

# GOING FOR GOLD



The glut of British sailing talent is no fluke. Winter training gives our sailors an edge, with preparation in everything from strategy to psychology instilling a can-win attitude and chilly conditions breeding good old-fashioned British grit, says Andy Rice

Photos: oceanimages.co.uk



Could the secret to British success in Olympic sailing be partly due to the toughness of the team's winter training in Weymouth?



Just what is the secret to the sausage factory of sailing talent coming out of Skandia Team GBR? A few years ago, cynics wondered if Britain's success on the Olympic scene was down to a few key individuals, some once-in-a-lifetime talents. Perhaps when the Class of 2000 and 2004 have moved on, Britain's grip on the Olympic scene will wane. Certainly that's what the opposition will have hoped, but recent times have seen a new crop of stars rising through the ranks.

Consistent performances by a large number of British sailors suggest the reasons for the team's success run deeper than that. These days, all 42 Elite level sailors in Skandia Team GBR arrive on the start line of a regatta believing they can win.

Barrie Edgington, Olympic development squad manager, believes one of the distinguishing factors between the Brits and the rest of the world is how they spend the winter. "This is the time when the sailors put in all the background work, when we focus on controlling the controllables, such as physical and mental preparation, and improving planning and boathandling skills,"

says Edgington, who raced a sailboard for Britain in Barcelona in 1992. "The harder they work on the different elements of their programme now, the more they can expect to reap the benefits in the racing season this summer."

Bryony Shaw, one of Edgington's acolytes in the new RS-X sailboard class and a Silver medallist at last year's European championships, agrees that this is a key moment in the campaign calendar. "I'm not aware of any other nations that organise any winter camps quite like the RYA does, and that gives us a massive edge," she says.

The RYA organises a series of week-long training camps during the winter, at venues such as Weymouth and Hayling Island. While sailing sessions constitute a key part of the week's activities, a range of experts is on hand to help the sailors with off-the-water aspects of their campaign: psychologists, physiologists, physiotherapists, nutritionists, technical coaches.

There are even 'performance lifestyle consultants' from the English Institute of Sport, who can help Development sailors resolve any conflicts between their sailing programme and their ongoing education. "At the Elite end," explains Edgington, "They will discuss possible careers a sailor might embark on after their professional racing career comes to an end. Maybe you want to learn Chinese or learn the guitar. The performance lifestyle consultants will help point people in the right direction."

This winter has been relatively mild, but Edgington says the sailors are still expected to go out and train whatever the weather. "We could hold some of these Development Squad camps in warmer climes," says Edgington, "but we have the next one at Weymouth while the Elite squad have theirs in Miami. But we think it's not such a bad thing doing a bit of cold weather training here in Britain. It instils a sense of good old-fashioned toughness, which should make those challenging moments during the racing season just that little bit easier to cope with." Train hard, fight easy.

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