# WSSYSA Regatta 2026 – a short report



For many young people across West Sussex the WSSYSA Regatta is the highlight of their sailing year, the event that they and their friends prepare for, and the event that they look forward to most. The competition and rivalry are intense, but the friendliness, camaraderie and goodwill are there for all to see. 100 young people, in 82 dinghies, from five Sussex clubs, signed up for the weekend of 18 & 19 September. Each of the four visiting clubs brought along a crewed RHIB safety boat, and Arun Youth Aqua Centre brought two. This generous support, together with two powerboats from Felpham Sea Scouts, Aaron Bridges' SIB and four FSC powerboats meant that 12 safety boats were available to provide safety cover and coaching to the fleets.

With ten days to go, the weather looked far from perfect for the range of ages and skill levels attending. The regatta preparation had always included a Plan B that would be ready if the weather didn't play ball. On the Saturday morning the wind forecast was too strong for most participating. At 0830 the decision was made and Plan B kicked into gear. Of the 100, 85 decided to stay for Plan B and have some different fun and games. Three groups had fun in a variety of activities which included race coaching, games at the Scout HQ, a walk to Hotham Park to have some fun pedalo racing (with a free ice cream), a free lunch, and some time out to chill doing activities such as a Treasure Hunt around Felpham village, arts and crafts, and some free time to be with friends.

Saturday evening saw a lot of the youngsters and their families enjoying Moonbeams Karaoke before retiring to bed. Sunday dawned bright and clear with gentle winds and a calm sea, what a difference from Saturday. Sunday morning started with a 0830 race brief the first part of which was an inspirational talk given by Jess Breach, Red Roses Women's Rugby star. Jess sailed at FSC and competed in several WSSYSA Regattas, loved her sailing but loved rugby even more. She now has 58 caps; in all those games she has scored 57 tries, and never lost a game. Her talk was about resilience, confidence and self-belief, giving tremendous insight into the life of a professional athlete dealing with setbacks, injuries and deselection, and at the same time having a tremendous high of the 2025 World Cup win.

The subsequent race brief saw the sailors divided up into fleets by PY handicap for Fast and Slow fleets and a separate Rookie fleet. The handicap fleets sailed on a trapezoid course with a novel arrangement for the start/finish lines to keep the two fleets separated. The Sailing Instructions allowed for four races in the day; sailors were briefed to stock up with snacks and water because back-to-back races left no time for a return to shore for a lunch break. An early start by the on-water teams with committee boat, mark layers and safety fleet getting set the tone of speed and efficiency culminating in publishing results and prizegiving soon after 4pm.

The racing in all fleets was close with participants from the five clubs evenly spread throughout. Orson Webb (Worthing SC) sailing an ILCA4 and Oscar North (Felpham SC) sailing an ILCA6, traded first places in the Fast Fleet, both scoring two

bullets, but Orson's 2nd place trumped Oscar's 3rd and he won the Fast Fleet by just one point after the discard. The next three places were also closely contested with just three points separating Louie Cornell (FSC), Archie Pearson (Dell Quay SC) and Joe Atherton (FSC).

The Slow Fleet had a similar situation with the first two sailors trading first places with Leo Dillingham (FSC) sailing an RS Tera Pro, and Szymon Giersz (Crawley Mariners YC) in his Topper 4.2 both ending up on 4 points, but on countback Leo took the honours. Joey Monk and Nova Robertson (WSC) sailing an RS Feva XL showing great consistency were clear of the chasing pack with 11 points. The following six places were separated by just six points and featured two Fevas, two Tera Pros, a Topper and a Pico, with all five clubs being represented in this group. 4th place in the Slow Fleet went to Ophelia Wilson and Ayuna Davey (Arun Youth Aqua Centre) sailing a Feva with 3rd being their best result and a total of 17.

Coaching, development and improvement was a theme developed during both Saturday and Sunday. On water video was taken of participants and subsequently shared online, and for the Rookie Fleet the first part of Sunday was spent coaching the fleet around a triangular course and doing some practice starts prior to completing three races. Like the handicap fleet a committee boat and flag starts were used but the flag sequence was a simple 3-2-1-Go. This was simpler and helped a faster turnaround of races and the Rookies completed three races. Once more we saw the top two sailors, Theo Gatehouse (RS Tera Sport, FSC) and Ben Smart (Pico, WSC) separated by just one point with Theo's two bullets making the difference between the two of them. And again, the next seven places were closely contested with just 7.5 points separating them and Team Worthing showing that they have some outstanding Rookie sailors.

When the sailors came off the water, they were greeted with a choice of a pasta meal or curry, and loads of cake, all provided free of charge to contestants. For prizegiving the tables were loaded up with a glittering array of prizes and Tony Bernard (Chair of the Steve Bernard Foundation – a regatta sponsor) helped with presenting the very many prizes. Besides sought after spot prizes there were prizes for the Treasure Hunt, thank you gifts for many of those in leadership roles, NSSA awards and the Russell Moore Trophy. There were several strong candidates for this trophy and after much deliberation Chloe Juniper (FSC) was awarded the trophy, presented by Paula Bentley, Russell's brother. Team managers were presented with a pack of gifts for every participant which included a certificate, a medal & ribbon, a Steve Bernard Foundation wristband, and a regatta branded baseball cap with the logo "Believe in yourself". 47 trophies awarded for Fleet podium places and Class trophies (where fleet size merited one or more trophies). However, all were aware of the all-important Team Trophy – which club was going to take the honours? The WSSYSA Team Trophy has been awarded for over 30 years, but this year for the first time a new perpetual trophy was purchased that would be awarded to the best placed Rookie team. The results were very close and are recorded here:

## Rookies Team Trophy

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| 1st | Worthing SC | 12 pts |
| 2nd | Felpham SC | 19 pts |
| 3rd | Arun Youth Aqua Centre | 36 pts |

## Handicap Fleets Team Trophy

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| 1st | Felpham SC | 11 pts |
| 2nd | Worthing SC | 23 pts |
| 3rd | Dell Quay SC | 29 pts |
| 4th | Crawley Mariners YC | 34 pts |
| 5th | Arun Youth Aqua Centre | 51 pts |

The theme for the Regatta was “Believe in Yourself”. A series of talks and event were arranged supporting and emphasising this theme. Sussex Underwater, Hannah Mountain, Jazz Turner, Moonbeams Karaoke and Jess Breach supported and inspired our young people in so many ways. Thank you to all of you.

Many, many volunteers from all five clubs pulled together to make this regatta a huge success, the generous gifts of spot prizes were most welcome. The Felpham team came up trumps with so many volunteers helping on the prom, the beach, with tallies, checking dinghies, results, committee boats, safety boats, event safety, first aid, kitchen, bar, arts & crafts, treasure hunt, and many more unseen tasks, duties and roles. I cannot possibly name them all and would inevitably miss some out, but to everyone who helped make the Regatta a wonderful success, I say a heartfelt thank you. The regatta was sponsored by The Steve Bernard Foundation, Rotary Hotham, RYA L&SE Youth Training Fund, SMR Solicitors & WSSYSA. 1st Felpham Sea Scouts and The Lobster Pot both supported the regatta in many ways too. Thank you to all of our sponsors and supporters.

At Prizegiving Jez Leggett, CYC Training Manager, invited everyone to Chichester YC for the 33rd edition of the WSSYSA Regatta on the weekend of 19/20 September 2027 – save the date!

Author: Roger Belton Photo credit: Tony Lord

Results, photo gallery & coaching videos: https://www.wssysa.org/wssysa-regatta-2026/











