

Dramatic Kiwi cup triumph

FREMANTLE — New Zealand snatched a dramatic 13-second victory from French Kiss yesterday after the two yachts collided on the last leg of their third America's Cup challenger semi-final.

Stars and Stripes beat USA for the third consecutive day in the other semi-final match. The San Diego yacht and the New Zealanders need only to win on Friday to meet in the challenger final later next month.

In a fraught climax to a race French Kiss had led most of the way, the collision occurred about 400 m from the finish line.

New Zealand made an aggressive turn towards the French boat, forcing it to give way, but as French Kiss backed off, its stern brushed against the rival yacht.

Both immediately raised protest flags, but French Kiss later withdrew its complaint, leaving New Zealand 3-0 in the best-of-seven semi-final series after its 27th straight win and its 35th from 36 races since the trials opened in October.

French Kiss had held the lead around the last five marks after the New Zealanders botched a spinnaker set at the second mark, wrapping the sail around the headsail.

New Zealand skipper Chris Dickson had lured French Kiss' Marc Pajot into a furious tacking duel on the final beat after trailing by 22 seconds at the last mark.

On the 29th tack he pulled his most aggressive move, turning sharply and forcing Pajot to lose his grip on the race. — Sapa-Reuter.