yet I was strong enough to keep the boat flat and maintain speed."

Karl James, a 5-time consecutive winner here in the past, won both the first and the last races but fell off the pace in between.

"I was well prepared physically coming here, but it wasn't to be", said James. "But it was good to see the others sailing well. I think I'm a very good light air sailor too, but when you see light guys passing you, you start to wonder."

A squall greeted the fleet before the first race on Saturday and then sucked up all the wind creating light and shifty conditions on the course. Sunday returned to more stable, but still light conditions.

Sint Maarten Yacht Club Commodore Robbie Ferron presented Dominican Republic's Omar Bros with a Yacht Club burgee, noting that the amiable sailor has participated on the regatta no less than sixteen times.

Lyn and Andrew were Race Officers for the regatta that attracted nineteen entrants.

Prize winners went home with framed Antoine Chapon paintings.