

The Daily Sail

THE RACING SAILOR'S HOMEPAGE

Inshore



We speak to Olympic women's match racer Lucy Macgregor about her campaign and how they won't be going to Palma or Hyeres

The new Olympic sport of women's match racing is going through a few teething problems at the moment. While the first Olympic classes event for the new discipline was successfully held at Rolex Miami OCR where Lotte Meldgaard Pedersen's team came out on top, Women's Match Racing has been canned at the subsequent World Sailing Cup events at Princess Sofia and Hyeres. This appears to have been due to some administrative issues leading to uncertainty over how many teams were going to show up, followed by a shortsighted reluctance by the organisers to go ahead with chartering Laser SB3s, as everyone awaits the arrival of the first Elliott 6s into Europe.

Meanwhile in the UK several teams are showing interest. In Miami, GBR hopes were represented by three teams Charlotte Lawrence/Lavinia Paternoster/Liz Rushall, Mary Rook/Rebecca Marriott/Nicky Macgregor and Lucy Macgregor/Annie Lush/Ally Martin. Of these the strongest proved to be of Lucy Macgregor's team, she and Annie Lush having previously sailed together with Shirley Robertson on the Yngling.



“It was brilliant sailing with both Shirley and Annie, I loved it and I learned a huge amount both sailing-wise and also about how to run a campaign and I am trying to do that on my own now, so it is all useful,” says Macgregor of her time with Shirley. “It was great doing the Yngling stuff and I enjoyed the racing as well in the Yngling, it being really close and all the technical aspects. So this is quite different in a way, just turning up and being given a boat to go racing in and not have to worry about any of that. It makes life a lot easier.”

As to Annie Lush, Macgregor says: “She’s done a huge amount of match racing over the last four years. So it is really useful having her on board and guiding me along a little bit.”

Personally Macgregor has been match racing sporadically for ages, since her 420 days, perhaps spurred on by an annual youth match racing event she regularly used to compete in between Parkstone and Poole Yacht Clubs each Christmas. She’s also competed several times in the RYA Match Racing Nationals. But her first taste of international match racing competition came just after the 2007 Yngling Worlds.

Over the course of 2008 she entered more. Was this anticipating the change in Olympic classes? “I knew there was a chance. At first it was something quite easy and different to go and do, while the Yngling stuff was on hold. So yes, I knew there was a chance of it coming in and the more and more I did, the more chance there was of it coming in. So it all seemed to make sense. At first I struggled to imagine campaigning it, because I really enjoy all the technical aspects of fleet racing.”

She has rounded up a regular squad including Annie Lush and in September brought on board Ally Martin who she used to race against in 420s. While that will be the crew for the Elliott 6, whenever that happens, for many of the events on the Women’s match racing circuit, the boats require more than three. In particular the World Championship in Sweden this summer will be sailed in the local DS37s six up.

Last year Macgregor’s team competed in the Germany Match Cup in Frederickshaven, the Rolex Osprey Cup in the US and various others. The most promising were winning the Europeans in St Quay Portrieux and the Nations Cup qualifiers in Antibes where they gained one of the two European slots (alongside world no1 Clare LeRoy) to go to the main Nations Cup event to be held next month in Porto Allegre, Brazil.

After ISAF’s announcement of the women’s match racing becoming an Olympic sport, of the UK teams Macgregor was first out of the blocks, announcing her campaign last November.

Since then they finished third in Miami. "It was good," says Macgregor. "I am really pleased we went. In terms of costs and everything - obviously we are not that well funded at the moment, so it was a big thing to decide to do, because it was going to cost a bit of money. But to get over there and do some racing and get some decent training in beforehand as well and sail three up for the first time match racing, because it does change the dynamics quite a bit from the normal four..."

Obviously Macgregor, along with the other British teams had hoped to compete in Princess Sofia and Hyeres. At present it looks as though Women's Match Racing will resume in the World Sailing Cup at the Delta Lloyd regatta (formerly SPA) in Holland where they may be racing in Ynglings and the latest thinking is that the Elliott may make its European debut at Kiel or Sail For Gold in Weymouth. According to the RYA's Stephen Park, the RYA have ordered boats, but there is no word yet as to when they will be getting them.



So now women's match racing teams are scrabbling to fill their calendars. Macgregor is in a fortunate position. Not only is her team going to the Nations Cup, but also having campaigned last year before the ISAF announcement, they have a suitably high ranking to get invites to events on the women's tour. As a result they have now had to rearrange their plans to enter the Women's Grade 1 event in Calpe and are planning to go across to Annapolis for the Santa Maria Cup.

In terms of funding, Macgregor's team are backed by the Poole-based company Jenkins Marine who run tugs out of various ports around the UK. However Macgregor says that she has just heard from the RYA that she is to be put up for funding. "That should make life a lot easier. I would really like to get some good coaches and sail against the boys as much as I can because that is where some gains are to be made."

For coaching so far they have had Soling and GBR Challenge legend Andy Beadsworth down to help them, but they would prefer a more regular arrangement. Without funding they are also struggling to find boats to train in. Fortunately with the Nation's Cup being held in J/24s, they have managed to borrow a couple of boats from the Poole J/24 fleet.

At present it is unclear how running a women's match racing team will compare cost-wise with a Yngling team. We suspect it will be cheaper, for although they will require two boats rather than one, most of the top Yngling teams had also multiple boats and with match racing there is no technical development (although teams or MNAs such as the RYA will be acquiring Elliott 6s to see how to get the best from them).

Meanwhile the UK women's match racing teams are out in force this weekend at Queen Mary Sailing Club on the outskirts of London, where they have their first training camp/qualification series. At present Macgregor doesn't know what form the Skandia Team GBR Women's Match Racing squad will look like – if it is a few teams or more of a squad system as the Dutch used to pick their Yngling team last year.

At least Macgregor seems to have got off to a good start with her Olympic campaign, even if the discipline she sails in hasn't.



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