

GOING FOR GOLD



In a new column looking at the build-up to Beijing 2008 and London 2012, top dinghy sailing correspondent Andy Rice follows the fortunes of Skandia Team GBR and their quest for medals. Can they surpass the achievements of Sydney and Athens?



Penny Clark heading for a Bronze at Qingdao in the Laser Radial

somewhere between three and four medals,” says Park, who is answerable to the governing body, UK Sport, for achieving these targets. If the sailors win their three or four medals in Qingdao, not only will it be mission accomplished for China, but it will help to secure similar levels of funding for the four years leading up to London 2012.

The team is funded by a combination of money from the National Lottery, via UK Sport, and from team sponsors such as Skandia who signed up as title sponsor to the team earlier this year. The British team is now one of the better funded teams on the Olympic circuit, although Park points out that they are not the best funded. So it can't just be about the money.

What then is the secret to Skandia Team GBR's success? “Good sailors,” says Park, perhaps a little too simplistically. Pushed to elaborate, he struggles to pinpoint any single ingredient but suggests: “It's a combination of lots of little things working together: continuity, a culture of winning, success breeding success.”

The RYA also works to ensure that as much of the money filters through as efficiently as possible to the sailors and their specific requirements, rather than being spent on designer team blazers or five-star hotels.

Park, a canny Scotsman, is particularly proud of this example: “We needed some cycling machines to equip our gym in China, so we found some being offered second-hand on eBay and we bought six for the price of two new ones.”

Here then, perhaps, is a clue to the success of Skandia Team GBR. Presbyterian thrift and common sense. Oh, and some good sailors too.

Photos: R Langdon/Skandia Team GBR



Stephen 'Sparky' Park, Olympic manager at the RYA – sailors must win 30 per cent of the medals

Such is the steamroller dominance of British sailors on the Olympic circuit that an air of mystique has grown up around Skandia Team GBR. Rival nations have been known grudgingly to refer to the Brits as “Team Invincible” and with good reason. At the past two Games, Sydney 2000 and Athens 2004, Great Britain has been the top performing nation, with five medals won on each occasion.

Midway through the current Olympic cycle, British sailing has, if anything, stepped up a gear. Across the 11 sailing disciplines Skandia Team GBR has medal prospects in just about all of them.

At the recent Olympic Test Event in Qingdao, China, impossibly strong currents and light winds should have turned the results into a lottery but still the Brits medalled in seven disciplines. The stand-out performance of the regatta was Ben Ainslie winning the Finn class with nine 1st places and two 2nds, despite having been out of the class for a year on America's Cup commitments.

No wonder that Stephen Park, Olympic Manager at the RYA, has felt compelled to increase the team's performance target for the 2008 Games. Whereas for the past two Olympics the stated aim was three medals – and the result on each occasion was five – for 2008 Park's sailors must win 30 per cent of the available medals, one of which must be Gold.

“With 11 medals available, 30 per cent means



Paul Goodison takes Gold in the Laser