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## Yachting: Nationals lure 30 OK dinghy sailors

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'ACTUARY' SPEAKING: Paul Rhodes' OK Dinghy journey was not about making it into a job. PHOTO/Paul Taylor

By Anendra Singh

IT was 1977 and a little boy, Paul Rhodes, was watching sailing TV commentator Peter Montgomery laud fellow New Zealander Peter Lester for becoming NZ Yachtsman of the Year.

It "sounded pretty good" to the Christchurch youngster who found himself gravitating more and more towards Lyttelton Harbour in his P-Class boat, a vessel widely used in New Zealand for honing skills of novices.

Now a fifty-something, Rhodes is still relishing sailing after graduating straight from P-Class to OK dinghies.

Not only has the actuary - someone who analyses the financial consequences of risk - from Wellington gone on to become the national president of the OK dinghy association but also he was runner-up at the New Zealand-hosted world champs in 2002, behind fellow Kiwi Greg Wilcox and ahead of Alistair Gair.

From today, Rhodes will compete in the OK Dinghy Nationals which the Napier Sailing Club is hosting.

The three-day event, to be raced along the Ahuriri waterfront, has enticed 30 sailors from as far south as Wellington and as far north as Auckland. It will run alongside the club-hosted annual New Year's Day Regatta from tomorrow.

For someone who wasn't intent on "making it [OK dinghy] a job", Rhodes reckons he'll be finishing

"middle of the pack" somewhere in the fleet when the allotted seven races are done and dusted on the six nautical mile "triangle with a sausage" course.

Two, three, two races are bracketed for each day but weather will dictate terms on the loading each day.

Today is a cloudy 22C with moderate winds but rain kicks in from tomorrow so the sailors will adopt a que sera sera (whatever will be, will be) stance.

"The winds can be anywhere from 5 to 25 knots," says Rhodes of a challenging sport that entails mastering a four-metre single-handed racing yacht.

The OK Dinghy rule makers made allowances for the advent of carbon fibre masts in the 2003-04 season that has worked as a catalyst in boosting the vessel's performance.

Ask who he thinks will win on Sunday, Rhodes replies: "I'd put my money on Luke [O'Connell] because he's won just about every regatta this year [2015]."

Hawke's Bay-born O'Connell, who lives and works in the capital city, finished runner-up to Matt Stechman, of Napier, at the World Champs in Melbourne in 2014.

But he believes lots of other sailors will give O'Connell a run for his money.

They include two Olympians.

US-born Rod Davis, a former Team New Zealand member, who won gold for the United States in the soling class at the 1984 LA Games and silver for New Zealand in the starling class in the 1992 Barcelona.

Dan Slater, of Auckland, is the other, having competed at the 2000 Sydney and the 2008 Beijing Games.

From the Bay quarters, he expects veteran Nigel Mannering to be the wildcard.

"He's a stalwart and he's been back on the water this year."

For Rhodes it has been an enjoyable journey leading to "lots of fun with good competitors and making a good bunch of friends".

It's a "great boat" and a good competition globally.

Napier, Wellington and Auckland host nationals.

## **NZ CHAMPIONS**

From the OK Dinghy World Championships:

**Greg Wilcox:** 2002.

**Leith Armit:** 1983, 1985, 1990, 1994.

**Richard Dodson:** 1979, 1982.

**Peter Lester:** 1977.

**Clive Roberts:** 1973.