

Yachting stars from the south

Five members of the South African team for the America's Cup Yachting Challenge in Spain in 2007 - Sieraj Jacobs, Golden Mgedeza, Solomon Dipeere, Alex Runciman and Ashton Sampson - are from the Southern Mail area. They are training aboard a yacht called Shosholoza. SOUTHERN MAIL



Sieraj Jacobs
(Grassy Park) - crew

Born into an active sailing family, Sieraj Jacobs, 25, started sailing Optimists at Zeekoevlei when he was nine years old.

He also sailed keelboats with his family in Table Bay.

Just three years later, at the age of 12, he was included in a Nocs Development Squad which was given observer status at the 1992 Barcelona Olympics.

It was the start of an illustrious sailing career which saw him representing South Africa at the Optimist World Championships in Spain in 1993 and Sardinia in 1994.

He was the South African Optimist National Champion in 1994.

As a 14-year-old in 1993, he was included in the high profile Parker Pen Cape to Rio campaign skippered by Bruce Tedder.

His second Cape to Rio race in 2000 was as co-skipper with Anthony Steward on MTN Better Connection.

He skippered the South African entry at the Coco Cola Youth World Championships in Auckland, New Zealand in 1999 (along with Alex Runciman and Golden Mgedeza as crew).

Jacobs was the Mirror Class South African National Champion in 1997 and 2001.

He finished 5th at the Mirror World Championships in Saldanha in 1999.



Golden Mgedeza
(Wynberg) - crew

Golden Mgedeza, 22, grew up in KwaThema in Gauteng and only started sailing in his teens after winning a bursary to study at Simon's Town High School in the Cape.

One of his subjects was maritime studies and, most opportunely, one of his teachers was Olympic sailor Ian Ainslie, who immediately recognised his sailing talents.

His initial sail training was with Ian on the SA Navy bosun dinghies and within months he was a regular crew of Ainslie's in Lipton Challenge Cups and J22 campaigns.

He was also a regular crew for Captain Salvatore Sarno on his J33 MSC Donna Mia at the mid-year NCS Week Regatta's in Durban.

He was part of a South African crew racing with Geoff Meek in the 82 foot Maxi's in a European Series in 1999 which was organised by Ernesto Bertarelli, head of the Swiss Alinghi Challenge, the current America's Cup defending champions.

He was also a member of the MTN Better Connection crew in the 2000 Cape to Rio race.

Mgedeza has done three Lipton Challenge Cup Regattas and was on the winning Zeekoevlei campaign yacht with Ainslie in 2002.

He was the first black African crew to win a Lipton Challenge which led to him being named SA Sailing Magazine's Sailor of the Year for 2002.



Alex Runciman
(Zeekoevlei) - crew

A top dinghy skipper, Alex Runciman has been the Laser Radial, Extra and Fireball South African National Champion in recent years.

He is also a sought-after crew member in local big boat campaigns and has competed in six Lipton Challenge Cups, having been on the winning Theewater's Sport Club campaign yacht last year.

He has been a regular crew member on the Port Elizabeth based pocket-maxi, Warrior, owned by Phil Gutsche.

Together with Golden Mgedeza, he sailed with Sieraj Jacobs in the 1999 Youth Match Racing World Championships, the Coco Cola Cup, in Auckland, New Zealand.

He has also competed in the Fireball Nationals in Britain and at the international Student Games in France on a University of Cape Town entry which finished fourth.

Runciman, 25, grew up sailing at the Zeekoevlei Yacht Club.

He is involved in all levels of sailing and was also the SA Optimist Class coach for three years and took teams to two world championships.

Solomon Dipeere
(Wynberg) - crew

Solomon Dipeere was just 15 in Grade 10 at Eureka High School in KwaThema, Gauteng, when he won a Safmarine bursary to do maritime studies at Simon's Town High School.

The bursaries were offered to the top 10 students at his school, one of whom was his close friend, Golden Mgedeza.

He initially started sailing with the Navy and his first spring regatta in Simon's Town was aboard one of South Africa's best known yachts, Voortrekker 1, made famous by solo sailor Bertie Reed in his round-the-world campaigns.

Dipeere says many of his classmates soon tired of sailing, but he and Mgedeza would spend every weekend at False Bay Yacht Club and soon became regular crew on racing yachts.

When SA Olympic sailor Ian Ainslie joined the teaching staff at their school in 1997, they pestered him to put together a proper student sailing team.

Ainslie's coaching inspired them and in 1998 Dipeere won his first regatta as a skipper at the Mirror Class inter-schools



championships.

The following year, he skippered a Mirror at the Mirror Worlds in Saldanha Bay.

He has done four Lipton Cup Challenges, one of which he skippered himself and the others as crew for Ian Ainslie and Anthony Steward.

He did the 2000 Cape to Rio Race on MTN Better Connection, with co-skippers Anthony Steward and Sieraj Jacobs, and has been a regular crew in the Durban NCS Weeks for Captain Salvatore Sarno on his J33 MSC Donna Mia.

Dipeere, 23, studied mechanical engineering at the Cape Technikon and will give up a promising job with Marine and Mineral Resources to join the SA America's Cup Challenge team in May.

Ashton Sampson
(Grassy Park) - crew

Ashton Sampson started sailing while still at Grassy Park High School through a programme offered by Rotary International at Zeekoevlei Yacht Club.

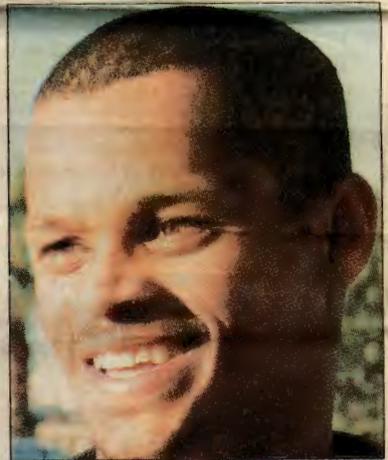
The sport has since become an all-consuming passion for him.

His early training was in the Mirror dinghy class and he went on to skipper a dinghy in two Mirror World Championships - Saldanha in 1999 and Tasmania last year.

He has also competed in all the local Mirror and Sonnet National Championships.

He has campaigned in five Lipton Challenge Cup Regattas since 1997, one of which was with Ian Ainslie on MSC Donna Mia. He also skippered a Lipton entry in 2000.

He did the 2000 Cape to Rio race on MTN's Better Connection and has competed in all the major off-



shore regattas in Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Durban as helmsman and crew.

Sampson, 24, started sailing at Zeekoevlei in dinghies and Table Bay in keel boats.

Incredibly generous with his time, he never turns down requests for coaching from lesser skilled sailors.