



RYA Press Release

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Rickham and Birrell claim fourth world title



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Alexandra Rickham and Niki Birrell have etched their names on the SKUD World Championship trophy for the fourth consecutive year after a hard-fought victory at the IFDS Disabled Sailing World Championships, which concluded in Charlotte Harbour, Florida, on Sunday (15 January).

The Skandia Team GBR duo, who were selected as the first athletes to ParalympicsGB in August, saw their Paralympic year off to the best possible start by claiming the world crown for the fourth time after what the 25-year-old crew Birrell describes as the “shiftest week we’ve ever sailed”.

The British crew, who finished fifth at the Beijing Paralympics, secured their victory by just two points after a nail-biting final race, with silver going to the American pair of Jennifer French and Jean-Paul Creignou and Australia’s Daniel Fitzgibbon and Liesl Tesch completing the podium spots in third.

“We’re unbelievably happy to have won the Worlds again – and it’s an even nicer feeling

considering it was so tight, right down to the bottom mark of the last race, to know we can hold and pull through when the pressure is on,” Birrell explained.

“We needed a fifth in the last race to win the title, and halfway round we were in eighth which meant the bronze medal position, but we managed to pull it back into gear.”

Birrell continued: “This is the biggest year that we’ll ever have and it’s great that we’ve been able to perform at these Championships to show that we’re on track for the main goal of the Paralympics.

“The top three at these World Championships were the exact same top three, in the same order, as at last year’s Worlds so we think we’ve got a pretty clear idea of who our main rivals will be this summer, although the Israeli team that finished fourth are a new team so definitely worth keeping an eye on!

“It’s a real confidence boost to know that things are still heading in the right direction – we don’t get many opportunities to race against the best of the fleet, and so although you think you’re addressing all the things you need to in your training programmes towards the big events and particularly the Games, you never really know until you get the chance to race.”

John Robertson, Hannah Stodel and Steve Thomas also got their Paralympic year off to a medal-winning start with a bronze from the three-person Sonar class.

The London-bound trio, who’ve won the world title twice before in 2005 and 2006, went into the final day with a chance of a silver medal to add to their silvers from the past two World Championships, but a 10th from their final race meant they had to settle for bronze by one point behind the French trio of Bruno Jourden, Eric Flaguel and Nicolas Vimont-Vicary, with gold going to Alexander Wang-Hansen’s Norwegian crew.

In the one-person 2.4mR event, where British selection for the Paralympic Games has still to be made, Helena Lucas finished just outside of the podium positions in fourth overall, with the world title going to France’s Damien Seguin.

For the latest news and information from the Skandia Team GBR British Sailing Team visit www.skandiateamgbr.com or follow us on Twitter (@SkandiaTeamGBR).

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