

Wray may get final say

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Sandra Wray is recognized as one of the most successful hydroplane racers in the nation.

In a sport dominated by men, Wray, 19, has made her mark. Wray is the youngest of about 50 women racers in the American Power Boat Association.

"There are a few chauvinistic men, but they never really hassle me," said Wray, a resident of Asuza, Calif. "But I've been racing for three years now, and I've proved myself. I'm just another racer out there."

Wray proved herself earlier this summer in California when she won the 145s class in the Western Divisionals. Because of that win, she automatically qualified for a spot in the 145s final in the Nationals at the Hydrobowl.

The APBA inboard Nationals continue today with elimination heats for the 2½-liter class and the JSS class beginning at 11 a.m. Sunday's competition begins at noon.

Wray decided to try racing hydroplanes after watching just two races. She thought it would "be a neat experience."

Wray got her first opportunity to race in San Diego in 1982. There she met Marcel Belleville, a boat owner and builder, and he offered to build her a boat. She's been driving Country Girl ever since.

"I needed and got a lot of coaching when I first started," Wray said. "Things like: how to look at the water in different ways, because that changes

all the time; how to sit during a turn, and those kinds of things. It really helped me."

Wray has learned quickly. Last year she set the one-mile world record for her class, recording a speed of 73 mph.

"I never really expected this kind of success," Wray said. "I've accomplished a lot in the past few years, but if I don't get a win, I'm just satisfied competing because I really enjoy doing this."

She spends the entire summer traveling to different races, and during the rest of the year competes in weekend events. Wherever she goes, her parents go also.

"My parents helped me make the decision to do this," Wray said. "They asked me if I really wanted to go into racing and they've supported me all the way. They pay for all the travel and equipment, but I try to pay for some of my expenses. They just love this as much as I do."

This is the second time Wray has raced in the Hydrobowl. Even though she won't compete until Sunday, she's confident she'll do well.

"I've raced against all of them in my class before and I've done fairly well," Wray said. "They know I'm running well. The start is going to be the biggest thing in our class, though, because it's so fast. If you're not there at the start, you can forget it."

"And I think this is a great course, because my boat does well on this type. It turns well, and these tight turns here are an advantage for me."