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CATALOGUE OF COWES DISASTER

By **PETER SMITH**

Drama, damage, injuries, a ferocious storm, arson, helicopter rescues, spectacular dismasts, tragically, even a death . . . Cowes Week and the Admiral's Cup '79 was two weeks of marine incident that will be remembered for years.

All this on top of the regular compendium of magic ingredients that sets this premier yachting event in the world apart from the rest — the revellings of the Royal Family at play, the social whirlings of debs and their beaux, and the racing of 800 yachts and 4,000 yachtsmen.

Perhaps the law of averages might have predicted that this year's Admiral's Cup series would produce drama and incident as the two previous series in 1975 and 1977 were remembered only for their inactivity and calm driftings.

This one had everything. From before the first start when a splintering collision left one yacht almost chopped in half, the pattern was set.

HORRIFIC INJURIES

Britain's Admiral's Cup hopes foundered early on when Blizard — everybody's darling after winning the first race — blundered incredibly by missing out a buoy and plummeted down the field in righting the mistake.

The ship of hope sank altogether when in the next race Morning Cloud's rudder snapped and British team skipper Edward Heath had to retire.

There were horrific injuries. A Hampshire man had his face smashed when hit by a main boom. Later, a Frenchman on a Belgian yacht repeated the emergency when he was tangled in the main sheets, having his head

dashed against fittings in a gale.

Another collision catapulted an Australian into the sea with his arm fractured in several places, and only brave work by other yachtsmen diving into the sea, saved him.

Two Japanese finished races with their heads pouring blood and needing stitches after other swinging boom accidents.

WIDESPREAD DAMAGE

And ashore there was as much action. In the early hours of one morning an arsonist torched two large marquees, destroying both.

Cowes Week's regattas had more drama than they wanted. The week was marred by the death, with a heart attack at sea, of a famous Belgian yachtsman, Mr. Albert Moorkens.

Heavy winds all week were crowned by a real hooligan of a gale which scythed through one day's programme. Sixteen classes were left on their moorings unable to get out, and among the fleets that went, the damage was widespread and costly.

Masts snapped up and down the Solent. For two yachts their moments of oblivion coming within sight of the finishing line and before the astonished gaze of hundreds of spectators.

Sails split like peapods popping, and they added up the damage in tens of thousands of pounds.

The most famous father-and-sons team of the week, the Duke of Edinburgh, with Princes Charles, Andrew and Edward were in action in yachts ranging from the 77ft. long, Siska to Flying Fifteens.