

GOING FOR GOLD



Goodbye chilly Solent, hello balmy breezes off Florida, host of the Rolex Miami Olympic Classes Regatta and a chance for the GBR crew to put their winter training into practice. Nine medals were bagged, says Andy Rice, yet the mood in Team GBR was one of frustration

Stevie Morrison and Ben Rhodes had a chance to take Gold in the 49er, but settled for Silver



The Rolex Miami Olympic Classes Regatta offers one of the first big opportunities for Britain's Olympic aspirants to assess their progress against rivals. After the hardships of sailing through a chilly British winter (albeit more like spring so far), Miami offers a welcome respite with warm water and warm breezes. What really matters, though, is results and once again Skandia Team GBR did not disappoint, taking five medals

from the Olympic disciplines and four medals from the Paralympic classes.

Yet Team GBR seemed to be disappointed. Even the official press release admitted: "Skandia Team GBR rued missed opportunities in a number of the Olympic classes – the chance of Gold melted into Silver for Leigh McMillan and Will Howden in the Tornado class." And in the RS:X women's windsurfing, overnight leader Bryony Shaw finished 8th in the double-scoring Medal Race

final, which relegated her to Bronze. In a few marginal situations, things seemed to go against the Brits.

An opportunity presented itself in the 49er fleet when the Spanish Olympic Champions, clear leaders going into the final Medal Race, crossed the start line too early. Brits Stevie Morrison and Ben Rhodes had made a great start and looked good for Gold until the final beat when Americans Morgan Larson and Pete Spaulding picked up a shift from the left and

sailed home winners of the race and the regatta. The British pair took Silver. Good, but not great. Such are the vagaries of the Medal Race system.

What every aspirant to Gold would love is to eke out such a points advantage by the Medal Race that it ceases to have an impact on your result. This was the enviable position into which Nick Rogers and Joe Glanfield had steered themselves by the end of the 470 Men's competition. With an almost unassailable 19-point lead heading into the final day and only disqualification incidents to avoid on the water, the Olympic Silver medallists from Athens finished 2nd in the final race and claimed Skandia Team GBR's only Gold from the Olympic classes.

This was impressive for a team that has done little sailing in the past year due to helmsman Rogers's wrist injury, incurred after he fell off a mountain bike. Crewman Glanfield admitted they did not feel their sharpest before the regatta: "We flew over, rigged up and immediately went into the North American championships where we finished 5th. We felt rusty in a few areas and we lacked race fitness, but we thought we were racing fairly well tactically." A few days' training between the two regattas allowed the team to work on weak areas and feel on top of things for the main event.

The fact that they have been sailing together for a decade enables them to return to the boat after a long break and still be competitive. Other teams such as Leigh McMillan and Will Howden can't yet fall back on that depth of experience together. Not long after teaming up in the Tornado two years ago, they narrowly missed out on winning the 2005 World Championships, although Silver was no disgrace.

However, their form since then has been erratic, with glimmers of brilliance offset by falls in form such as the Worlds in Argentina last December, when they finished just inside the top 20. While they finished last in the ten-boat Medal Race in Miami, seeing Gold slide to Silver, Howden wasn't complaining. "It's a real shame not to have won, but we have to look at the positives of this result. It was only four weeks ago we were 19th at the Worlds, so this is a huge improvement for us."



Photos: R. Langdon/Skandia Team GBR

Leigh McMillan and Will Howden took Silver in the Tornado, an improvement on their 19th at the Worlds

Skandia and Team GBR

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