



ROWING

Six SA boats ready for action

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THE World Rowing Championships in Ottensheim, Austria starting on Sunday will be a reunion of sorts for two of South Africa's crews.

Olympic medallists John Smith and Lawrence Brittain will lock arms at a major championship for the first time in nearly a decade rowing the men's pair boat in Austria.

The lightweight women's doubles sculls combination of Kirsten McCann and Ursula Grobler will revive their partnership from the Rio Games.

A total of six South African boats will be competing at the championships with five aiming for Olympic qualification. The Tuks-based squad will include four heavyweight boats – the men's pair, double sculls, four and the women's pair – that will be looking to qualify for next year's quadrennial showpiece. Nicole van Wyk will be in the sixth boat at the regatta in the lightweight single sculls which is not an Olympic-class event. National rowing coach Roger Barrow was cautious about making predictions about his crews' chances but hoped

to qualify the majority of the boats for the Olympic Games.

The championship marks a remarkable comeback of Grobler, who hung up her oars after the Rio Games where she and McCann finished fourth in the lightweight women's double sculls final.

The 39-year-old last year moved back to the Capital City from Cape Town to pursue her dream of another Olympics and a possible medal.

"Ursula has done very well to get back into the boat with Kristen and move Nicole into the lightweight single now," Barrow said. "She returned almost wiser than what she was and is doing it for the right reasons now, not that she wasn't before.

"She's taken some time to get her strength back to where it was, and I still think she has some way to go. If they do qualify hopefully, they can concentrate on building for the next season."

The men's pair sees Olympic gold medallist Smith and Brittain, who won silver at the 2016 Rio Games, renew the partnership that earned them the men's pair gold at the 2010 World Under-23 Championships.

