

SA rowers qualify three boats for the World's finals

With a little bit of luck and lots of guts South Africa's rowers stand a chance of winning more medals at the World Rowing Championships in Auguebelette, France than they did at last year's Championships in Amsterdam.

Four South African crews qualified for the A-finals. Equally exciting is the fact that South Africa has already qualified three boats for next year's Olympic Games in Rio and there is still a chance for them to qualify a fourth crew.

The good news is that South Africa's defending world champions, James Thompson and John Smith, are still on track to defend their title in the lightweight double sculls, after having to dig deep to survive their semi-final. Over the last 100 metres they had to fight off the fast finishing Polish crew of Artur Mikolajczewski and Milosz Jankowski. Luckily they were able to finish third to guarantee a spot in Saturday's final.

"Definitely not our best race," is how Smith (Tuks/HPC) summarized their performance.

According to Thompson things went awry for them between 1000 metres and 1500 metres.

"You can say we lost our 'groove' in the boat and we nearly paid the price for it. But it's good that we had this mishap in the semi-final and not in the final," said Smith.

Thompson emphasized that they will be going into the final as the underdogs. "But it is nothing new for us. We are used to it. We now realize that we will have to dig deep to find something special for the final."

Stany Delayre and Jeremie Azou from France won the semi-final in which the South Africans competed. Their winning time was 6:15.94. Italy's Andrea Micheletti and Pietro Ruta were second in 6:17.59. Thompson and Smith finished in 6:19.50.

South Africa's Kirsten McCann and Ursula Grobler were involved in a titanic battle against Canada's Jennerich Lindsay and Patricia Obee in their women's lightweight double sculls semi-final. The South Africans were in the lead from 500 metres to 1 500 metres but they slowed down over the last 500 metres, giving the Canadians an opportunity to catch up and pass them. The Canadians won in 6:57.02m and South Africa was second in 6:57.83, the two fastest times in the semi-finals.

Grobler (Tuks/HPC) was quite relieved afterwards that they were able to qualify for the Olympics.

"This has been my dream ever since I started rowing."

Naydene Smith and Lee-Ann Persse (Tuks/HPC) seem to have mastered the art of peaking at the right time. They finished second in their semi-final in a time of 7:14.41, making sure that they go through to Saturday's final of the women's pairs.

Unfortunately for Shaun Keeling and David Hunt things did not quite work out for them and they could only finish 5th in their semi-final of the men's pairs. But all is not lost for the Tuks/HPC crew. They can still qualify a boat for next year's Olympic Games in Rio if they can manage to finish 5th or better in their B-final.

Tomorrow (4/09) South Africa's Willie Morgan, Jake Green and Leo Davis will compete in the final of the men's coxed pair.

Last year in Amsterdam South Africa's Thompson and Smith won a gold medal, while Shaun Keeling and Vince Breet won a bronze medal in the men's pairs final.