



SA sailor switches boats to book Olympic spot



If all goes according to plan, South Africa will have two boats in the Olympic sailing programme in Tokyo this year. That's after Leo Davis secured a qualification spot at last week's Finn Gold Cup in Portugal to join Benji Daniel and Alex Burger, who qualified in the 49er class.

Davis had initially dreamed of representing the country at the Olympics in rowing but was eventually named as the reserve to the

heavyweight pair that competed in Rio five years

ago. After four years training with the high-performance squad under national rowing coach Roger Barrow, in 2018 he switched boats, with a view to competing in Tokyo in sailing.

Having successfully secured the continental qualification spot in the Finn class, the Cape Town sailor's final selection for Team SA is now in the hands of the SA Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC).

Explaining his transition between the sports, Davis said: "Luckily I had been sailing at a very high level before rowing took over and I managed to keep sailing whenever my rowing training allowed, so getting back to professional sailing was an easy transition.

"Rowing and sailing are both leg-orientated and highly physical sports. Many of the professional Finn sailors utilise the rowing machine in their cross



training as the downwind pumping resembles the rowing stroke and is great for a cardio-vascular training tool.

“I was able to use all the knowledge about nutrition, training programmes, recovery and adaptation that I learnt from the national rowing team to assist my sailing training and racing. I feel that the way an athlete approaches their sport and their mindset to achieve is transferable between all sports and other aspects of life,” added the multiple national sailing champion.

With travel and training made all the more difficult by the Covid pandemic, Davis is currently based in Europe in an effort to make things smoother, but even getting to the qualifying event was a massive challenge.

“I was uncertain that I would be able to attend the event until the restrictions eased a few days before I travelled from Italy. If I were travelling from South Africa, I don’t think it would have been possible for me to attend, at least not without a long quarantine in Portugal.

“So I’m really excited to have qualified South Africa for the Olympics. It has been my dream since I can remember to represent my country at the top level.”

Davis had a taste of the Olympic Games at a young age when his father, Greg, travelled to Atlanta in 1996 as a coach of heralded SA sailor Ian Ainslie.



“From when I was a child, I would try on my dad’s Olympic kit and imagine wearing the South African colours at the Games, so to do that together would be very emotional,” reckoned Davis, whose dad will hopefully also travel to Tokyo as his coach.

For now, the 29-year-old is just keeping his head down and training as hard as possible with the aim of reaching the medal race at the Games.

“I plan to train as much as possible between Italy and France, getting as much work in with the top Finn sailors and top coaches. I have a list of things to improve from the last regatta and the aim is to make every decision from now on based on what will improve my performance leading to the Games.”

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Congratulations to Benji and Alex who were officially named as part of Team SA by SASCOC in their first team announcement for the Tokyo Olympics. We trust Leo’s participation will be confirmed shortly in the next team announcement.