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**8th Sailing of the Conch Republic Cup / Key West Cuba Race Week 2016
Kicks Off January 27th, 2016**

The 8th sailing of the Conch Republic Cup is fast approaching. This 9 day, 3 distance race and 2 inshore race event covering 3 cities in 2 countries will begin with a kick off welcome reception on January 27th, 6PM at Dante's in Key West. Participants from 55 competing vessels in 5 distinct classes will gather in anticipation of spirited sailing across the Florida Straits to Cuba. The vessels will be gathering from New York, San Francisco, Charleston, Key West and all points in between. Included in the fleet are multihulls ranging from a 24' Dash 750 trimaran to a Lagoon 620 and schooners ranging from 45' to 84'. This event is being sponsored by our two host clubs, Club Nautico International Hemingway De Cuba and the Key West Yacht Club.

Recent Developments

For the first time in regatta history, Commodore Jose Escrich of Club Nautico International Hemingway De Cuba plans to attend the 5PM race start on Thursday, January 28th in the South West Channel off Key West. He will send the fleet past Sand Key Light and on to Varadero, Cuba. This will be the first time that the Commodore has been in the United States for the start of such a race. There will be five starts for the five separate classes which include 2 racing mono hull classes, cruising class, multi hulls and a schooner class.

Commodore Escrich has also petitioned the Cuban Ministry Of the Interior on behalf of several Cuban born American citizens who wish to participate in the Conch Republic Cup. This would mark the first time in decades that a Cuban born American has been able to enter their home country by boat. Three of these people would be traveling aboard their own boats while several more will crew on the vessels of others.

Shake-A-Leg, Miami, an organization providing waterfront access in Miami for children & adults of all abilities, has entered the 60' wheelchair accessible custom catamaran "Impossible Dream". At a December 26th meeting with CRC 2016 Race Principals and Harry Horgan of Shake-A-Leg Commodore Escrich was asked if it would be possible to sail with disabled Cuban citizens during our visit. The Commodore expressed that he would like that very much and he will look into making this happen.

Our list of sponsors and supporters has grown to include;
Geslin Sails – Key West, FL

Mainsail School – Hilton Head Island, SC
Pusser's Rum Ltd. - Original Royal Navy Rum and Official Rum of the Conch Republic Cup
Coral Reef Sailing Apparel – Official clothier of the Conch Republic Cup
Gill North America
Charleston Ocean Racing Association – Supplying the race marks, ground tackle, flags and race committee support.
Hot Cuba Travel – Offering Cuba travel tips, trips and flight arrangements for support staff.
Harmony Yacht Vacations – Offering race prep services, provisioning, charter yachts (in fact 2 of their yachts are entered in the event) and charter management.
Southwinds Magazine – South East Sailing News
Spinsheet Magazine – Mid Atlantic Sailing News
Key West Cigar Club – Duval Street, Key West
Coldwell Banker Schmitt Real Estate Co. – Key West

The list of participating yachts has grown to include several boats also competing in Quantum Key West Race Week, January 17th - 21st and a couple of them going on to the Miami – Havana race, February 10th - 13th. The full list of participants can be found on http://yachtscoring.com/event_scratch_sheet.cfm?eID=1259 .

The CRC race management team has grown to include Jeff Zarwell (International Race Officer) from Regatta Pro as PRO, Forrest Gay on mark boat, Hal (National Race Officer) and Sally Smith on finish and scoring and Lauther Parker from Charleston as race committee and equipment manager along with many more. Randy Draftz, Executive Director of Charleston Race Week has been instrumental in helping to gather this team, arrange the equipment and Randy will be our stateside support to relay finish statistics to Yacht Scoring for everyone to follow along.

Schedule of Events

Race Headquarters will be at Dante's 951 Caroline St., Key West

January 27th 4:30-6:30 check in at Dante's
5:30 Skippers Meeting
6-8 Welcome Party

January 28th 10:30-12:30 check in at Dante's
5pm Race Start Key West Harbor - Michele Geslin Memorial Cup - Key West to Varadero (approx 96 Nautical Miles)

January 29th Arrival in Varadero at Marina Gaviota

January 30th 5pm Skippers meeting (For both Varadero Cup and Cuba Coast Challenge)
6pm Welcome party at Marina Gaviota

January 31st 10am Race Start - Varadero Cup - Buoy Races
6pm Awards Party for Michele Geslin Memorial Cup and Varadero Cup

February 1st 10am Race Start - Cuba Coast Challenge- Varadero to Havana
(approx. 77 Nautical Miles)
Arrival in Marina Hemingway

February 2nd 5 pm Skippers meeting (for both Castillo Del Morro Cup and Havana to Key West Cup)
6pm Welcome Party at Marina Hemingway

February 3rd 10 am Race Start - Castillo Del Morro Cup - Buoy Races
6 pm Awards Party for Cuba Coast Challenge and Castillo Del Morro at Marina Hemingway

February 4th Lay Day

February 5th 5pm Race Start - Havana to Key West Cup (approx. 99 Nautical Miles)

February 6th Arrival in Key West and customs check in

6 pm Awards Banquet at Dante's for Havana to Key West Cup and Overall Trophy for Conch Republic Cup

About The Conch Republic Cup

For what began in 1997 as a cordial invitation from Commodore Escrich to the Key West Sailing Club (as it was known at the time) to resume our annual race to Varadero from the 1970s, this has become an epic event. The KWSC Fleet Captain at the time was Peter Goldsmith who, upon receiving the invitation stated "I don't care what anybody thinks, I just want to sail my boat to Cuba." The 1997 and 1998 race continued as the previous races had been run. Then in 1999 Commodore Escrich proposed this multi race format we use today. The 5 race series of the Conch Republic Cup was run by Peter Goldsmith and his partner Michele Geslin for the entire 7 year with the last such event being held in 2003. At this time, with the "encouragement" of the US Government this regatta was discontinued. Recent developments and policy changes within the US – Cuba relations normalization have once again made it possible to continue our annual "Cultural Exchange Through Sport" after a 13 year hiatus. We look forward to re-establishing this bond with our Cuban neighbors by continuing our maritime traditions in the 2016 running of this event.

Official Event Photography will be available from Priscilla Parker at <http://www.priscillaparker.com/>. pparkerchs@bellsouth.net

Official Video B reel will be available by contacting Jeff@MainsailNews.TV. Video provided by Big Impact Films
T2P TV
Mainsail News TV

