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Ainslie to lead ambitious assault on America's Cup

SAILING

By Stuart Alexander

In Southampton

A powerful, gilt-edged line-up of Olympic champions and round-the-world winners for Britain's £50m assault on the America's Cup was announced here yesterday. Ben Ainslie will be skipper and helmsman with

Iain Percy calling tactics for an Origin team that has also attracted the talents of leading Argentine designer Juan Kouyoumdjian.

Double gold medalist Ainslie is rewarded with a "fantastic challenge" for a highly-praised apprenticeship with Team New Zealand, with 2000 gold

medalist and 2007 America's Cup skipper Percy alongside him.

After months of organisation and recruitment, especially from BMW Oracle, since he announced his intention to form a team to challenge for America's Cup 33, Sir Keith Mills was able to parade a line-up that already includes 20 design staff, 18 sailors and a support staff of 20.

Kouyoumdjian studied at the same Southampton Institute where design coordinator Andy Claughton, recruited back from Team New Zealand, ran the hull testing tank, and he will devote the whole of his office of 13 to the British challenge once work is completed on his current designs for the

Ericsson team in next year's Volvo round the world race.

"This is a British challenge," said Sir Keith, one of the masterminds of Britain's successful bid for the 2012 Olympics. "At least 50 per cent of our team is British, the flag is British and GBR will appear on the mainsail of every one of our racing yachts."

To add to that, Charles Dunstone, manager of Carphone Warehouse and a keen amateur yachtsman, is joining Sir Keith with the geld in a private funding campaign to deal with the need for serious sponsorship – the planned budget is £25m a year for four years. The Royal Navy will help

with logistics in Portsmouth harbour at Gosport and the Royal Yachting Association will bring planning expertise. RYA director general Rod Carr's son David is also in the crew grinding alongside Oxford rowing blue Ian Weighell and George Skourdos.

There are representatives of 10 countries and the sailing team includes the Kiwi Robbie Naismith as a trimmer alongside Britain's mast and mainsail expert Neal McDonald. The navigator will be Ian Moore, but he will have as technical director the American Stan Honey, navigator for Sanderson on ARN and an adviser both in balloons and boats to the missing US adventurer Steve Fossett.



(Left to right) Sir Keith Mills, Ben Ainslie, Charles Dunstone and Mike Sanderson stand aboard Great Britain's America's Cup challenge boat, Team Origin ONEEDITION

Sanderson will take a role in the afterguard brains trust with fellow Kiwi Hamish Pepper and others already committed include the sail designer Mickey Ickert. "I want to be at the coalface," said Sanderson. "Ben will be skipper, but with his boss at the back of the boat. He is in charge on

the boat, there was never any doubt that was what I wanted." Sanderson will be meeting Dalton today at a meeting called by the America's Cup holder Alinghi to discuss the design of the 90-footer proposed for the next cup in 2009, assuming the "black cloud on the hori-

zon" – the court case brought by Larry Ellison against Alinghi – goes away. Sanderson, who hopes to take over the Prada command in Valencia's America's Cup Port, expects work to start soon on building the first of two boats to the new design. "This is a serious challenge," he said.

Pitch