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Veteran glad race decided on the sea

BY JON TUXWORTH SAILING
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It may have cost him and his crew line honours, but Wild Oats XI veteran Iain Smith was ecstatic when Investec LOYAL's Sydney to Hobart win was confirmed yesterday.

An international jury meeting at the Royal Yacht Club of Tasmania yesterday accepted that LOYAL tactician Michael Coxon was not seeking help from an ABC helicopter pilot when he asked about Wild Oats XI's sails on Tuesday.

Former Canberran Smith declared it would have been a travesty had his rival been stripped of victory.

Any sailor wants to win the race fair and square on the wild seas, not in the jury room, and Wild Oats XI is no different.

"Certainly you don't want to win in those circumstances, they didn't deserve to lose on protest and it's great they've won," Smith said.

"I really don't think that [protests] should happen and it's disappointing for the event, but yacht racing's got a lot of rules and you have to go by them.

"I don't think there was anything in it from LOYAL's point of view."

It's just the second time in seven years that Wild Oats XI has failed to win Australian sailing's most prestigious trophy.

But Smith believes the result can help spark greater public interest in the event.

"It would be boring if we won every race, it would be horrible," Smith said. "I think people get disappointed with that, like when the Australian cricket team were winning everything.

"It's far more interesting to have competition and a mix-up of results, because that makes us stronger too.

"If you go away with your tail between your legs, you probably shouldn't be in the game."

Meanwhile, Lahana finished third for the second consecutive year after arriving in Hobart at around 1.30am yesterday.

The crew, including Canberran Steve Byron, had to endure a frustrating wait in benign conditions with the Tasmanian capital in sight.

Sailing's a lottery and when the ballast yacht ground to a halt beside the Hobart casino, they'd effectively rolled snake eyes.

"We were becalmed about three miles from the finish with zero boat speed, and it plays on your mind when you're lacking sleep," he said. "We were beside the casino and could see the finish line."



RIGHT RESULT: Former Canberran Iain Smith was pleased with the outcome of the protest.



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