

Holland's Mitchell Kiss scores title at National High School Single-Handed Sailing Championship

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A cold, fall day whipped up the winds on Lake Michigan and created a choppy finale of sailing at the National High School Single-Handed Sailing Championship.

Eleven races in one day made Sunday in Chicago even more challenging, but did not faze Mitchell Kiss of Holland.

The junior at Black River High School emerged as champion in the prestigious event, getting a high enough finish with enough distance between him and his chief competition to take the overall title in the Laser Radial division.

"It's pretty amazing," Rob Hallawell said of the performance. He coaches Kiss.

"The best thing I can say about him is his perseverance in really tough conditions, especially on Sunday. We raced 11 races in pretty brutal winds, wavy conditions.

"The other kids were not prepared for that kind of stuff at all. At some point, some of them were out their surviving, and he was competing as hard as he could."

Kiss is the first sailor from the Midwest Interscholastic Sailing Association to win the national event.

The Interscholastic Sailing Association governs secondary school sailing in the United States in both independent and public high schools.

It was Kiss' third appearance in the event. He finished second in 2010.

"This means I'm on the path to being good, doing really good things in sailing," Kiss said. "I'm hoping to go to the Olympics. It's the best high school sailors in the country. It's really tough."

Kiss won with 39 points in 18 races. The lowest score wins.

Kiss took first in seven races and second in eight of them, including the last one. He needed to finish two spots ahead of Ian Burrows of the Antilles School from the U.S. Virgin Islands to capture the overall title.

He got the separation from Burrows he needed on the sprint toward the finish line.

It was the culmination of hours of practice since Kiss' 2009 debut at the high school championships, Hallawell said.

"He's been working hard. He's incredibly dedicated," Hallawell said. "He is a very mature guy and figured out pretty early what he needed to compete at a worldwide level. He changed his own eating habits. He works out a lot more now. He practices a ton even though there are the brutal Michigan winters and he needs to take some time off from sailing.

"He'll be able to say for the rest of his life he won a high school national championship. There are few people in the world who can say that."