

AT THE ANNUAL ROCK PAPER SCISSORS REGATTA

BSC's junior sailing program hosts weekend of family fun



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Photographed by **TUCKER WEBB**
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The Birmingham Sailing Club is humming with activity on a late-summer Saturday. It's high noon and the day actually feels pleasant. The temperature is in the low 90s, there is a nice breeze stirring, and the humidity is blessedly low.

In other words, it's a perfect day for sailing.

It's the start of the Birmingham Sailing Club's annual Rock Paper Scissors Youth Regatta on Logan Martin Lake, a series of races for kids capped off with an "epic" rock, paper, scissors tournament as the sun begins to set over the lake. The regatta is a weekend of fun on the water, giving these young boaters a chance to develop their sailing skills in a



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low-pressure environment and emphasizing fun and learning rather than winning.

"This regatta is to encourage kids to get into racing," says Amy Sides, who oversees the club's junior sailing program and organizes the annual youth regatta. It has two categories, one for the younger and less-knowledgeable sailors and one for older youngsters and those with more experience.

"Some of them are really serious, but some of them may be older and it's their first time," Amy said. "The focus is just on having a fun weekend."

From the viewpoint of a novice, (like me), the racing looks like organized aquatic anarchy with boats seemingly going in all directions at once. However, as Amy explains, there is structure to the chaos.

A race begins with a five-minute period in which each sailor, helming either a small one-person boat or a team of two sailors on a larger vessel, works to get into position. It's during this period that the sailors sail to the starting line, marked by an anchored motor boat on one side and a buoy marked with a flag on its top. Once the five-minute period is over, a horn signals the start of the race,



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and... they're off!

Watching the races at a distance, from the club's pier or on the back deck of one of the nearby lake houses, the action looks like a peaceful day on the water. With sunlight shimmering on the surface of the lake and the boats, with their majestic white sails standing tall and gently gliding across the water, you can almost hear Barry White's "Love's Theme" in the background (FYI: CBS Sports used this song during televised PGA golf events for years).

Up close, however, it's a different story.

The regatta features boats in different classes such as Optimists, 7.9-foot dinghies designed for beginners, Lasers, 420s, and Open Skiffs, all battling for position as they race to be the first in their class to sail through the buoy-marked course and back across the finish line.

Hitching a ride on Amy's motorboat, captained by her husband Jeffrey, we ride along the edges of the action as the kids jockey for position and, when needed, receive instructions and advice from adult members of the club. Throughout the race, the kids are making quick decisions, adjusting for the wind direction and competing boats as they tack and



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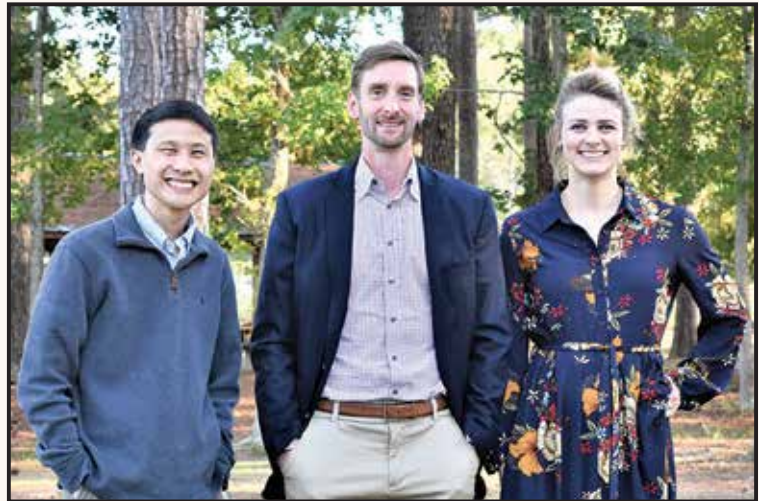
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gybe their way through the course.

These young sailors, some of them at an age where they're still learning to color within the lines, are constantly adjusting and learning how to handle a sailboat under pressure, including when to duck as the sail shifts direction so the boom doesn't conk them on the coconut. Once one race comes to an end, they reorganize and start another.

Amy says that events like the Rock Paper Scissors Regatta are helping the sport to grow by introducing kids to sailing while also emphasizing the skills they develop that will benefit them later in life. "It's a really great sport because they learn a lot of skills. They learn self-reliance and how to figure things out by themselves. And it's just fun to be out on a sailboat."