

quick catches

NAME: **Graham Benton**
AGE: **32**
CREW: **Reading University/ARA World Class Start Program**
ACCOMPLISHMENTS: **2006 C.R.A.S.H.-B. open men's champion**

THE REAL THING

It's a rare athlete who sits on an erg for the first time and pulls a 6:35 2k without really knowing how to row the machine or pull a test. Rarer still is the guy who cuts 20 seconds from that time a few weeks later to win a competition at his local health club. But what presents a problem is when he pulls a 6:03 in his first-ever indoor rowing competition, losing only to a former world champion, and then cranks a 5:57 at the British Indoors—just a matter of months after that first test. The problem? No one really knows how fast he can go.

THE RACE PLAN

Graham Benton, a former elite-level cricket bowler and self-described "gym rat" took a step towards solving that problem at this year's C.R.A.S.H.-B., when he pulled a 5:46.4 to win the men's open event. But he's not done: he feels 5:44 is within his grasp and 5:40 isn't far off. And why not? He's only in his second year of training with a plan and a coach, Reading's Eddie Fletcher, who's trying to teach Benton to transfer that horsepower to speed on the water. If all goes well, Benton, 32, will take a shot at competing for Great Britain in the 2008 Olympics.

WHAT HE SAYS

Benton, a salesman for IBM, admits that being the first British C.R.A.S.H.-B. champ since a guy named Redgrave is thrilling, but applies a practical perspective to his talent: "There's no point in having a quick ergo if I can't make a boat move. I need to learn to row with more efficiency and consistency. Obviously it's going to be difficult for me to break into the national squad because of my age, but I take confidence from knowing that I have a good physiology for rowing and that I'm still making huge improvements physically. Hopefully they can continue and I can force myself into the reckoning, as rowing for GB would be a dream."

WHAT THEY SAY

"Combining indoor and outdoor rowing—Graham went into the World Class Start Program at Reading last summer—has enabled him to put real structure and progress into his training," comments his coach, Eddie Fletcher. "It took us some time to establish working methodology but now we're able to combine specific indoor training with the requirements of outdoor rowing. Graham has great confidence and mental toughness—qualities he will draw upon to meet his goals. He is a disciplined trainer and has the physiology to cope with the training load necessary for success at the elite level." **TOPHER BORDEAU**

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