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Only 6 seconds separated Larry Cain and Tommy Buday as the racers took first and second at Saturday's Surf to Sound in Wrightsville Beach. Staff photo by Terry Lane.



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PHOTOS: Seconds separate racers as Canadians dominate Wrightsville Beach's Surf to Sound again

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BY TERRY LANE ON NOVEMBER 7, 2016 - 11:34 AM

NEWS

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At the south end water tower, local paddler April Zilg was finally overtaken, despite holding a lead over the top-rate Canadian competitor for most of the Surf to Sound standup paddleboard race on Saturday. Zilg was in a desperate sprint to try to break up the recent Canadian ownership of the podium, but in the end, Brandon Von Elslander's powerful stroke was too much

"I wanted to be on the men's podium," Zilg said afterwards. "I had a really good ocean leg, but the wind picked up and the tide wasn't pushing on Banks Channel. That last leg was so long."

Von Elslander took the third-place spot on the podium, outracing the women's winner Zilg by 29 seconds. The Canadian paddlers continued their recent dominance of the race, though this year's results were flipped from last year, with Larry Cain topping Tommy Buday in both of this weekend's races at Surf to Sound North Carolina at the Blockade Runner Beach Resort. In both of their races, the two Canadians were separated by only seconds.

The ocean start of Saturday's 6.5 mile Surf to Sound race was disruptive for some of the Canadian competitors, who mainly train on lakes and rivers.

"The beach start is difficult," Von Elslander said. I started slow, but once I got around the jetty, I started picking up speed and picking off other racers one-by-one."

Von Elslander charged to reach Zilg, who was so far ahead that he thought she might have been a male competitor that he lost track of.

"I didn't come all this way to get fourth," he said. "She did really well, but I was just going to go for it."

The competition for third didn't distract from the exciting finish between Cain and Buday. Cain bested Buday by six seconds on Saturday's Surf to Sound and by five seconds on Sunday's 9-mile Flatwater Championship.

Cain attributed the win to his conditioning, pointing to his winter paddle routines, and a win two weeks ago at the Chattajack 31 race in Chattanooga, Tenn. The 53-year-old athlete won the canoeing Olympic gold medal in the 1984 Olympics.

"We were right together the whole way," Cain said after his Saturday win. "Every time he passed me, I responded. My advantage came in the headwind."



Wilmington paddleboarder April Zilg, center, points out Brandon Von Elslander, the Canadian racer who bested her by less than 30

seconds. Zilg won the women's Surf to Sound division and Larry Cain, pictured right, was the men's champion. Staff photo by Terry Lane.



"The wind and the current were not my friends today," said 10-year-old Elizabeth Lennert

The weekend's event also included the 4-mile Harbor Island Outer Loop Race on Saturday and the daunting 23.5 mile Kraken race, which was completed by three competitors: Hunter Hay on a surf ski, Mary Margaret McEachern on kayak and Mark Sumner on a standup paddleboard. Three mixed teams of 6-person outrigger canoes competed in Sunday's 9-mile flatwater race.

While the Surf to Sound tested the elite racers on Saturday, the Harbor Island race gave first time racers an experience with the sport. Mindy Magrath traveled from Raleigh for her first paddleboard race and accomplished her goal.

"I didn't fall off!" Magrath exclaimed, whose training has been exclusively on lakes. "A few boats went by and, woah, I was surfing the waves. These were tougher conditions."

Though not her first paddleboard race, 10-year-old Elizabeth Lennert also struggled through the conditions on Saturday to finish the Harbor Island race in 1:15.

"The wind and the current were not my friends today," Lennert said.

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Photos from Sunday's Surf to Sound races from staff photographer Allison Potter:

<http://luminanews.com/2016/11/photos-seconds-separate-racers-canadians-dominate-wrightsville-beachs-surf-sound/>