

Olympic trials begin for SA yachtsmen

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Fifty-nine of South Africa's top yachtsmen have entered in six classes for the Olympic yachting trials which start in Durban this weekend.

The entry list reads like a who's who of yachting, with all the top yachtsmen vying for six places and the fulfilment of a lifetime dream — to compete in the Olympics.

The star-studded gathering of yachtsmen includes 20 Springboks with Capetonians Dave Hudson, Geoff Meek and Blaine Dodds sharing the honour of being the most capped yachting Springboks. Hudson and Dodds have more Springbok caps for dinghy and catamaran sailing than Meek who has earned his caps mostly from keelboat racing.

Meek has been yachtsman of the year four times and is certainly hot favourite to win the

Soling Class with his crew of Greg Davis and Duncan McKechnie. Giving him a good run for his money will be the powerful Chris King/Rick Nankin combination, who have proved to be almost unbeatable over the past years.

Their four victories in the Lip-ton Cup is proof of this, and a host of other victories — including one in Cowes Week, has earned them the respect of most yachtsmen.

A dark horse in the Soling fleet will be Bruce Savage who recently returned from a few years of highly competitive sailing overseas. Together with his crew of Giles Stanley and Rick Mayhew, Savage has been out practising every day since mid-December.

Whoever goes to Barcelona in the Soling Class will have the added pressure of a match racing final by the top six crews. Match racing is man on man racing and is tactically more demanding than fleet racing, so the man who goes to Barcelona will have to be a goold allrounder.

The Flying Dutchman class will also be very competitive because most of the top contenders have imported boats.

Two up-country teams returned this week from the world championships in New Zealand.

Robbie Willcox with his crew, Grant Davidge-Pitts, finished 46th out of 70 boats while Nigel Travarthen and R Samways finished 56th.

According to Willcox the South Africans did not do well although they did learn a lot about making their boats go faster.

"I think this will give us an edge on the local competitors," said Willcox.

The first official race is on Wednesday, January 22. But not since the Fireball world championships held in Durban in 1980 has there been such excitement and enthusiasm for dinghy sailing, a South African Yacht Racing Association spokesman said.