Day one: <u>Jonas Høgh Christensen leads in Palma after</u> <u>two races</u>

Sailing World Cup 2012

Denmark's foremost Finn sailor for a generation, double world champion Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN) leads the Finn fleet after the first day at the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta in Palma, after winning the opening race and placing fifth in the second. Daniel Birgmark (SWE) is in second on equal points while race two winner Andrew Mills (GBR) is in third just one point back.

It was an eventful day on and off the water which started quietly with very light winds forcing the postponement of the start of racing, but after a few coffees the fleet set out several hours later and two races were started in a south-south-westerly light gradient breeze at 6 to 10 knots.

The first race went to 2006 and 2009 World Champion Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN) from the up and coming young Caleb Paine (USA) and Daniel Birgmark (SWE). The 2008 Olympic Silver medalist Zach Railey (USA) crossed in fourth. It took several attempts to get the fleet away with lots of boats picking up a black flag penalty, including some of the favourites.

Høgh Christensen commented, "It was a great day for me today. Making few mistakes made the day a success. The conditions were light and the first race was a bit tricky. I had an OK start to windward. I was the most







right on the first beat and rounded the top mark behind Daniel. On the first run, all the guys in front gybed and all got in a hole with less pressure. They all fell in to the shadow of the fleet and I managed to get around them and stay in the breeze and then extended the lead. Race was pretty much over from there. On the second race I had an average start but gained lots of places on the run."

The second race was sailed in similar conditions and this time the British sailors were at the front. Andrew Mills (GBR) led throughout, initially from Tomas Vika (CZE), before Ben Ainslie (GBR) and Birgmark pulled through.

Mills said, "The pressure was quite patchy today with some decent size shifts. The right was pretty good on most beats, unlike normal Palma. In the first race I went left although most

went right and rounded around 10th. Generally throughout the race there were a few key gusts and shifts which meant big ups and downs during the races. But luckily I did OK on most of those."

"In the second race I won the committee boat and tacked quite early to head to the strong right. Most people went left and at the top mark, CZE85 was close but there was a big gap to the rest of the fleet. Then on the second beat I almost went to far to the left and Ben and Birgmark were looking good for a little bit. I managed to stay ahead though and then extended slightly on the downwind."

Birgmark added, "I had a good day and it shows that all the winter training done in Cadiz has paid off. I had a good upwind speed and managed to sail in the areas with more pressure. It is easier when you sail from the front to make your tactical choices. I also had a good speed downwind and could pass many boats."

Further back down the fleet, Jorge Zarif (BRA) was having an up and down day. "I didn't have a great day but finished where I belong. In the first race I was about 10th at the top mark but got a yellow flag just before the finish and lost places to 25th. In the second race, I was nearly last at the top mark and climbed up to 25th. So might be my right position!"

Racing continues until Saturday when the medal race for the top 10 will be sailed. Follow the racing live through the event website at: www.trofeoprincesasofia.org/

Results after two races

1 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh Christensen 6 2 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 6 3 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 7 4 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 10 5 POL 17 Piotr Kula 13 6 USA 4 Zach Railey 18 7 AUT 3 Florian Raudaschl 26 8 CAN 41 Chris Cook 26 9 SLO 573 Vasilij Zbogar 27 10 CZE 85 Tomas Vika 28

Photos: (c) Thom Touw

Day two: Ainslie wins day two for Finns in Palma

Sailing World Cup 2012

After three months out of the boat it was business as usual for Ben Ainslie (GBR) on the second day at the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta. A first and a second place in Tuesday's two races puts him on top of the 57 boat Finn fleet. Daniel Birgmark (SWE) remains in second while Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN) drops to third.

It was another light wind day in Palma on the second day at the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta with the southerly wind maxing out at 10 knots, and again it was very shifty across the course area. But there were some different faces at the front of the fleet with two new race winners.

In the first race of the day, the Olympic champion Ben Ainslie (GBR) took the win from Jonathan Lobert (FRA) right on the finish line, with the 2008 Olympic silver medalist Zach Railey (USA) crossing in third. Piotr Kula (POL) continued an excellent series with another fourth place and sits in fifth overnight.

Ainslie said, "The day was good but the conditions were tricky, not the typical Palma conditions. Lots of differences of pressure."

In the second race French Olympic choice Lobert didn't fare so well, crossing the line in second again but picking up an OCS to add to his black flag from Monday. The race was won by Dan Slater (NZL) with Ainslie benefiting from Lobert's premature start to move up to second. In third place was the runner up at the recent Europeans, Vasiliy Zbogar (SLO).

Slater said, "It was 6-9 knots today and a very shifty and patchy breeze. I felt lucky to get clear today it would have been easy to score two races in the mid 20s. In the second race I had an average start and was rolled by Ben and forced to tack then the gaps started









to appear and I was able to sail my own race. I led at every mark and the lead got quite close for a while at the top of the second beat when the breeze went a bit funky but I extended down the final run to win by about 15 seconds."

On his preparation he said, "My training over last week has been a bit of a lemon with a few things not working out so I am happy to be on the start line and being able to race." And on the all important Olympic selection, "YNZ can select whenever they like. I have met the selection criteria so it's really up to them. But they have been supportive in helping me with some funding and some coaching till the Gold Cup."

Railey posted a seventh in race four and moves up to fourth overall. "It was a solid but very difficult day. The conditions were very tricky again today with lots of shifts and pressure differences. In the second race I was stuck trying to get from the left and the right just kept coming with pressure. I made the choice to cut my losses early and that allowed me to stay in the race and catch up to a seventh which I was very happy about. Good decisions and speed saved what could have been a 20th."

The opening series continues until Friday with the medal race for the top 10 on Saturday. The racing can be followed live through the event website at www.trofeoprincesasofia.org and on the Twitter feed @sofiamapfre_en

Results after 4 races

- 1 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 13
- 2 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 17
- 3 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh-Christensen 23
- 4 USA 4 Zach Railey 28
- 5 POL 17 Piotr Kula 37
- 6 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 40
- 7 CAN 41 Christopher Cook 40
- 8 SLO 573 Vasilij Zzbogar 42
- 9 ESP 669 Pablo Guitian Sarria 54
- 10 FIN 218 Tapio Nirkko 57

Photos: Thom Touw

Day 3: Ainslie on top form as light winds continue

Sailing World Cup 2012

Another first and second for Ben Ainslie (GBR) on the third day of the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta in Palma gives him a comfortable lead of 11 points at the top of the Finn fleet. Daniel Birgmark (SWE) stays in second overall, while Zach Railey (USA), who won the first race of the day, moves up to third.

The light winds continued on day three in Palma, though promised more early in the day with 8 to 10 knots for the first race. However by the time race six was underway the breeze was down to a scant six knots. It was testing conditions for patience and nerves.

Continuing his good form this week, Zach Railey (USA) took race five from the overnight leader Ben Ainslie (GBR). Another 2008 Olympian, Chris Cook (CAN), who returned to the campaign trail in November last year, crossed in third while the leader after day one, Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN) was fourth.

Railey said, "It was such a difficult day to predict the wind again. But I was able to extend at the top of the second beat and hold the lead to the finish. In the second race we really felt that the right was going to be the side to play and it went left. I got back the best I could to finish ninth which was much better than where I was at the first weather mark."

On his week so far, he commented, "I am happy with the way things are going. It's been a hard few days to predict the breeze and I've been correct sometimes and wrong others but overall we are happy with where I am at right now."







In race six, Ainslie was at the front again, winning his second race this week from a very consistent Daniel Birgmark (SWE) and Matt Coutts (NZL).

Ainslie said, "It was a very difficult day today. The wind was quite light this morning and changing a lot so it was very hard to read and there were lots of ups and downs in the fleet but for me I had a good day. I managed to pick it just about right to be up with the top guys and I had some good speed so I'm pretty happy with the day."

On his return to competition after an operation on his back, "The body is holding together very well, but having said that it's been pretty light winds. But considering where I was two months ago, I couldn't be happier to be here and to be racing and to be back on the programme, in tune and racing well. That's a massive step for me."

Ainslie now has a string of five places in the top two to hold a useful 11 point buffer at the top from Birgmark. Both Railey and Høgh Christensen picked up relatively high scores in race six, but still have built a gap of 13 points over the rest of the fleet.

In the sixth overall is race rwo winner Andrew Mills (GBR) who placed 17 and 11 today. He commented on the conditions, "Not really sure how to describe the racing. I never worked out which side was paying down or upwind. It is proving very hard to predict and constantly seems to be a case of damage limitation. The pressure is very localised and hard to work out where it is going to land."

In seventh overall placed 19th in race six after his earlier third, Chris Cook said, "The conditions today were light and variable again, like yesterday, but with the left side of the course paying. Unfortunately, like yesterday we started at 11 again and didn't get a chance to sail in the afternoon sea breeze, which came in as we were sailing home."

On his training, "The training since Perth has been going well. Canada now has seven Finns training and working together, so our future looks very bright. I've been working hard to balance my sailing and home life so there have been some days I would have liked to spend on the water but have had other commitments to take care of. Other than that I feel I'm on the right track with still some work to do on the downwind and fitness."

Cook coached the young Canadian squad before training himself in the run up to Perth. "I'm still working with our team as best I can while competing against them. My goal coming into this has always been to raise the level of competitiveness of the team as well as learn a few things myself." What has changed since his last campaign in 2008, "For sure the fitness levels of all the top guys has improved dramatically, but I would expect that after the 2008 Games being in such a light venue. The young guys are also coming on strong with their fitness."

There are four more opening series race scheduled over the next two days before the medal race for the top 10 on Saturday. Last year Ainslie not only dominated and won the Finn fleet, he also took the overall trophy for the best performance of the week. On his current form, who would bet against him repeating this feat for the second year running.

Results after 6 races

- 1 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 8
- 2 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 19
- 3 USA 4 Zach Railey 24
- 4 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh-Christensen 27
- 5 NZL 1 Dan Slater 40
- 6 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 43

- 7 CAN 41 Christopher Cook 43
- 8 SLO 573 Vasilij Zbogar 49
- 9 POL 17 Piotr Kula 62
- 10 GER 151 Matthias Miller 63

Day 4: No stopping Ainslie after two more wins

Ben Ainslie (GBR) is on a charge in Palma at the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta with a clear message to the other Finn sailors. Two more race wins for the 2008 Olympic champion leaves him with a 23 point lead over the 2008 Olympic silver medalist Zach Railey (USA) with Daniel Birgmark (SWE) two points further back, with just three races to sail.

Overnight storms and a three hour postponement because of lack of wind disrupted the start of day four in Palma, but eventually two more races were sailed in slightly better wind conditions.

Race seven got away at 14.00 with a number of black flag disqualifications in seven knots of wind. Regatta leader Ben Ainslie (GBR) was straight back to winning ways to take his third race of the series. Team mate and winner of race two, Andrew Mills (GBR) crossed in second followed by Vasilij Zbogar (SLO). Zbogar has two Olympic medals in the Laser class to his name already and is fighting to qualify for the chance to win a third, this time in the Finn. Zbogar ended the day in fifth overall, while his main competition here, Gasper Vincec is struggling in 19th.

Race eight followed a similar pattern with Ainslie taking his fourth race win of the week. This time he was followed across the line by Zach Railey (GBR) and Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN). This result – along with a seventh in race seven - moved Railey up to second overall, while Daniel Birgmark (SWE) who finished 11-5 today, dropped to third overall. These two have also built a 17 point gap over the rest of the fleet.

Railey said, "Conditions were a bit better but still very hard to predict." On Ainslie he had only respect. "Ben is going fast and making really great decisions on the race course. We









had a close race in the second race today and he was able to edge me out for the win. You have to give credit when someone is sailing well and he is doing a great job this week."

Ainslie of course is still getting back to fitness after an operation on his back earlier this year. He commented, "It was a difficult period over the winter. We've been here training pretty hard, but the conditions funnily enough are quite different to what we've been training in and I think everyone's finding it hard. For me it's just great to be back racing again and you do realise there's a huge difference between training with four or five boats and suddenly having 60 boats, a long start line, 1.3 mile beats and a big course so it's very different and it's great for me to be back racing and getting my head into that."

Other Olympic selection trials here are also running including the Poles and the Czechs and it couldn't be closer. Rafal Szukiel (POL) who was a 2008 Olympian is just two places and seven points ahead of the young Piotr Kula (POL), who had an excellent start to the regatta. Meanwhile the Czechs are even closer with Tomas Vika (CZE) leading four time Olympic veteran Michael Maier (CZE) by just one place and one point. Friday is going to be a critical day for all these sailors.

Szukiel commented on the selection process, "Our selection started here in Palma. We have three regattas, here, Hyeres and the Gold Cup, but only two best are counting. So everything is still open." Is there a competitive spirit between the sailors. "At the moment we are one team. I hope it will stay like that up to the Olympic."

On the conditions this week, "Today's conditions were difficult. The wind was shifty and different with strength. I got some good results because I was sailing well downwind and what is more important I was starting well."

Ninth placed Matthias Miller (GER) commented, "I'm very happy to be in the top ten. Last year was not so good for me. but I always could felt that I could do more. Now after lots of training in Valencia I'm ready. This week, like at the Europeans. the main thing was is to reduce the risk."

On qualification for Weymouth, "I didn't get selected last year. So the last selection is the worlds in Falmouth. I have to do top ten."

However at the top of the fleet, Ainslie is now in a great position going onto the final day of the opening series. On Friday he has the possibility of sealing the regatta win with room to spare. He is the only sailor here seeming to make sense of the conditions every race and his scoreline proves it.

Results after eight races

1 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 10

2 USA 4 Zach Railey 33

3 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 35

4 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh-Christensen 52

5 SLO 573 Vasilij Zbogar 56

6 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 58

7 NZL 1 Dan Slater 63

8 CAN 41 Christopher Cook 66

9 GER 151 Matthias Miller75

10 POL 7 Rafal Szukiel 87

Photos: Thom Touw

Day 5 Ainslie wins in Palma with day to spare despite adversity

Despite suffering boat damage and back injury in the pre-start and unable to sail the first race of the day, regatta leader Ben Ainslie (GBR) still made it out for the final race in a different boat to protect his points lead and win the Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta with a day to spare. Zach Railey (USA) had another good day to consolidate second place while a race win for Chris Cook (CAN) lifted him to third, with just the medal race to sail.

The breeze was finally up in Palma and so were the stakes on the last day of the opening series. Today was make or break day for Saturday's medal race and the first one to break was in fact Ben Ainslie (GBR) after a pre-start collision and an injured back. I spite of a 23 point lead he still needed one more race to be in with a chance of overall victory.

He commented, "It was one of those crazy days and a really strange pre-start incident I think because of the big waves and trying to clear another boat which would have caused me to capsize onto another boat. I injured myself in the process and reasonably damaged my boat so there was no real chance of continuing in the race in that state so the best option was to come ashore and luckily there was a spare boat lying in the dinghy park that no-one was using so we just switched the rigs round, came back out and just had to try and get a reasonable race to get round the course."

"Really I was just thinking about my equipment long-term, so trying to protect the boat as best I could, so it was really a nobrainer to come in and try and find a different option and do the next race. You do have to make those decisions quite quickly and it's probably a good thing for us to have gone through now in preparation for the Olympics."

"The boat is fine really, just a hull deck join









issue. My back took a good whack from the boom which was pretty painful. It all happened trying to avoid Zach who was surfing backwards down a wave in pre start."

With finally some wind to end the week, the sailors had a great race and for the first time this week, Pieter-Jan Postma (NED) was up front taking the race win from Jonathan Lobert (FRA) and Chris Cook (CAN). But despite a fourth in the following race for the second best performance of the day behind Cook, it was too late to make the medal race cut.

Postma commented on his week. "This week was very difficult to understand the breeze, I kept searching for a pattern but couldn't find it. I know I need to work on the light wind speed, the good thing is I know what to do. But today was a good day. In the breeze I am still going strong. From now on I look forward to the worlds with 120 boats on the starting line. That will be big fun, and a hopefully a nice event."

Meanwhile Ainslie had made it back out for the start of the final opening series race. A big right hand shift on the first beat left Cook well ahead of the fleet. He held on to win the race from fellow Canadian Greg Douglas (CAN), while Ainslie recovered from being on the wrong side of the shift to cross in third.

Cook said, "The conditions today were 10 to 18 knots from the south, with lots of shifts to catch and lots of light spots with pressure slowly rolling down from the top. I started at the boat end in both races today. In the first race I worked hard to get to the left side and had good speed so managed to get to the top behind PJ. My downwind speed was pretty average so I found myself fighting with a group of boats at the finish for the third."

"Before the second race I saw a big cloud rolling down the right side and we were in a left phase so I tacked after the start. After a couple minutes of sailing I was pretty much by myself but could cross the fleet. After I tacked the breeze clocked hard to the right giving me a massive lead on the fleet. Again on the downwind I found I was struggling and the wind was filling in from behind giving Greg Douglas a nice ride right up to my stern. On the last beat I had some great speed and stretched out enough to coast downwind for the win."

"It was fantastic to see the Canadians first and second in the last race, perhaps a glimpse of things to come!"

Ainslie added, "As it turned it out I was not very quick at all [in the swapped boat] but managed to sail reasonably well and had very good speed downwind and I finished third. So it was a bit of an epic day, but sometimes these things are sent to test you and in a way there were actually some good lessons learned from crisis management. In this instance it helped that I had quite a big buffer in the overall points score."

Second overall, Railey now has a 14 point margin on third, so barring disaster should take the silver in the medal race. "I had a good day today. There were some huge shifts on the course and I was up there in the first race and flipped on a big wave on the first downwind dropping to the mid 20s and then getting back to 14th so that was a hard one to take."

"In the last race the ninth was actually a sold result as many of us were buried by a big right shift and almost all the leaders went left. Chris Cook nailed the righty and was gone. Ben had the best comeback getting to third and I feel good about getting back to ninth."

And on his strategy for the medal race, "Tomorrow I will just go out and try to have the best race and I can and see what happens"

Third placed Cook has the real battle on his hands with five boats behind him capable to snatching the bronze. The closest is Daniel Birgmark (SWE) who has been top three overall all week, but dropped to fourth today after an OCS in race nine. Cook stated, "For the medal race I have a lot of guys really close behind so I will have to sail my own race. I've been starting well and have good upwind speed so I will have to rely on those to keep my position."

Sixth placed Dan Slater (NZL) said, "Tomorrow will be fun as I think in a bit of breeze the top 10 are all quite even and anyone could win tomorrow's race. Given the points being so close I don't think really you can control five other boats so the plan is go racing and do my best and add the scores at the end."

The medal races on Saturday will be tracked live with TracTrac through the event website at www.trofeoprincesasofia.org. The Finn medal race is scheduled to start at 12.15.

Results after 10 races

1 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 21

2 USA 4 Zach Railey 56

3 CAN 41 Christopher Cook 70

4 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 74

5 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 75

6 NZL 1 Dan Slater 79

7 SLO 573 Vasilij Zbogar 79

8 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh-Christensen 82

9 GER 151 Matthias Miller 118

10 POL 17 Piotr Kula 125

Day 6 Andrew Mills wins medal race in perfect conditions

Sailing World Cup 2012

The 43 Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE regatta ended with a blast, solid winds, sunshine and great sailing. For regatta leader Ben Ainslie (GBR) the medal race was a formality to complete the series, but there was plenty still at stake behind him. In the end, nothing actually changed in the medals with Zach Railey (USA) taking silver and Chris Cook (CAN) the bronze after an eventful medal race.

With huge seas and winds touching 20 knots, it was a great end to what has generally been a light wind regatta. Zach Railey (USA) led the fleet to the windward mark followed by Vasilij Zbogar (SLO) and Andrew Mills (GBR). Zbogar took the lead on the downwind only to lose it to Mills on the second beat.

Mills held onto the lead on the final epic downwind to the finish, with Ben Ainslie (GBR) moving up from sixth at the first windward mark to second at the finish. Zbogar crossed in third.

As the finishing order stood, Railey had the silver and Mills the bronze. However, at the start five boats had been scored OCS (has that ever happened before in a medal race?) Ainslie was out, so was Zbogar and so was fourth placed Jonas Høgh Christensen (DEN). This left Railey, who was fifth across the line, in second to win the silver medal, and Chris Cook (CAN), who crossed sixth, in third to take the bronze medal. The points gap that Mills thought he had produced vanished into Finn air.

Also disqualified as early starters were Daniel Birgmark (SWE) and Matthias Miller (GER).

Mills said, "I had a good start, went right, and was third at top mark, and second at the leeward gate. It was awesome conditions

downwind, big waves with the shallow water close to shore. I managed to get into first up the second beat then hold on for the last run."









"It was nice to finish with a fun race, but a bit frustrating to finish having got five boats between myself and Cook only to find four of them were OCS and I had not got the bronze. On the water I thought I had all the boats in the right position to get the bronze, so it's a bit frustrating."

Ainslie retains his Trofeo SAR Princesa Sofia MAPFRE title by 17 points. He summed up his regatta, "It's a real boost after a very difficult period so I'm very happy with the way I've been sailing and things in general, and my body seems to have held up reasonably well. I'm happy but there's a lot of work to do yet in the coming months in the build-up to the Games and I'll keep pushing to try and get better and be better prepared."

Eighth placed Høgh Christensen said, "I wouldn't say that Ben has been as dominant as the results look, but he has made almost no mistakes in a very tricky week. But if you want to beat Ben and the top guys you have to do better. Train more, harder and get better."

"In general I am happy with my performance. I am at 103 kg right know which is probably 8-10 more than Ben, Daniel and Zach, so keeping up with them in a week sailing in eight knots or less is pretty good. As it's Olympic year where people are training harder and working more on their gear. We decided to stick with a M-1 and my old boat and that worked. My speed was good, up and downwind."

As one of the few correct starters today, Dan Slater (NZL) moved up to fifth overall said, "This week has been OK for me. I sailed well to get out of some bad starts and come back. I normally like the shifty conditions but with the waves it's been really difficult this week. But it's been tough for everyone and Ben has made it look easy. He has started well all week and got the first beats right to be in the hunt almost every race. Each race the leader at the top mark has come from hard one side and I was no exception in the race I won. It's been a regatta for the edges and it's not really my style to get to far out to the sides and maybe that's why my first beats haven't been that great."

The fleet now has a two week break before gathering again at Hyeres in France for the Semaine Olympique Francais and leg 4 of the 2012 ISAF Sailing World Cup. Railey takes the lead in the Sailing World Cup standings from Høgh Christensen and Caleb Paine (USA).

Results after medal race (medal race position in brackets)

1 GBR 3 Ben Ainslie 43 (OCS)

2 USA 4 Zach Railey 60 (2)

3 CAN 41 Christopher Cook 76 (3)

4 GBR 85 Andrew Mills 77 (1)

5 NZL 1 Dan Slater 89 (5)

6 SWE 11 Daniel Birgmark 96 (OCS)

7 SLO 573 Vasilij Zbogar 101 (OCS)

8 DEN 2 Jonas Høgh-Christensen 104 (OCS)

9 POL 7 Rafal Szukiel 125 (4)

10 GER 151 Matthias Miller 140 (OCS)