

FLYING THE SA FLAG AT NEW ZEALAND OPTIMIST WORLD SAILING CHAMPIONSHIP

To the uninformed public, sailing may appear to be an obscure sport or even not a sport at all. However the sailing community is very active. The sport is still growing and South Africa (SA) is being put on the world stage by our sailing talent.

On 21 December, 5 South African boys will jet off to New Zealand to participate in the 2011 Optimist Worlds Sailing Championship that will take place in Napier from 30 December – 10 January 2012.

At Optiworlds the top five sailors from about 50 countries will compete for the world title in a very technical and competitive 10-day event.

The Optimist, Oppie or Opti for short, is a small, single-handed sailing dinghy, measuring 2.3m long by 1.1m wide, and intended for use by children up to the age of 15. It is recognized as an International Class by the International Sailing Federation (ISAF). Over 150,000 kids in over 100 countries sail an Optimist, making it not only one of the biggest dinghy classes in the world, but also one of the fastest growing.

Optimists provide real international competition because they are a one-design boat, manufactured to the same specification by dozens of builders around the world. They all must conform to the same standard (the class rules), so the results of a race depend on the skill of the skipper rather than equipment superiority.

The SA team is made up by Cape Town boys: David Wilson, Travis Barret and Emil Feuillette (all aged 14) as well as Ryan Barnardo and Daniel Spratley (both aged 15). They will be accompanied by their coach Andrea Giovannini and their manager Kevin Bingham.

Sailing is an endurance sport, which requires and tests one's fitness, strength and one's decision-making ability. Each contestant is alone in their boat and they are not allowed to be coached while racing.

The sport currently receives very little support in South Africa and the boys and their families have had to cover their own costs to get to the competition. Thankfully, the generous sponsorship from Twice2Much, Hitachi and Gill sailing gear has helped the boys with their team uniform and equipment needs.

Over the next few weeks, the SA team will place high priority on getting as much time on the water to hone their skills. They've also had to focus on their end of the year exams, but with that now behind them, the excitement is mounting and they're counting down the days...

For more information about the world championships visit <http://www.optiworldsnz.org.nz>.

