

## Andrew Simpson

Contributed by Tim Jeffery

The Star and Bart SAimpson by Tim Jeffery, The Dailiy Telegraph

Meet Bart. Blessed with his surname and a pair of short legs that are ideal for hiking out over the side of a boat, there was an inevitability about his nickname.

- 'Sid' shines as Britain's own 'medal maker'
- Olympic Sailing Guide: Team GBR

- Weighty matters for Paul Goodison Andrew Simpson is one half of Britain's Skandia Star crew, a man who twice went to the Olympics as reserve to Ben Ainslie and Iain Percy and is now heading to China with Percy in the 22ft two-man keel boat class. In harness: Andrew Simpson (left) and Iain Percy are going all out for Olympic gold in China Simpson is one of a clutch of British sailors who have revelled in being in the same generation as Ainslie and Percy but have not been able to beat them for Olympic selection. This cohort is patently talented enough to have won Olympic selection in most other countries. Ironically, these self-same people snapping at Ainslie and Percy's heels have contributed to making the men they have tried to beat better still. "Ben and Iain are two of the best sailors we've ever had in England but on my day I could beat them," Simpson says. "But I don't think I ever backed or trusted myself as much as I should. I always felt there was such a barrier in the way. I probably didn't deal with it as well as I should have done." A few years back, Simpson sought help, and now he counts a 'shrink' among his circle of friends. No couch, no consultation room, rather some earnest chats in the pub over a pint.

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 s[0].displayUnit.handleFSCCommand(command,args,"ebBannerFlash\_0\_7901390405200576");} "It was really good," says Simpson, who rebounded with a top-three result in the Finn class world championship before the Athens Olympics. "It is hard competing against two of your closest friends and two of the best sailors in the world." After Athens, Percy as skipper and Simpson as a strategist were recruited by Italy's +39 America's Cup team. But the dream turned sour amid chaotic finances and stop/start campaigning. Most of those involved existed on thin air, broken promises and their credit cards. But out of it came Percy's decision to swap Steve Mitchell, with whom he had won the 2002 Star World Championships and selection to the Athens Games, for Simpson. The harnessing of Simpson and Percy together in the new formation Skandia Star crew was decided in November 2006. Even though the America's Cup trials were four months from starting, Simpson says things were so dire at +39 "that we were done with the Cup by then. Iain decided then that the Olympics were going to be his priority." One reason singled out by Percy for wanting to sail with Simpson was the latter's light air skills. When Simpson was close to outgrowing the Laser single-hander's optimum weight, his results in soft and shifty winds stood out. Not bad for a big man. "I think Iain decided that for China he needed a bit more feel on the boat, a bit more tactical input," Simpson says. Through the +39 baptism of fire, the pair proved they worked well. "With 'Perce', the back of the group worked pretty well," Simpson says. "It was fluent. It was just a shame we didn't have the money or time to get the boat going well." The swap won't have been easy; Percy and Mitchell were long-standing friends. "I felt a little uncomfortable at first," Simpson admits. "Steve's a great guy and I have a lot of respect for all that he's done with Iain." While +39 was making its faltering way, the Star class hit a new spike in competitiveness. Newcomers, notably Brazil's Robert Scheidt and Kiwi Hamish Pepper from the Laser single-handed class, plus Pole Mateusz Kusznierewicz from the Finn class, gave it a new shot of blood. This had already happened after the Sydney Olympics, when the likes of Percy, Sweden's Freddy Loof and France's Xavier Rohart, also from the Finn single-hander, had brought new levels of fitness and dynamic boat-handling. Thanks to Scheidt and Kusznierewicz alone, there were five medals from the last three Olympics arriving in the class at once. It was to counter this, and to mitigate for the time lost in the Star due to the America's Cup, that tipped Percy's choice. "We were playing catch-up a little bit," Simpson admits. Since +39's elimination from the America's Cup in May 2007, the pair have trained with only one month off. This is the unseen hard graft of Olympic preparation. One period included two months in Valencia during the winter, expressly to rehearse the soft-wind sailing that is likely in China. There was another fortnight in Rio, training with Scheidt. The pair have just completed a very disappointing world championships in Miami, in which all title hopes were dashed by gear failures and a disqualification. The mid-point of the regatta was the worst sailing day in eight years for Simpson. "It wasn't representative of the work we've been doing," he said of their overall 52nd-place finish. He is right; the result in Miami has little bearing on China. It is there that the talent, commitment, testing, determination and fitness work will be tested "for the one goal that matters". [www.telegraph.co.uk/jeffery](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/jeffery)