

RYA Press Release

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J80 in action © Paul Wyeth/RYA

Sailors make the grade as British Keelboat Academy announce 2012 line up

Twenty two of Britain's aspiring young keelboat sailing talents have come through a gruelling two-weekend selection process to earn their call up to the British Keelboat Academy (BKA), the RYA and UKSA's joint keelboat racing initiative.

The BKA received an incredible 75 applications from young sailors from across the country which were whittled down to 40 applicants who were invited over to UKSA's headquarters in Cowes, Isle of Wight, for the BKA selection weekends (17/18 & 24/25 September).

The weekends comprised of a range of activities to test not only the candidates' sailing abilities, but also other personal skills such as the ability to work in teams and perform under pressure. Being able to compete at a high level and run successful keelboat racing campaigns is not only about sailing ability, so these other areas were a major part of what the selectors were looking for in order to choose suitable sailors for the BKA.

"The selection weekends were extremely tough and involved activities that were testing both mentally and physically. They tested how we worked as a team and what our attitudes were like which are crucial components for any BKA sailor. The fitness tests were by far the hardest part of the selection process," said 17-year-old Nathan Thorne from Holyhead, Gwynedd.

For each weekend, most of Saturday was spent afloat in UKSA's fleet of J/80 and Colgate 26 keelboats, with sailors encouraged to try several roles on board to demonstrate their abilities and gain an understanding of what is required. Sailors were given input throughout the day, and especially during debriefs after sailing, from RYA-qualified coaches as well as existing BKA squad sailors who offered to help out with each weekend.

Will Semken, one of the newly selected squad members from Yelverton, Devon explained what membership of the BKA meant: "For the last year I have been sailing on various boats in the Solent and I wanted to find a dedicated crew so I could get where I wanted with my racing. My ultimate goal is to become a pro-racer and I came across the BKA website and realised it was the perfect way for me to forward my sailing. With excellent facilities, coaching and career prospects, the BKA provides endless opportunities if you put the effort into the squad.

The 20-year-old concluded: "It means so much to be selected in what was a tough selection process. It is the perfect opportunity for me to gain the skills and experience for professional yacht racing. I have been trying to better myself on the water and the BKA is the best thing for any young sailor with aspirations to get as far as they can in the world of sailing.

To assess the sailors' abilities in other areas, they completed a range of other activities including command tasks focussing on teamwork and leadership, outdoor fitness sessions and orienteering to establish their levels of fitness, ability to operate in unusual environments and motivation as well as tasks covering their ability to plan and manage time.

Luke McCarthy, British Keelboat Academy Head Coach, commented: "The selectors were not only looking for sailors who could perform in all areas, but also those who would benefit from the opportunities the British Keelboat Academy is able to provide. This includes not only their future sailing objectives, but also their ability to develop both through reflection on their performance and input from coaches.

McCarthy continued: "A lot of thought and time went into selecting the new squad members, and after extensive consultation between the BKA coaches the decision was made to select 22 of the most promising, motivated and passionate group of young sailors for next year's season.

"We were really impressed with the standard and quantity of applications received for the selections this time around and we are delighted with the sailors we have selected to join the existing squad members who remain involved from previous years. We are already well into planning our activities for 2012, which again looks set to be an exciting one for the BKA and which will allow the young BKA sailors to take their keelboat sailing forward and perform on the international stage," concluded the British Keelboat Academy Head Coach.

John Derbyshire, RYA Racing Manager/Performance Director, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity for the new BKA members as the programme offers its sailors expert coaching and guidance, both on and off the water addressing all aspects of running a successful keelboat campaign. The young keelboat racers will have the chance to further their skills, experience and knowledge of the sport whilst fast-tracking their development and progression towards racing at the highest level."

Selected sailors from the BKA Selection weekends are:

Alex Grant (Cowes, Isle of Wight)
Alex Mathews (East Grinstead, West Sussex)
Alice Butler (Salisbury, Wilts)
Alistair Norris (Preston, Lancashire)
Ben Gibson (East Cowes, Isle of Wight)
Callum McCullough (Daventry, Northamptonshire)
Chris Robson (Edinburgh)
David Harsent (Staines, Middlesex)

Fergus Barnham (Norfolk)
Jack Whiting (Colchester, Essex)
Jo Ireland (Falmouth, Cornwall)
Leo Schofield (Jersey, Channel Isles)
Liam Gardner (Wirral, Merseyside)
Nathan Thorne (Gwynedd)
Nia Jones (Cardiff)
Oliver Essex (Ipswich, Suffolk)
Pete McCoy (Emsworth, Hampshire)
Ross Carmichael (Dumfries & Galloway)
Serena de Nahlik (Rugby, Warwickshire)
Trystan Seal (Lampeter, Ceredigion)
Will Goldsmith (Colchester, Essex)
Will Semken (Yelverton, Devon)

To witness all the action unfold please visit www.britishkeelboatacademy.org to watch the video from the selection weekends.

For more information about the British Keelboat Academy and how you can help with fundraising, please visit the BKA website at www.britishkeelboatacademy.org, or follow the BKA on Facebook at www.facebook.com/BritishKeelboatAcademy or on Twitter (@tweetbka).

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About UKSA

- UKSA is the UK's leading youth maritime charity, working to change lives through maritime education and personal development.
- Based in Cowes, UKSA's 3.5 acre on shore campus and fleet offers a comprehensive range of industry accredited yachting and watersports careers, programmes, leisure, training and multi activity watersports activities for schools and youth groups. UKSA has a strong alumni network in the global maritime industry including the world-renowned sailor Dee Caffari.
- The charity celebrates its 25th anniversary in 2012. www.uksa.org