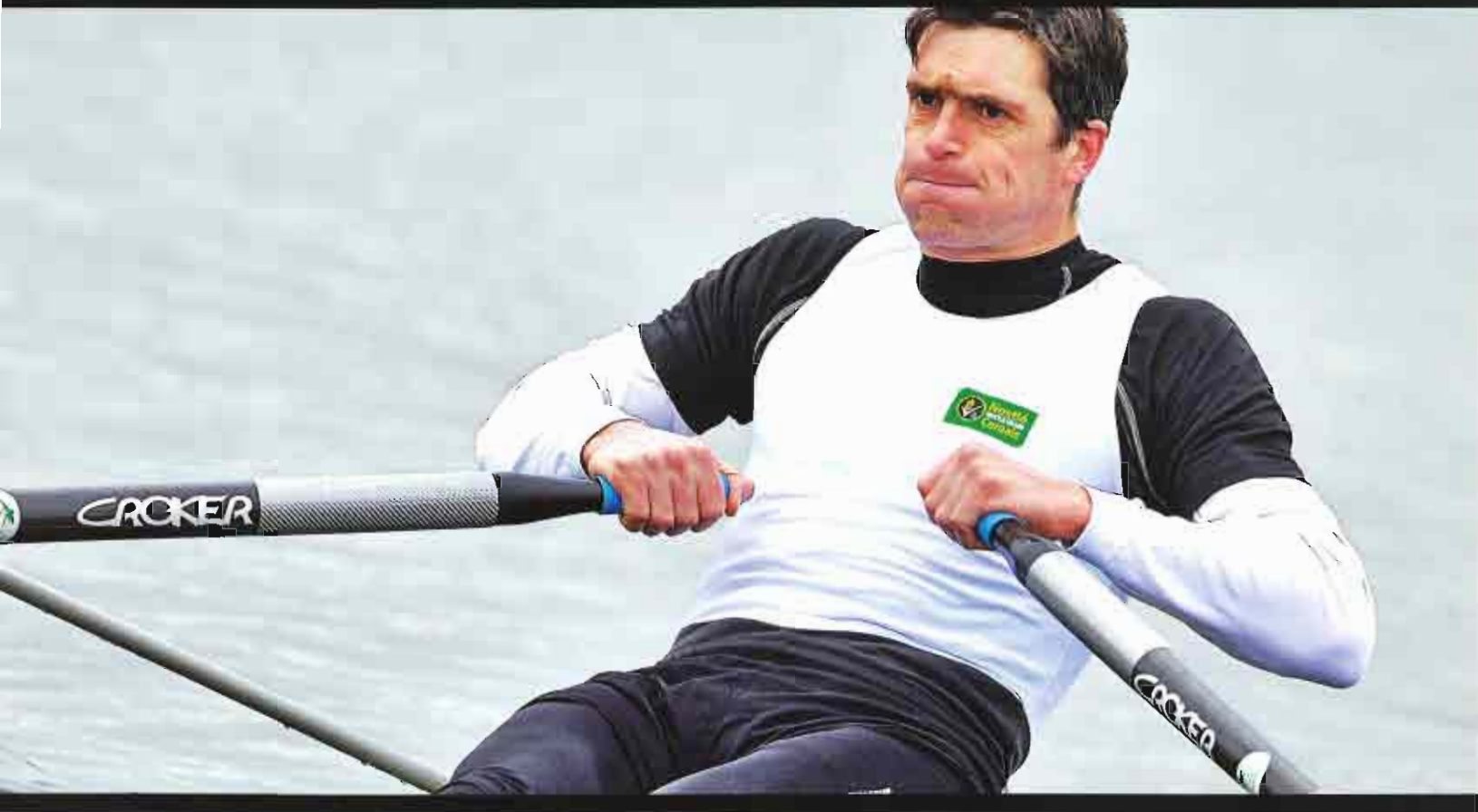


ROWING NEWS

APRIL 2010

INDEPENDENT // RACE DRIVEN // EVERYWHERE



THE LONGEST SHOT 42

Greg Searle fights back

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THE LONGEST SHOT

For magazines, comeback stories are like manna from heaven—who can forget Lance Armstrong’s grim-visaged assault on newsstands last summer?—and we’re no different.

Over the years, we’ve covered the comebacks, successful and otherwise, of some of the biggest names in our sport. That being said, it’s probably safe to say that no one is asking for a Greg Searle comeback. Surely not the British national team, which has an abundance of talent heading into the London Olympic Games and beyond. As a reader, you may be wondering what to make of it too. (You may also be wondering who’s Greg Searle.)

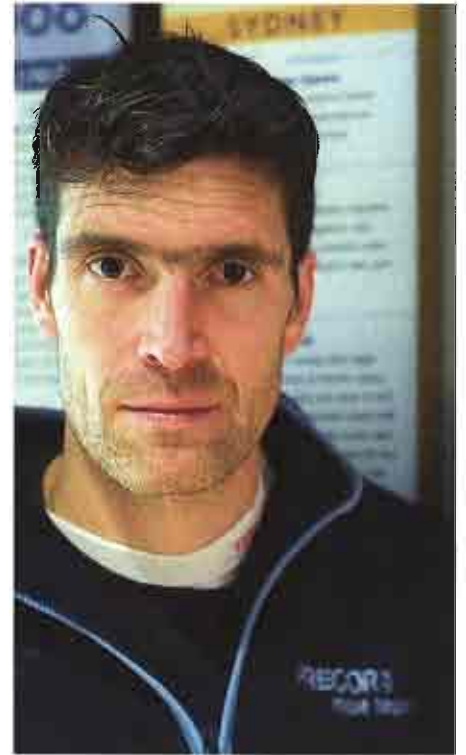
Searle rose to fame 18 years ago after dismantling the Italian coxed pair of Carmine and Giuseppe Abbagnale at the Barcelona Olympics. The stirring come-from-behind victory over the legendary gladioli growers from Naples would be his only win on the Olympic stage.

In 1996, Searle was in a British bronze-medal four that pushed Australia’s Oarsome Foursome to gold in Atlanta. Then, following a brief detour in the men’s single, Searle landed in a pair for the Sydney Olympics. The British men’s eight rowed to gold. Searle and Ed Coode finished one spot out of the medals after the French unleashed one of the greatest sprints in Olympic history.

In our cover feature this issue (“Unknown Quantity,” page 42), Searle tells writer Christopher Dodd that the easy thing would have been to continue on to Athens. “But I would have carried along the trajectory of gold, bronze, fourth—ugh. I chose to walk away.” Then came 2012.

Searle will be 40 at the London Olympics. His first step to changing the trajectory of his rowing career comes this month at a trials event to determine the British men’s training squad. It will have been 10 years since his last Olympic appearance and 20 since his stirring win under the Banyoles sun. As far as comebacks go, it’s a long shot.

But what a story it will be if he makes it.



“Searle will be 40 in 2012” ///

ED WINCHESTER
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UNKNOWN QUANTITY

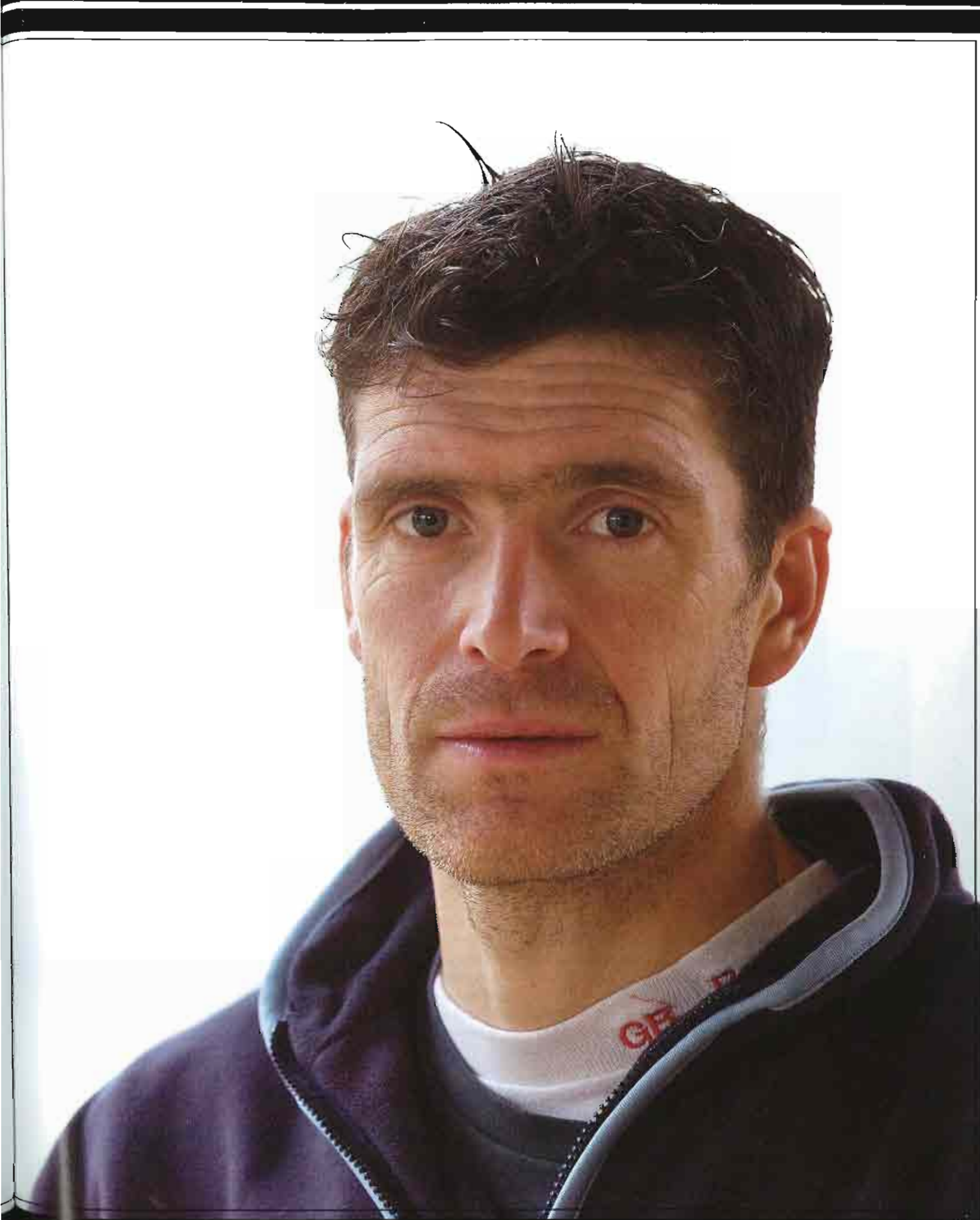
A decade after retiring from international rowing,

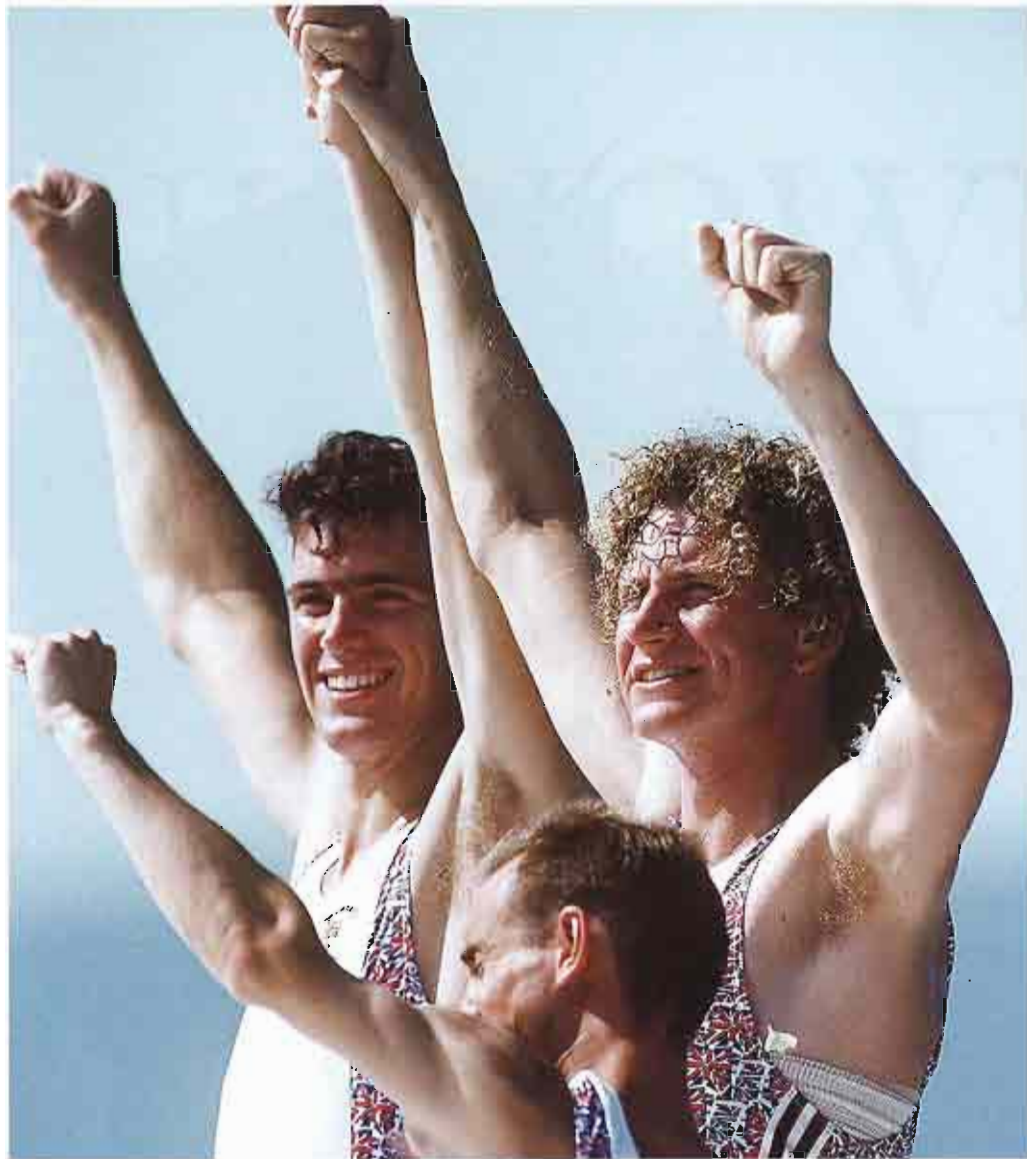
GREG SEARLE,

the reigning Olympic champion in the coxed pair, has set his sights on London 2012. A comeback of this magnitude won't be easy.

But neither were the Abbagnales.

By Christopher Dodd and Peter Spurrier





Greg Searle was 20 when he and brother Jonny rowed down Italy's legendary Abbagnale brothers, gladioli growers from Naples, in arguably the most sensational final in Olympic history. At Banyoles, as they entered the last 500 meters of the 1992 Olympic final in third place, their cox, Garry Herbert, fired off a litany of rhetorical challenges to the brothers as they stared history down.

"If not you, who?" intoned Herbert. "If not now, when?" And they brought the grandstand to its feet as they robbed the Italians of the title literally on the finish line. During the next Olympiad the Searles rowed in a feisty four before Jonny retired and Greg tried single sculling on his way to another exciting Olympic pairs final in Sydney, one he remembers for different reasons. The three common threads in Greg's career, though, whether it's the Olympics, a host of Henley events (including wins in eights, fours, pairs, and singles) or the Thames World Sculling Challenge, are film-star looks, a fine-honed stroke, and the heart of a racer. For their entire rowing career, the Searle brand has been as much about driving the vehicles as powering their engines. Individually and together, they perform. A Searle in a boat is exciting, and no one more so than Gregory.

Right now, Searle is working out in a single on the flooded river at Henley, hoping he'll be fast enough at Britain's April trials to gain entry to the 2012 squad. "My form is very unknown to me, and to everyone else," he says. His motivation comes from setting himself in a hard place. To row in London, and to do it as a 40-year-old, are two incredibly difficult things. "I treat August 2, 1992 [the day of his Olympic victory] as a birthday," he says. "I send a little text to Jonny and Garry. There will quite possibly be finals on August 2, 2012, when I'll be 40."

The Barcelona medal represents the pinnacle of Greg's rowing achievements and, pending London, the one he most likes to be remembered for. The annihilation of the Abbagnales was his fourth international medal in a career that totals nine so far. The first was gold in Britain's junior four in 1989 and the most recent a bronze in the 1997 single sculls. The Searle brothers joined Tim Foster and Rupert Obholzer in a straight four that won bronze in 1994, silver in 1995, and bronze again in 1996, in an event won by Australia's Oarsome Foursome. They did not like the experience. At Sydney in 2000 Greg was paired with Ed Coode and they paced the field for 1,500 meters until the French led the Americans and Aussies home in an insane charge that dumped the Brits out of the medals. "We under-

“My form is very unknown to me, and to everyone else.”

performed,” he says. “What annoys me most is underperforming on the day when I’m normally good at overperforming. Not performing on the day matters.”

Greg and Ed continued rowing in 2001. “We wanted to do whatever we could together so that Sydney was not the last thing we did,” he says. But while Ed eventually struck gold in Britain’s four in Athens, Greg was lured away by a new challenge—the America’s Cup. “It would have been easy to drift on to Athens, but I would have carried on along the trajectory of gold, bronze, fourth—ugh. I chose to walk away and do something different.”

He joined the growing distinguished band of former oarsmen who served as grinders on America’s Cup yachts. He spent 18 months with the GBR Challenge team, with additional duties of fitness training for the crew. He saw it as an intermediate step between rowing and real

life. “Sailors referred to it as a job, going to work, and to me rowing had never seemed like a job or going to work, it always seemed like a fun and exciting thing I’d done.” Sailing never really grabbed his passion the way rowing did, and in any event, GBR Challenge didn’t reach the final.

Searle’s sailing career was followed by an appointment as a consultant for Lane 4 Management Group—the firm is run by Adrian Moorhouse, an Olympic swimming champion in 1988—to apply to business ideas that work in sport. “I try to get a business team working together the way a sports team works together. In a sports team you are really clear on why you’re there, what success looks like, who does what. You give each other really honest feedback: who’s good, who’s not, what you have to do to get better. In my experience, most work teams don’t do that. People come and go and don’t have much passion about it, and

(continued on page 47)



Greg Searle, A Career

1992 Barcelona Olympics

The Searles’ demolition of the Abbagnale brothers at the Barcelona Olympics was the race of the 1992 Games. At halfway they were 4.5 seconds down on Carmine and Giuseppe Abbagnale and it was evident already to spectators on tenterhooks that the Searles were too far back to succeed with their customary lightning finish.

But Garry Herbert, the pilot, was not convinced. The granite-faced Abbagnales, with two Olympic and seven world titles in the bank, had

erupted like Vesuvius off the start, set a relentless pace, and opened a big gap at the head of the field. They hoped that stoicism and power cruising would not require them to change gears before the finish line.

Herbert and the Searles, however, were out to inflict pain. “Do you want to make a little magic for yourselves? Do you want to make history?” queried the cox. With 1,500 meters gone, Romanians Dimitri Popescu and Nicolai Taga were in second position, despite the Searles putting in an unscheduled push at 1,250. The brothers decided to make history.

They went at the Abbagnales like no one had ever done before. And with the grandstand was on its feet, they blew the decade’s most successful oarsmen apart. Cox Giuseppe di Capua raised his hands in utter despair. Herbert was on his feet. It was a breathtaking, unbelievable feat. Greg said later that he looked across at the Abbagnales and had a pang of guilt at what he had done. “They rowed over and said ‘well done!’ I was very touched by their graciousness.”

Greg Searle, A Career (continued)

America's Cup

"The difference between rowing and sailing is that in rowing you take your boat off the rack, go rowing, and put it back again. In sailing there is a huge amount of maintenance to do. The work on the boat is immense. The loads are so massive that everything has to be maintained properly." You can imagine that Searle grin as he says it, a man who is spending a lot of time as a greaser deep in the hull.

1997 British national championships

While the rest of Britain's national team eschewed the national championships for altitude training prior to the world championships, Greg Searle came to Nottingham and knocked off Steve Redgrave's 1983 record of 7:02.29 in the single sculls. On Saturday's semi final, Searle reduced it to 6:53.43 and shave off another two seconds in the final. "No record should be hanging around that long," the Molesey sculler said as he signed autographs afterwards. "It was even better to take it out with a bit of interest."

Thames World Sculling Challenge, 1997

Greg Searle made his move between the Mile Post and Harrods in the Thames World Sculling Challenge, suddenly opening up a two-length gap over his four tightly bunched opponents. Searle, who won worlds bronze in the single that year, thus took command of his first ever sculling race from Putney to Mortlake, keeping the tide and the others in view. "It was a great race," he said. "I'm just glad I wasn't in it."



“What annoys me most is underperforming on the day when I’m normally good at overperforming. Not performing on the day matters.”

we try to inject the same sort of idea as how a sports team would work, how we feel inspired to do something different, and better.”

His employer is supporting Searle’s attempt to qualify for the 2012 team by reducing his hours, while some of his clients are promoting him in return for him promoting them. And make no mistake; Searle has kept in shape since his yachting days. He’s competed in the London marathon and triathlon, goes for 10-kilometer runs, and rows with Molesey Boat Club, “in races where I don’t feel I deserve to win, but where I feel I deserve to participate, which is totally appropriate for where I am in my life.” He reached a Henley final in 2006, the year in which he joined his brother as an elected Steward of the regatta. He’s also had injuries—a broken elbow in a cycling accident in 2002, a broken leg playing soccer in 2008, which he turned into an advantage by learning the importance of disciplined training.

What has been important for Searle in the 2000s is being healthy and fit, sharing family duties with wife Jenny, and doing things with his friends in the world of rowing or work. “That’s what ex-rowers do,” he says. Then 2012 came along. If the task wasn’t hard, it wouldn’t be motivating, says Greg. He quotes John F. Kennedy’s response to the question of why go to the moon. We go to the moon because it’s hard, not because it’s easy.



So now he’s going to bed at 10 p.m. each night and rising at 6:45. He sculls between 8 and 10 a.m., eats and rests, does a little office or planning work before an erg or gym session between 1:30 and 3 p.m., collects children Josie, 9, and Adam, 6, from school in Marlow and stretches or engages in a light workout in the evening. He enjoys support from Cereal Partners as member of the company’s Team Wholegrain, the CPM marketing company who promote physical and mental health in the workplace, and Amer Sports Group, who supply him with a heart-rate monitor and gym equipment. In April he must show up at trials and qualify for the core group at the British team’s Caversham training base, when he may have to increase his daily dose to three sessions. “I have to prove I’m good and hungry and motivated to want to do it.” He applies Lane 4 principles of teamwork to what he is doing. He’s not trying to do his own program and say, “Look what I can do on fewer sessions than you.” He wants to get into the team with eligibility to the full support services available to it, look for a seat in a quad or an eight at Karapiro, and take it from there.

“I don’t imagine I’ll end up doing the single scull,” he says, “unless Alan Campbell changes his mind or is injured.” But look out, guys, there’s a Searle about. □