

False Bay in protest drama

DALE GRANGER

THE fate of Lipton Cup supremos Chris King and Rick Nankin, bidding for a record seventh victory, is in the balance.

The False Bay co-skippers sailed brilliantly to clinch their first race victory of the contest on Daly's Insurance — only to watch the protest flag flying furiously from Royal Cape's MBS Challenger, the defenders. At the time of going to Press, the protest committee was still hearing evidence.

Co-skippers Greg Davis and Dave Hudson, second over the line in 12-knot westerly winds, insisted that during a heated tacking duel on the final beat, False Bay should not have tacked onto port.

This was moments after MBS Challenger was forced to veer to starboard to avoid ploughing her bow midships through the hull of Daly's Insurance.

King had ostensibly tacked to force Royal Cape into her "dirty air", while Davis and Hudson were adamant that — under the circumstances of a near collision — False Bay should have held its course. But the race victors retorted that there was never the threat of a collision with half-a-boat length available.

Hudson called it a "blatant mistake" and said False Bay should have done a 720 (two circles) to redeem themselves.

King called the protest "absurd".

"It's their only chance of manufacturing something," said King. "There was no chance of a collision so they chose something and chose it good. It's a spoilsport attitude and I am surprised they have gone ahead with it."

With False Bay under threat of disqualification, which would effectively kill their victory hopes, the one skipper smiling was Geoff Meek.

He finished fourth yesterday for Hermanus on Africa Glass behind Point Yacht Club's Olympic stars on Ford Falcon, skippered by Bruce Savage, but still leads the regatta overall.

With three races left it has effectively become a three-boat affair, provided False Bay survive their protest.

Hermanus are only 1,75 points ahead of False Bay, with Royal Cape a slender 0,75 points adrift.

Savage, however, refuses to concede that Durban's challenge for the R500 000 Sir Thomas Lipton Cup — the most sought after prize in local sailing — is over.

Point are eight points off the pace in fourth place but Savage remains optimistic.

"We'll just have to sail better in the second half of the regatta. We can easily win a few races and be right up there, but it is going to be tough," he said.

Subject to surviving the protest, though, King and Nankin's performance is a worry to their rivals considering their recent history.

Since 1988, their maiden win at Lipton, they have made a habit of coming from behind in the closing races to win with progressively improving results.