

The Officers, Directors and Members of  
US SAILING  
**are pleased to present the**  
ARTHUR B. HANSON RESCUE MEDAL  
to

**BENJAMIN RICHARDSON**

**for the rescue as follows:**

On March 16, 2003 at the 2003 Laser Classes Midwinter West Regatta at Mission Bay Yacht Club in San Diego, CA, the 15 knot winds and 8 to 13 foot waves had shifted direction causing the waves to break in Mission Bay Jetty inlet, a channel with rock piled breakwaters on both sides, with air and water temperatures about 61 degrees.

One returning Laser Radial with a junior in his PFD came too close to rocks of the south jetty. Suddenly, a large wave broke on top of his stern, causing an immediate capsize. He quickly separated approximately 30 feet from his boat by the surge and the sailor began to drift towards the jagged rocks to leeward.

Ben Richardson wearing his PFD, the nearest competitor in a full rig Laser, retrieved the sailor on his own boat (after the victim was floating free for 2 minutes), which was within 20 feet of the jetty and its wild surf. While getting back to the middle of the channel, Richardson's boat capsized, re-righted and both climbed back on board. Clearing the surf zone, Richardson delivered the sailor to the safety of a nearby coach boat. Richardson then went back to the Laser Radial and attempted to rescue the boat. Another surf capsized his boat and broke his boom. He climbed back aboard and sailed to the safe zone abandoning hopes of rescuing the boat and clearing a channel of this hazard.

Congratulations to Benjamin Richardson, for coming to the aid of another mariner in peril, while risking himself and his boat, and attempting to clear the waterway of a navigational hazard. US SAILING is pleased to present the Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal.

Ronald C. Trossbach  
Chairman, Safety at Sea Committee  
By Direction

**The Arthur B. Hanson Rescue Medal was awarded to Benjamin Richardson  
at the at Mission Bay Yacht Club Midwinter West Regatta  
Awards Ceremony on March 16, 2003.**

**DETAILS:**

Ben Richardson displayed exceptional seamanship and real heroism during his rescue of a fellow sailor, while sailing at the three-day 2003 Laser Class Mid Winter West Regatta in San Diego, CA, in extreme sea and surf conditions. Richardson, a long time participant on the North American Laser circuit, is currently training and campaigning for a berth on the US Olympic team.

The regatta's participants leave and return each day through the Mission Bay Jetty inlet, whose south side is extremely unforgiving in westerly surf. While the first two days of the regatta saw blustery ESE and SE wind conditions unusual for March in the area, day three began with moderate W winds and a forecast for increasing swells and wind late in the day. Early in the morning the inlet and ocean looked passable and the PRO determined that racing would continue. While the leaders had no particular difficulty negotiating the channel enroute the racing venue, the large Pacific swell arrived 6 hours early – which created dangerous breaking surf at the jetty mouth, making the entrance impassable for the second half of the fleet. The PRO abandoned racing and signaled the fleet accordingly.

Sailors began to make their way back to the Club for further instruction. One returning boat had too much fun surfing the large waves and came too close to rocks of the south jetty. Suddenly, a large (masthead high) wave broke on top of his stern, causing an immediate broach. Quickly separated almost 30 feet from his boat by the surge, the sailor began to drift towards the jagged rocks. Ben Richardson, the nearest competitor, demonstrated exceptional seamanship by immediately retrieving the sailor on his own boat (no mean feat in a Laser), which was itself by then within 20 feet of the jetty and its wild surf. Clearing the surf zone, Ben delivered the sailor to the safety of a nearby chase boat, demonstrating exceptional seamanship and control in the dangerous conditions.

Ben returned to the capsized Laser and tried to tow it to the center of the channel. However, a large and nearly vertical wave completely enveloped his boat and the boat in tow, capsizing Ben's boat, breaking the boom and leaving Richardson in the water. Recovered by a San Diego Lifeguard Surf Rescue Boat, Ben was placed on one of the RC Boats. Several chase boats were by then on the scene and were able to place the 2 capsized Lasers safely in tow during a lull in the heavy surf.

At the awards ceremony later that day the longest and most sustained applause was when Ben Richardson's remarkable efforts were recognized.

How did victim help himself back onboard: Pulled himself aboard.

Benjamin Richardson clarifies the event:

A narrow pass to the ocean in which there is a breaking surf. Several boats make it out to the ocean towards the race course. Zach Railey, another top-50-in-the-World-Laser-sailor and I hang around in the pass surfing the waves. The RC boat tries to get out to no avail and calls the day off, so boat start coming in from outside. One kid gets tossed by the surf and ends up very close to the leeward break-wall. Neither Zach nor I can get to him, but luckily a life guard boat comes and grabs him, leaving his boat.

Another kid comes in and gets tossed by the surf and very quickly another wave comes and washes his boat further into the impact zone (somewhere Zach and I cannot really even venture into), so I go and grab him. Once I get him into my boat, we are tossed by a relatively small wave, but get back into the boat and I sail him out and onto a coach boat. By then there are numerous coach boats that have made it out from the yacht club and none of them are 'doing anything' about the situation. Boats are still coming in from the ocean, and for whatever reason, the impact zone is getting worse.

Boats coming in don't know that one half of the pass is dangerous. The two boats that are now turtled in the impact zone aren't getting any closer to the rocks, probably due to the outgoing tide, so I decide to 'test' the situation and see how safely one can get to these boats so we can try to get them out. This is when I get tossed by a serious wave and my boom breaks.

I am able to swim to my boat and get out.

I am happy that six years of international Laser sailing made me skilled and stupid enough to involve myself in various aspects of this situation. If I was in a motor boat, I would have been totally confident in zipping in and grabbing sailors an/or boats. The waves were building very quickly and very dangerously, but with a motor, it was do-able (this from someone who has finished 20th in a Laser Worlds race in 30+ knots). However, no one in

motorboats was doing anything. I don't consider anything I did out of the ordinary or commendable, although I happened to be about the only person capable of doing anything at the time.

Anyway, time for rest with three days to go in Athens.

Best,  
Benjamin Richardson

Nominators Name: Bob Falk  
Event Name: Laser Midwinters West  
Sponsoring Yacht Club: Mission Bay Yacht Club  
Date of Event: 3/16/03  
Event City: San Diego  
Event State: CA  
Date of Incident: 3/16/03  
Body of Water: Mission Bay Jetty  
First Victims Name: unidentified racer, approx 14 yrs old  
First Boat Length: 14  
First Boat Make Model: Laser Radial  
Rescuing Skipper : Benjamin Richardson  
Rescuing Boat Make Model: Laser Full Rig  
Rescuing Boat Length: 14  
What was the nature of this incident: Pulled sailor from breaking swells  
Was any injury sustained by the victim: no  
Can your story be published: yes  
Was a PFD worn: Yes  
What position was the victim working before they went in: dinghy skipper  
Was this day or night: day  
Wind speed: 15  
Wave height: 15  
Water temperature: 60  
Air temperature: 60  
How much time did the victim spend in the water: 1-2 minutes  
Was the victim able to help in the recovery: yes  
What happened:  
Sailors heading out the Mission Bay channel to the Pacific Ocean racing area on Sunday morning, Mar 16 at the Laser Midwinters West regatta found huge, breaking swells closing out across the entrance to the jetty. One young Laser Radial competitor, upon seeing the conditions, turned around to sail back in but was caught by an especially large swell of approximately 15' which broke inside the jetty and flipped his boat. The sailor and his boat were in peril of washing against the breakwall with the breaking swells. A full rig Olympic hopeful competitor, Benjamin Richardson, was in the vicinity sailing out the channel and immediately came to the young competitor's rescue despite his own peril and pulled the sailor onto his boat. Another large breaking wave then struck and rolled the rescuing Laser breaking it's boom in the process, however rescuing skipper Ben Richardson was able to recover and sail the boat with it's broken boom and get the young sailor to the safety of a rescue boat.

Note: this is the story as I understood it from Ben Richardson on the day of the event. Please contact Ben for clarification of details prior to any press release. You can get his contact information from the Mission Bay Yacht Club's entry forms. Also, please note that at least one other Laser sailor was also rescued in the same general area by a chase boat that morning. Both abandoned boats were later recovered dismasted with various levels of damage from washing into the breakwall.

Nominators Name: R. L. (Scott) Mc Kay  
Event Name: 2003 Laser Classes Midwinter West Regatta  
Sponsoring Yacht Club: Mission Bay Yacht Club  
Date of Event: 14, 15 and 16 March  
Event City: San Diego  
Event State: CA  
Date of Incident: 16 March (last day)  
Body of Water: Pacific Ocean/Mission Bay Jetty  
First Victims Name: Unknown

First Boat Length: 13'

First Boat Make Model: Laser (Radial)

Rescuing Skipper: Ben Richardson

Rescuing Boat Make Model: Laser (Full rig)

Rescuing Boat Length: 13'