



Picture: DOUG PITHEY, The Argus

YOUNG PRETENDERS: The Zeekoevlei crew to compete in the Lipton Cup regatta from September 1-7 are, from left, Robyn Keen (16), skipper Davey James (20), Alex Runciman (17), Rodney Tanner (25), Neil MacKellar (17), Gareth Blankenberg (16) and manager Sieraj Jacobs, (17).

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Rookie James takes the helm

BARRY TYSON

WANTED (a notice on the Zeekoevlei Yacht Club noticeboard may have read): Skipper for Lipton Cup campaign. Requirements: Must be young (yet experienced) and prepared to take over the mantle of two of South Africa's finest-ever yachtsmen, six-time Lipton winners Chris King and Rick Nankin. Tasks: The daily grind of preparing an ageing boat for a regatta. Rewards: nil.

Fortunately Zeekoevlei's new skipper Davey James fits the bill perfectly. He started sailing when just four and now, sixteen years later, has a national title under his belt and has been awarded WP colours three times.

Neither James nor any of his five-man crew - greenhorn schoolboys with an average age of 17 - have competed in South Africa's premier yachting event before.

They do have, however, five junior Springbok caps among

them (including manager Sieraj Jacobs) plus a wealth of expertise gained since they started racing Optimists at Zeekoevlei.

James first represented SA in the 1990 Optimist World Championships in South America and was a member of the schoolboy Bishops/Carducci team in the 1993 Cape-to-Rio race.

The team's top international result is held by the only girl in the team Robyn Keen, 16, a standard nine pupil at Westerford High.

Keen, who this year was the first woman to be awarded the SA yacht-racing youth sailor of the year award, has just returned from Laser Radial World Youth championships in Newport, Rhode Island, where she finished an impressive third after 11 races (two of which she won).

Keen's Lipton Cup teammates Gareth Blankenberg, 16, and team manager Sieraj Jacobs, 16 - both standard nine pupils at Wynberg

Boys' High school - completed in the same regatta with Jacobs just missing a medal to clinch fourth place in the Laser 2 boys class.

Blankenberg is a junior national dabchick champion while Jacobs was just 13 when he crewed on Parker Pen in the 1993 Cape-to-Rio race.

The other standard nine team members are Neil MacKellar, 17 of Wynberg BH, Alex Runciman, 17, Westerford (he has represented South Africa at Oppie Worlds) and reserve Ian Runciman.

James, a construction management student at the Cape Technikon says he is building a team for the future: "This year we're just looking for consistent results - for a young crew it's better to be in the top 10 every day than, for example finishing third one day and 20th the next.

"We're planning to sail conservatively - but on certain days we might just go for it," he added with a grin.