

# Exhausted yachtsman saved after long ordeal

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DURBAN — An exhausted Transvaal yachtsman was rescued after more than an hour in the chilly, wind-whipped sea off Durban on Saturday.

Ben Botha of Vaaldam's Stilbaai Yacht Club was just one of the sailors participating in the Natal provincial championships for Hobie-14s, Hobie-16s, Paper Tigers and Darts off Durban at the weekend who got into trouble after a wind gusting over 45 knots sprang up.

Two local sailors, Darryl Massey and Kevin Morris of Point Yacht Club in a Hobie-16 had problems themselves when their sail dropped because of the howling wind and it was while they were waiting to be rescued that they noticed Mr Botha.

"We were alone and quite far out when we saw some-

thing bobbing in the water about 100 metres from us. It was quite strange because there were no other yachts near us. On the next swell we realised it was a fellow competitor," Mr Massey said.

Because their sails were down and floating in the water, their ability to steer was hampered.

"We tried to steer around in an attempt to get closer to him but couldn't — the wind was just too strong and it was pushing us all out to sea, closer and closer to the shipping lanes."

According to Mr Massey and Mr Morris, the yachtsman appeared to have "given up all hope".

"We were yelling at him to swim toward us but he was just hanging in his life-jacket and lifting his arms in despair — he wasn't even trying!"

At one stage, Mr Massey considered swimming out to Mr Botha and trying to bring him aboard the Hobie but realised that it would be too dangerous.

"We were having trouble just keeping our boat flat. We eventually tied ourselves to it."

After about 40 minutes, the race rescue boat reached them and fished Mr Botha out the water.

"I actually thought he'd had a heart attack," one person aboard the committee boat said.

Mr Botha could not be contacted after his ordeal but according to all accounts had recovered well.

□ That was not the only tale of woe — Mr Hugh Barr in a Dart was dismasted.

"We were lucky not to go over! Our mast was all bent and buckled and we waited an hour before being picked up by a rescue boat."