

# GOING FOR GOLD



Having gone soft aboard Italian America's Cup hope +39 Challenge, Iain Percy has to toughen up if he is to take Gold in Qingdao. And just to be safe, he's taken on his Cup windspotter, reports Andy Rice



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from his days in the Finn class. Two years of steering an 80ft keelboat have, by his own admission, made him a bit soft, so one of the early priorities is to regain leg strength and all-round hiking fitness.

The other big challenge is how quickly Percy can get up to speed with his new crew Andrew 'Bart' Simpson. Percy reluctantly split with former crew Steve Mitchell to bring Simpson onto the boat at the beginning of this year. Percy and Simpson have been mates since they were in short trousers, from their days in the Finn and in the Laser before that. More recently, Bart has been the strategist and windspotter for +39 Challenge, and Percy was impressed by his friend's uncanny ability for sniffing out the best lines of breeze on light and fluky days.

"It's a real strength of Bart's to see where the best pressure is," says Percy. "I think in the light winds of China that's going to be important. Spotting the right shift, picking the best breeze, Bart's got that in spades."

Not that Simpson's windspotting skills are sure to prove useful for China. "Normally you can't see more than a hundred yards in the fog," admits Percy of the Olympic venue, where he took the Silver medal at last year's Olympic test regatta. "But in most venues [Bart's sixth sense] should be quite an asset."

The early goal for the new pairing is to compete at the ISAF World Sailing Championships in Cascais, Portugal, at the beginning of July. Asked what their goal is for the Worlds, Simpson replies: "To win it."

Really? Does his helmsman agree? "You go there to try and win like you do with every regatta," says Percy, who with Mitchell won the Star Worlds at his first attempt back in 2002.

That was a windy regatta and the hope is that Cascais on Portugal's Atlantic coast will also provide plenty of wind and wave action, Percy's favourite playground. Maybe winning this year's Worlds is realistic after all.

**A**fter two years trying to hold together an America's Cup campaign that was dogged by dodgy finances and dysfunctional management, Iain Percy has fulfilled his duties as skipper of the Italian +39 Challenge and can focus on his bid for Olympic Gold in Qingdao next year.

Despite all the frustrations of running a sailing team in Valencia that for many months worked without pay, Percy proved his exceptional leadership skills and has developed a new level of technical understanding from the highly complex world of the America's Cup. So there will be some useful lessons to take back into the Olympic scene, particularly to a technically challenging keelboat like the Star.

However, Percy's hallmark in the Star has been his incredible fitness, which he carried through

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