

Pauline Courtois (FRA) and Maxime Mesnil (FRA) took top honors respectively in the Women's and Open Divisions at World Sailing's 2019 Nations Cup Grand Final, hosted by the St. Francis Yacht Club in San Francisco, CA.

Courtois and her Match in Pink by Normandy Elite Team (Maelenn Lemaitre, Loise Acker and Sophie Faguet) defeated Nicole Breault (USA) and her Team Vela Racing (Molly Carapiet, Karen Loutzenheiser and Hannah Burroughs). Courtois went 3-0 in a blustery westerly wind peaking at 22 kt, sailing against a stiff flood tide which kept the teams hugging the shore and repeatedly calling for sea room. In the first prestart, Breault gained a prestart penalty against Courtois and also led at the windward mark. She then hoisted her kite, with Courtois overlapped to windward, and aggressively sailed Courtois off the race course. In the process of jibing back toward the leeward gate, Breault's spinnaker tore and Courtois was able to luff her and gain an offsetting penalty, then pass her downwind. They continued back upwind with the short-taking duel along the city front, in full view of the St. Francis Yacht Club grill room, packed with members and guests. Courtois called for sea room and gained an inside advantage, then carried that throughout the race. In races 2 and 3, they had similar tight positioning off the starting line and working the shoreline, but Courtois' execution proved decisive and carried the day.

Close racing also ruled the Open Division with Mesnil's Match in Black by Normandy Elite Team (Hugo Feydit, Yann Chateau, and Yves-Marie Pilon) besting Henrique Haddad (BRA) 3-1. They too were close to each other on every start and played the shoreline. Boat handling was terrific, and the down-winds were phenomenally fast, making a premium on control.

"We're pleased with how racing played out and entertained viewers in and around the Club. What was unique about the venue was the public had commanding view of the racing - all the tactics and execution were visible to everybody, whether you were a junior or a match race champion, you could learn from watching," said Regatta Chair Bruce Stone. "One of the challenges of the final day of racing was the current and who could get in to the rocks first. The tide charts were not accurate due to snowmelt from the Sierra Mountains and tremendous outflow from Oroville Dam, with the substantial freshwater unable to exit through the Golden Gate, it was backing up along the shore into our racing area, resulting in what we call a "false flood" during the normal ebb cycle. While we often short-tack the shore here, the professionalism and sailing skill of these match racers was on display - I've never seen it done so tightly in all my years here.

"It was a good fight. We didn't make it easy, but they owned us," said Breault, who was racing with the same Team Vela members from 2015 Nations Cup, defending their Women's Championship title. "The losses live with you, but we can't wait to do battle again," she said.

Courtois had only praise for her rival, Breault, recalling that "four years ago we

were in the Nations Cup Final in Vladivostok, against them, and we lost 3-1 so to win these three races today was incredible," she said. "It's an amazing place to sail."

Mesnil said the matches against Haddad were tricky, but the elevated wind conditions helped put his team on the podium, which he's delighted to be sharing with "the women's team, who are our training partners."

"A nation wins the Nations Cup," said Michael O'Connor, Nations Cup Working Party Chair in World Sailing. "Many of the countries who came are emerging nations in match racing...we want to build a platform for it."

Haddad concurred that the event helps the sport in general. "We started in match racing 12 years ago because we had the Nations Cup in Brazil," he said, thanking his team for coming together to compete once again.

Anna Östling (SWE) and Juliana Senfft (BRA) finished third and fourth respectively, with Östling scoring two points in quick succession during the petit-finals. James Hodgson (AUS) and Pearson Potts (USA) battled for a medal in the Open Division, with Hodgson beating him 2-0 to finish third overall.

"Brazil sailed better than us and deserved the spot," said Hodgson. "We're super happy with how we sailed today. These were the most fun matches of the regatta for us, my crew was really on and we're grateful to the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia for supporting us and St. Francis Yacht Club for hosting us."

Results - https://www.stfyc.com/files/Nations_Cup_Results.pdf