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Investec Loyal wins Sydney to Hobart after protest dismissed

By NEALE AND D.D. MCNICOLL The Australian December 29, 2011 1:07PM

Investec Loyal wins after prot... Video Anthony Bell



Investec Loyal wins after protest is dismissed. Investec Loyal is confirmed as line honours champion of the 2011 Sydney to Hobart.

ANTHONY Bell's Investec Loyal is now the official line honours winner of the Sydney to Hobart race after an international jury dismissed the protest against the supermaxi for seeking information on a rival from an outside source.

A beaming skipper Anthony Bell walked down the stairs from the protest hearing room at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania to announce the decision to the waiting media scrum.

"It is an amazing feeling," Bell said. "Michael Coxon's question was not to gain any advantage to our boat at all, it was about his business."

Coxon heads North Sails in Australia which made Wild Oats XI's \$250,000, high tech mainsail. Bell and his crew will be presented with their line honours trophy at 2.30 this afternoon, alongside their moored boat in Hobart's Constitution Dock.

"The full committee has dismissed the protest against us," Bell told reporters at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania.

Investec's three minute, eight second upset victory over Wild Oats - the fourth-closest in the race's 67-year history - was challenged by the race committee on Wednesday night over claims it had received outside assistance.

The case was heard by a jury of five International Sailing Federation Judges, chaired by Australian John Kirkjian, who are appointed by the Cruising yacht Club of Australia to oversee the 2011 Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

An overjoyed and emotional Anthony Bell, skipper of Investec Loyal, said the magnificent win by his crew last night in the 628 nautical miles ocean race could now be properly celebrated.

In a thrilling finish in the twilight of Wednesday night, Investec Loyal and five-times previous winner Wild Oats raced up the Derwent River together to the Hobart finish line.

The decision by Mr Kirkjian and the jury means that instead of a "provisional" win, Investec Loyal is now been recognised as the official Line honours winner in the 67th 2011 Sydney to Hobart race.

"It was a long way around; but now there is no doubt," a relieved Mr Bell said.

"But there is a sweetness; a great moment was taken off the crew (last night) but I would prefer that if there was a question mark that it be dealt with properly like this and now it has.

"As much as anyone can say we won on the water and that it doesn't matter what happens in the (judges) room, it does matter."

Mr Bell said he and his crew would now be off to celebrate what he dubbed an 'against-the-odds victory' with a long lunch in Hobart.

He said the international jury had taken the protest very seriously, but had been convinced that tactician Michael Coxon has asked a question about Wild Oats not to gain a sailing advantage, but as a business query.

The protest against Investec Loyal had been lodged by Tim Cox, a retired navy captain and chair of the official race committee of the Cruising Yacht Club of Australia, which runs the Sydney to Hobart race.

Investec Loyal was informed of the protest on its arrival in Hobart, dampening the usual joyous on-board celebration and delaying the announcement of the race's line honours winner until after morning's protest hearing.

The protest centred on a conversation between the ABC's race helicopter pilot and Loyal tactician Michael Coxon off the south coast of NSW on the first morning of the race, less than one day after 88 yachts left Sydney Harbour.

According to the protest form, at 6.30am on Tuesday, Coxon a highly experienced professional racing yachtsman and sailmaker with 28 Sydney to Hobart races under his belt "sought information from the helicopter (pilot) about the sail plan in use on (race leader) Wild Oats XI."

In particular, information was sought as to whether Wild Oats was flying a try-sail (a very small replacement mainsail)," the protest form details.

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