

Up To The Challenge

Twelve athletes won overall titles at the 24th annual Kneeboard National Championships, Sept. 13-14, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Written by **Marissa Foglia**
Photography by **John Dicus**

If hard work could be measured in dollars, the nation's top kneeboard athletes would have represented millions at the 24th annual Kneeboard Championships. It was a weekend of competition mixed with family fun, Sept. 13-14, on Lake Lauderdale at Mills Pond Park in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

This year's event was hosted by the Skionee Board Team and Gold Coast Water Ski Club, as the country's best kneeboard athletes vied for coveted titles in slalom, tricks, freestyle and flip out events.

Among the returning competitors this year was Mark Ritchhart, who won Open Men slalom and overall as well as the exciting flip out competition. "The competition is getting more intense and closer every year," says Ritchhart, who also won the Open Men overall title in 2007. "I was definitely glad to win Open Men, don't get me wrong. But what stuck in my head was my trick performance. It seems like you could do one trick perfectly one hundred times and then once you attempt it in the actual competition, you just can't seem to get it."

Doug Rogerson won Open Men tricks, tallying 4,100 points to Ritchhart's 3,830 points. Still, Ritchhart was able to leave his worries from the tricks performance behind once he conquered the flip out. "Sometimes things seem to just go your way, which is why I thought it was kind of funny that I ended up winning the flip out competition just an hour or so after my loss in tricks," he says. "It all worked out."

Ritchhart's daughter, Leah, also competed at the event and won the Girls' overall and tricks titles. "Competing with my oldest daughter at this year's nationals was really nice," Mark Ritchhart says. "Winning is wonderful, but the entire weekend is always such a family-oriented time and we really



value that. When you've been skiing with the same people for years and years, it's more like a family reunion than a competition."

Throughout the weekend, athletes competed in 12 divisions, ranging from Junior to Open. In the slalom event, competitors ski around each buoy in a six-buoy course, with the towline being shortened each time a complete pass was achieved. In tricks, the rider must complete as many maneuvers as possible in two 20-second passes.

Patrick Dicus of Alpharetta, Ga., clinched the Junior Boys' slalom and overall titles, while Mitchell Ascher of Green Bay, Wis., won the Junior Boys' tricks title. In Boys, Patrick Kimrey of Lake Placid, Fla., swept titles in overall, slalom and tricks.

In Girls, Amanda Davis of Naples, Fla., won slalom. In Junior Girls, Kai Lei Wallace of De Pere, Wis. won the tricks and overall titles, while her sister, McKenzie, won the slalom. Kai Lei, who was coached by both her father Mike and fellow Men 1 competitor Chris Dinse, was blown away by her win. "I felt pretty good about my perfor-

Jared Bohlen tallied 4,225 points to win the Men 1 tricks title.

mance that day, but I didn't think I'd place that high up," says Kai Lei, 13. "To be honest, I was kind of surprised because this was actually my first

Individuals Honored

Jon C. Haile received the Mr. Pete Salassi Good Sportsman award at the Kneeboard Nationals. Each year the members of the American Kneeboard Association select a recipient of this prestigious award. Ballots are distributed at the annual competitors' meeting. Leah Ritchhart was the recipient of the Mr. Pete Salassi Scholarship award. Each year the American Kneeboard Association awards a member 17 or under a scholarship in the amount of \$500. To be considered, a short essay must be submitted to the board of directors prior to the annual summer board of directors' meeting.

competition I'd ever taken part in...so I was really excited to win."

So what's it like competing against her sister, McKenzie? Perhaps a little sibling competition added to the drive to win. "I knew a few other riders at the event that day, but it is always kind of tough competing against family," Kai Lei admits.

Looking ahead, Kai Lei plans to work on holding onto her title. "I'll continue to practice a few times a week and on weekends," she says. "Next year will be exciting because I will move into the Girls' division, so I'm going to work on my wake crossings. I'm going to really give it my best again next year."

In Men 1, Jared Bohlen of Lake Placid, Fla., won titles in overall and tricks, while Ken Stuart of Copperhill, Tenn., won slalom. In Men 2, Gabe Grissom of Chocowinity, N.C., swept the slalom, tricks and overall titles. He also won the national freestyle title. Kurt Schmelzer of Saint Bonifacius, Minn., swept the Men 3 slalom, tricks and overall titles, while Kenny Stuart of Copperhill, Tenn., swept titles in Men 4 slalom, tricks and overall. In Men 5, Dave Brunt of Tobaccoville, N.C., swept titles in slalom, tricks and overall.

Amanda Davis won the Girls' slalom title and placed second in tricks and overall.



Patrick Dicus won the Junior Boys' slalom and overall titles, and placed second in tricks.

In the Women's divisions, A'lisha Piper of Lake Placid, Fla., swept the slalom, tricks and overall titles in Open Women. She also won the national freestyle title. Denys Anderson of Lakeland, Fla., swept the Women 3 slalom, tricks and overall titles.

For complete results, visit USAWATERSKI.org and click on the "Kneeboarding" link at the top of the home page.

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