

## **McCann and Grobler are first SA women's crew to medal at Worlds**

Kirsten McCann and Ursula Grobler made South African rowing history on Saturday when they won the bronze medal in the lightweight women's double sculls at the world championships in Auguebelette, France.

They were the first South African women's crew who were able to medal at a world championship. If ever there was a crew who deserved to step onto the podium at a major championship, it was them. They have worked extremely hard and made many sacrifices over the past year. At last year's world championships in Amsterdam McCann and Grobler missed out by a mere second on winning a bronze medal. Instead of allowing this set-back to make them despondent, it motivated them to push themselves that little bit harder during each training session, eventually being able to reap the rewards.

In the final on Saturday McCann and Grobler took the early lead, setting the fastest time over 500 and 1000 metres. Unfortunately they were not able to keep up the fast pace and allowed New Zealand's Sophie McKenzie and Julia Edward to catch up and pass them at the 1500 metre marker. Over the last 500 metres Britain's Charlotte and Katherine Copeland also passed the South African crew.

The New Zealanders won in 6:53.10. Britain was second in 6:54.22, followed by South Africa in 6:55.79.

Grobler (Tuks/HPC) has an interesting story to tell. She used to row for the USA. In 2012 she just missed out on representing the USA rowing team at the London Games. In 2013 the former pupil of Willow Ridge High School in Pretoria decided to come back to South Africa and join the South African squad.

Grobler admits that she has learned some valuable life lessons from the 2012 failure. She is excited that she has now been able to help South Africa to qualify a boat for the Olympics. The Tuks/HPC rower says it is her ultimate goal to represent South Africa at next year's Olympic Games in Rio, but she realizes that there are no guarantees that she will be able to do so.

Roger Barrow, national rowing coach based at the Tuks/HPC, is on record saying that there is no guarantee that the rowers who qualify boats for the Olympics will be the rowers to compete at the Games.

"The most important thing is to enjoy what you do. I go out every day winning an Olympic medal in my mind. I see it. I dream it. That is what gets me up in the morning. Above my bed I have a flag with the Olympic rings. It is the first thing I see every morning when I wake up. Even if I should never get an opportunity to go the Olympics, just having been able to dream will have been special. To wake up every morning with such passion is something many people will never have, but which I am fortunate to have," Grobler said.

McCann, a former under-23 world champion who has won gold medals at the World Student Championships as well as at the World Student Games, describes rowing as the most beautiful sport.

"There are so many aspects to rowing. You need a sound technique and be physically strong and fit as well to make the boat go faster. Rowing is also a huge mental challenge, especially when competing at the highest level. To really put your body on the line is a big ask."

James Thompson and John Smith, last year's world champions, only finished 4<sup>th</sup> in Saturday's lightweight men's double sculls final. France's Stany Delayre and Jeremie Azou won in 6:13.38, Britain was second in 6:15.15 and Norway third in 6:15.62. Thompson and Smith (Tuks/HPC) finished in 6:17.46.

According to Barrow the South African crew did not row fast enough during the first 500 metres and that was when they lost the race.

"I am impressed with the way James and John kept fighting right until the end. They showed a lot of guts but they could not overcome their early setback."

Naydene Smith and Lee-Ann Persse (Tuks/HPC) finished fifth in the women's pairs final (7:06.95). Britain won in 6:52.99.

Shaun Keeling and David Hunt (Tuks/HPC) won the B-final of the men's pairs. On Friday Leo Davis, Jake Green and Willie Morgan were fourth in the final of the men's coxed pairs.

Barrow considers the World Championships as 'mission accomplished' from a South African perspective.

"We have qualified four boats for the Olympics and that was our goal for 2015. Obviously we would have liked to have won perhaps one more medal at the championships."

Barrow is very proud that South Africa's Sandra Khumalo (AS women's single sculls) and Dylan Trollope, Lucy Perold, Shannon Murray, Dieter Rosslee and Willie Morgan (mixed cox fours) have all qualified for the 2016 Paralympic Games.