



Britain's Yngling team members Sarah Ayton, Sarah Webb and Pippa Wilson (from left to right) sail back to the Olympic Sailing Center after winning the gold medal during the Yngling three-women keelboat sailing competition at the 2008 Beijing Olympics in Qingdao yesterday. Ju Chenghao

# British Yngling trio grabs first gold in Qingdao

► Netherlands, Greece finish 2nd and 3rd; Chinese women in 9th

**QINGDAO:** British Yngling trio Sarah Ayton, Sarah Webb and Pippa Wilson snatched the first gold medal at the Olympic sailing regatta yesterday.

The defending Yngling champion led the keelboat class from the beginning of the medal race to round the windward mark first, a second ahead of rest of the fleet, despite heavy rain on the sea.

Although they were overtaken by Germany at the third mark, they kept their com-

posure and first crossed the finishing line seven seconds ahead of Germany and a minute in front of the Dutch.

The British Yngling women ended up on top of the podium with 24 points overall, pocketing the first gold medal in Qingdao.

"When we crossed the line, the three of us just looked at one another. I can't describe the feeling, because you just know that you're the best in the whole world at what you do," said Ayton.

"The conditions today were

quite Great Britain: big wind and big rain. We were quite prepared," she added.

"It has been a fantastic journey. It is so exciting with a little relief and, of course, loads of joy," said Webb.

Ayton and Webb won gold in 2004 Athens with Shirley Robertson; they are two-time world champions and they won the Olympic test event in Qingdao last year.

The silver medal went to Mandy Mulder, Annemieke Bes and Merel Witteveen from the Netherlands with 33 points overall, finishing fifth in the medal race though.

"This is my first Olympic

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SARAH WEBB  
British Yngling team member

medal. But it's a pity that we didn't beat GBR," said Bes.

Their coach Thanasis Piniaris said, "We're going to Shangri-la tonight to eat the chocolate fondue. They were not allowed to eat it before they got a medal.

They have worked three years for this medal."

The bronze medal was taken by Sofia Bekatorou, Sofia Papadopoulou and Virginia Kravarioti from Greece with 48 points after their third finish in the medal race.

"We made our gain today on the first downwind. We feel great for the 10 million Greeks back home. It's wonderful," said Bekatorou.

Chinese Yngling team members Song Xiaqun, Yu Yanli and Li Xiaoni also sailed their best performance today, placing 9th overall with 65 points.

"This is my first and last Olympics. If I had a chance, I would do this all over again,"

said Song.

**Danes wait for gold ruling**

The Danish team of Jason Warrer and Martin Kirketerp Ibsen is being listed as the winner of the 49er skiff Olympic sailing class, but race officials say they cannot confirm the medal because they are handling three protests against the result.

The mast on the Danes' boat broke shortly before the start of the 49er medal race, and they rushed back to port and borrowed a skiff from the Croatian team, which failed to make the field of 10 boats for the 49er medal race.

International sailing federation spokesman David Knapman says the race measurement committee is protesting the finish, saying the two could not start in another country's boat. He said protests were also under consideration that demand the annulment of the race because it started after a 4:30 pm deadline set in Olympic racing rules.

If the Danes are disqualified after Sunday's race, Spain's Iker Martinez and Xabier Fernandez, winners of the medal race, will retain the title they won in Athens four years ago.

Xinhua/Agencies



Defending gold medalist Ben Ainslie of Britain, sailing in Finn class dinghy, waits for the start of the medal race in Qingdao. Ju Chuanjiang

# Defending champ Ainslie still reigns in Finn

By HUANG YANHONG

**QINGDAO:** The Beijing Olympics has cemented Ben Ainslie's status as one of Britain's greatest Olympians.

After a gold in the Finn class in Athens, the 31-year-old veteran repeated his golden achievement yesterday in the same class. He raced to a silver in the Laser class in Atlanta in 1996 at age 19 and grabbed gold in that class in Sydney in 2000.

"The Olympics is a chance for sailing to represent itself on a global scale and to win a gold medal gives you an im-

mense feeling of achievement," he said.

His fourth appearance at the Olympic Games has made him the biggest name in Qingdao waters.

He also has won eight World and European Championships, was crowned International Sailing Federation World Sailor of the Year in 1998 and 2002 and was a four-time British Yachtsman of the Year. He also won the championships in both the 2006 and 2007 International Sailing Regattas in Qingdao.

Ainslie holds the world record for the number of wins in the long-established and

legendary Olympic Finn class. Since 2004 Athens, he has been unbeaten in the Finn.

He began sailing at the age of 8 with his family in Restronguet, Cornwall, the coastal county in southwestern England.

What started as a hobby quickly turned into a way of life. By the age of 16 Ainslie was Laser Radial world champion.

In September 2007, the UK's campaign for the America's Cup named Ainslie skipper for races likely to take place in 2009 and 2011.

Ainslie said the people most influential in his sailing success are his parents, "Roddy

and Susan, who have given me endless time and support over the years".

Roddy skippered the yacht Second Life in the first Whitbread Round the World Race of 1973-74. The younger Ainslie has engraved his mother's name "Susan" on each of his boats to give him good luck.

Yet in the first sailing race of the 2008 Olympics, he didn't perform well, ranking only 10th.

"My greatest strength is that I never give up," he said.

"During the competition he is of course the main contender," said Jonas Hoegh-Christensen from Denmark, who is ranked

world No. 1.

"Anything but gold for him would be a catastrophe. He is a very complete sailor and makes very few mistakes. He is hard to beat."

Ainslie credited his sailing heritage with his string of victories.

"I guess I'm fortunate in that I have now been racing boats for 20 years, pretty much continually, yet I am still really motivated to train hard, learn and improve," said the 31-year-old champion.

"I feel that I still have a long way to go and I'm still very passionate about winning," he said.

# Friends, family the biggest fans

By GUO XIN AND ZHANG YING

**QINGDAO:** As it heads into more medal races, the Olympic Sailing Regatta is drawing even wider attention with spectators lining the sailing venue. The keenest are probably families and friends of athletes.

Cynthia Goodison arrived on the spectator breakwater half an hour before the first round of the men's Laser-class race started on August 12.

She was there to cheer her son Paul Goodison, a medal favorite from the United Kingdom.

He won both Olympic test events in Qingdao in 2006 and 2007. Yet after the first day of Olympic racing he was far below expectations - he ranked 15th.

But Mrs. Goodison had confidence in her son. "I am sure he will soon catch up and perform well," she said.

Paul lived up to his mother's confidence and ranked first after yesterday's sixth race. Since August 11, there were

men's 470-class races every day, and Helen Geronti from Greece sat at the breakwater waving a flag and looking to the sea where her boyfriend Andreas Papadopoulos was competing. The Greek team placed 12th and didn't make it to the medal race.

Supporting Andreas was Helen's main purpose in Qingdao.

"I didn't think that he must win a medal. I just hoped he can give it his best," she said. "Of course a medal would be much better."

Accompanying Helen are her father and Andreas' parents.

The Papadopouloses are a sailing family - all three sons love sailing. Their father Thanassis is also a sailor.

"It is in our blood," Thanassis said proudly.

He taught Andreas when he was a child.

"But now, all I can do is to give him full support and cheer him," Thanassis told China Daily.

Giulia Conti and Giovanna Micol finished seventh in the last race before the medal race.

"I prayed for fine weather and brisk winds when Giulia started her competition in Qingdao," her mother said.

The father declined to reveal his thoughts. "I have already had my answer in my mind. Now I am just waiting for the right time to say it," he said.

Among all the cheering sections, perhaps China's sailor in Star-class Wang He boasts the largest. With his mother as the cheerleader, more than 60 relatives and friends stood on the bank, yelling encouragement.

"He did not perform well, but he participated in the Olympics for China so I still think he is a hero," said Wang's mother.

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Fans from different countries and regions cheer for their athletes during the sailing competition. Ju Chuanjiang/Ju Chenghao