

Two world champions in SA team for youth championships

26 October 2017 – A team of six South African sailors will take on the best in the world who will converge on Sanya, China for the Youth Sailing World Championships from 9-16 December.

SA Sailing today announced the names of those sailors selected to compete at the prestigious event, which is widely seen as an important stepping stone towards Olympic-level sailing.

Previous winners have included the likes of Britain's Ben Ainslie and Brazil's Robert Scheidt who went on to become Olympic champions, together with America's Cup skippers Russell Coutts and Chris Dickson.

The SA team will be captained by Calvin Gibbs, who will compete in the Laser Radial class, and includes newly crowned 29er world champion Benji Daniel as well as former two-time Mirror World champion Michaela Robinson.

"I feel very privileged because being selected to sail for your country, with the youth worlds being such a prestigious event, is such an honour," said Robinson, who sailed to the Mirror world title with her brother Ryan in 2013 and 2015.

The St Mary's, Waverley student, who hails from Carletonville, has never sailed in China before but is looking forward to the challenge as she teams up with Elsje Dijkstra in the 420 class.

"I'm aiming to achieve my best possible result. At this stage Elsje and I have not sailed together against these competitors so we can't really rank ourselves. We are aiming to learn as much as we can and to try our best," she explained.

"I think competitions like Youth Worlds are very important stepping stones because in South Africa we don't get the big fleets and intense competition. So if you are thinking of Olympics

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as a long-term goal, you need to be exposed to competition with many boats around you. The most important skill is to learn how to sail fast in a competitive fleet.”

Daniel had also taken much confidence from his victory at the 29er World Championships alongside Alex Burger – who will act as assistant coach to the SA team in China. “It has given me confidence in my sailing but sailing a 420 is completely different to a 29er. I don’t think I can take the boat handling aspects across but certainly the racing and tactical sorts of things. That’s definitely something I can take away and use in China for youth worlds,” he said.

“It’s a really great event for getting from amateur local sailing to almost professional sailing because people are at the top level there – they are stepping into the Olympic classes in the following years and looking at the Olympic circuit. It’s a really key regatta to do as it simulates the Olympics and the kind of racing that happens there. So it’s a good thing to do if you’re looking to go past youth sailing and to take it further than that,” added the 16-year-old from Hillcrest.

“It’s such a cool event to go to and to go with the team we have is a great thing. I’m really looking forward to it.”

SA team: Rivaldo Aarendse (420), Benji Daniel (420), Elsje Dijkstra (420), Calvin Gibbs (Laser Radial), Michaela Robinson (420) Sonja Stock (Laser Radial)

Head coach: Roger Hudson, **Assistant coaches:** Alex Burger, Asenathi Jim (non-travelling)

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