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America's Cup: Team Origin back on course

Team Origin, who through no fault of their own have been thwarted in their attempt to challenge for the America's Cup, effectively staged a relaunch on Wednesday when they unveiled a racing programme that will include nearly 200 days on the water in 2010.

By Brendan Gallagher
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Winners: Ben Ainslie visited Jenson Button at the European GP in Valencia Photo: GETTY IMAGES

The ultimate aim remains to become the first British team to win the oldest international trophy in the sporting world and they now believe that Sept 2011 will be the first opportunity to make sporting history.

The team, skippered and helmed by three time Olympic gold medallist Ben Ainslie, will remuster with almost immediate effect to compete in the Louis Vuitton Challenge against other top America's Cup teams in Nice this November, the first of four or five such regattas around the world over the next year.

Team Origin, as a partner in the Louis Vuitton project, will also be entitled to stage one of those regattas, probably in Cowes, a showpiece occasion that can be used to publicise and promote the future challenge

The Louis Vuitton series – and other big boat sailing competitions – will keep all aspiring crew's gainfully employed while the fate of the 33rd America's Cup is decided next spring when the defender Alinghi takes on the Challenger of Record, BMW Oracle Racing.

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After that Team Origin are in a good position to be considered as the Challenger of Record and the lines of engagement for the challenge itself and the qualifying series, the latter taking place in the

summer of 2011 – can be decided.

"We are back into a recognisable America's Cup cycle and we can start to make plans again" said Team Principal Sir Keith Mills on Wednesday. "It has been extremely frustrating while the lawyers sorted out what was to happen between Alinghi and BMW Oracle Racing for the 33rd America's Cup, especially as we felt we were ahead of the game and in good position to challenge. We had assembled a great crew and had two superb boats designed and ready to build.

"But we have not wasted the time, we have been busy with other racing projects such as the Extreme 40s. Ben has been competing in the World Match Racing championships which he will also continue to do and the team showed up well in the Louis Vuitton Pacific challenge in Auckland earlier this year. The new series is very much a continuation of that really."

Among other things the schedule allows Ainslie to pursue his ambition of winning a fourth Olympic gold in 2012 although there is precious little margin for error.

"I don't think I have met anybody who organises his time better than Ben and we have contingencies to allow him to also spend the time he needs to prepare for the Olympics," said Mills.

Although there is very little danger of the America's Cup clashing directly with the Olympics – now the cycle has been resumed 2011 and 2013 should be the next two competition years and commercial concerns would not realistically countenance a clash with the Olympics – the complication could arise if Ainslie is needed to secure his place in the Great Britain team by racing in the Finn class for part of 2011.

In any other nation Ainslie – the outstanding dinghy sailor of this generation and arguably of all time – could take his place for granted but with Ed Wright having just been crowned the winner of the inaugural World Cup in the Finn class and other young Britons challenging hard it is possible that the Olympic legend will have to submit himself to whatever selection procedure the RYA and Skandia Team GBR decide on. Even before Beijing he had to participate in a race-off with Wright.

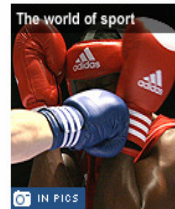
Meanwhile Ainslie doesn't appear flustered at the prospect: "Just because I am not racing Finns at the moment doesn't mean to say I am not working away in the background looking for improvements and doing the fitness work," warned the three-time World sailor of the Year.

Both Ainslie and Mills were talking on Wednesday at the announcement of Team Origin's collaboration with the Carbon Trust which will ensure that their operation leaves the minimum carbon footprint on the planet. Sir Keith also reiterated that the four principal sponsors and the 15 secondary and tertiary sponsors will be expected to also enact their "Race for Change" philosophy and sign up with the Carbon Trust.

Mills expects to announce the first of his principal sponsors – who will contribute between £3-4 million annually over the next five years – in the autumn and insists the 'market' has been receptive despite what would appear a difficult economic climate to launch such projects. As the man who largely brokered over £500m of sponsorship for 2012 he should know the marketplace better than anybody and indeed he did not rule out some of those supporting London's Olympics also wanting a stake in Britain's attempt to finally win the America's Cup

Royal Yachting Association

TeamOrigin



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