

SAILING

Britain riding crest of wave

By Edward Gorman
Sailing Correspondent

IN THE long build-up to the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and the Athens Games four years later, British sailors dominated world Olympic sailing and then went on to top the medal table at both Games, winning five medals in Australia and five more in Greece. The 2008 Olympic regatta at Qingdao in China is a long way off but the recipe looks unchanged, with British sailors again dominating Olympic fleets in the early stages of the cycle and with every indication that more medals are on the way in two years' time.

The final races in the first big Olympic classes regatta of the

year took place this weekend in Miami, where the Great Britain squad walked away with eight medals, the best by any nation, ahead of France in second place. British sailors achieved podium positions in seven classes, among them gold medals in the men and women's windsurfers, the men's 470 fleet and the Laser class.

This team performance is all the more impressive because several of Britain's top Olympic stars were not competing, among them Ben Ainslie and Shirley Robertson, the double gold medal-winners, and Nick Rogers and Joe Glanfield, the Athens silver medal-winners in men's 470s.

Among the strongest performers in Miami was Nick

Dempsey, the bronze medal-winner in windsurfing at Athens, who was in imperious form on Biscayne Bay, leading the windsurfer fleet from the first day and scoring eight race wins out of ten, including victory in the final medal race. In the end, Dempsey was 27 points clear of his nearest rival, Nicolas Hugué, of France.

In a rare British windsurfing double, Bryony Shaw matched Dempsey in the women's fleet but with a much tighter margin over Marina Alabau, of Spain. Shaw sailed consistently throughout the week, compiling seven top-three finishes, yet almost lost out to Alabau, who managed five wins in her last seven races. Going into the final medal race just behind

Alabau in the overall standings, Shaw finished third to the Spanish sailor's fourth to clinch the title by two points. Third place overall was also occupied by another Briton, Lucy Horwood.

Other British winners were Paul Goodison, who prevailed in the 89-strong Laser class, and Nic Asher and Elliot Willis in the 470 class.

In the women's 470 fleet, Christina Bassadone and Saskia Clark learnt a hard lesson. They had led their fleet all week but a fifth place in the medal race led to them being overtaken by Ingrid Petitjean and Nadege Douroux, of France, who were second in the last race and squeezed past to win by two points.

PETER BENTLEY



Beating a path to China: Shaw helped to complete a rare double in the windsurfing as Britain's sailors gave an indication of their Olympic potential