



THE CHOSEN ONES

After a tense and demanding selection process, the British Sailing Team announced who will represent Great Britain in the RS:X windsurfing class at the 2020 Summer Olympics in Tokyo. The chosen sailors were **Emma Wilson** and **Tom Squires**, we learn more about the dynamic duo.

Words Emma Wilson, Tom Squires // **Photos** Nick Dempsey/RYA,
Robert Hajduk / ShutterSail/RS:X Class, Richard Langdon/British Sailing Team.

Tom and Emma with their call-up letters.
PHOTO Nick Dempsey /RYA.



2020 OLYMPICS

EMMA WILSON – “I am 20 years old and live in Weymouth now, when I am in England!! I was born in Nottingham and lived there until I was age 8, before we moved to Christchurch, Dorset. My mum (Editor’s note – Emma’s mum is Penny Wilson (nee Way), two-time Olympian and a three-time world windsurfing champion!), taught my brother and I to windsurf in Christchurch harbour, that’s when we improved a lot. I had done a little bit at Notts County Sailing club, but in Christchurch I really started to love it.

I enjoy windsurfing for many reasons, but especially the physical element that the RS:X brings; you have to be a top athlete to compete with the best in the world. I also love the feeling of going fast and pushing the limits and also how many people I meet through travelling the world. Windsurfing has taught me so much but probably most importantly to never give up and if you want something enough put everything into it. My best and most memorable windsurfing moment was probably when I won the Youth Worlds in 2014, I was 4 years too young for the age group and I really wasn’t expecting to do well, it was a massive surprise and to win it on the last race was a feeling I will never forget. And also being told I was selected for the Olympics, that was pretty cool!! My worst experience windsurfing was probably when I was first starting on RS:X and my brother and my mum were sailing in Spain. It was a nice 12-15 knots, we had gone a bit further out this day as all week we had stayed very close to shore. Suddenly it picked up to 40 knots offshore wind, and we just had to wait it out for 2 hours and drift downwind before we eventually made it back to shore. I found it pretty scary, but I think it gave me a lot of respect for the sea which I think is important. I train 5-6 days a week on and off the water. On the water we do a mixture of everything depending on wind conditions; off the water I use a Wattbike, a rowing machine, go surfing and do some gym stuff. Probably one of the best tips I was told was with my gybing - making sure you look where you want to go and put your back hand back on the entry. I look up to lots of top athletes from many different sports, but I think what keeps me going is I know how hard all the girls I’m competing against are training and I love the feeling of making improvements. The secrets to success for me are simple - work hard and enjoy it! For dealing with pressure, I try to just remember all the training I have done in the past, be as well prepared as possible for the race and enjoy it. Easier said than done, but enjoying it is key I think! My motto is the harder you work, the luckier you get. Windsurfing makes me happy! I like spending time with my friends, family and dog! And also I love surfing - or trying to surf ha ha! I am very competitive, I think because I have a brother 18 months older than me, Dan Wilson. When we were growing up most of the time he was slightly better than me at things and I always wanted to be better than him! My goals in windsurfing are to win an Olympic Gold medal and go from there!

To do that I’m going to keep working as hard as possible! In the future I would like to windsurf and surf and encourage more girls to do these sports. Finding a way to earn a living doing this will be a mission! I am so happy to be selected for Tokyo 2020 and now I just want to arrive at the Olympics as well prepared as possible. Then just enjoy every moment because it has been my dream for so long to get to this point! In my spare time I love to go surfing on my rest days or do some wind foiling. I also quite like cooking and spending time with family and friends. I just want to say a big thank you to 24 Haymarket, my sponsor, without external sponsors it is so hard to afford all the equipment and accommodation etc. I am very lucky they wanted to help me for this last year of the 2020 Olympic cycle. Also thanks to British Sailing, UK sport, lottery funding, and last but not least my parents and my brother Dan!”



Emma in race mode.
PHOTO Robert Hajduk/ShutterSail/RS:X Class.

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Tom flying the flag!
PHOTO Nick Dempsey/RYA.



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TOM SQUIRES – “I am 26 years old and from Oxfordshire. I got into windsurfing on holiday in Cornwall with my Dad and sister; we had a tie on boom and some very very old gear. We never knew you could turn around let alone what tacking and gybing was. We soon went to our local reservoir, Farmoor, and the Oxford Sailing Club based there, to hone our skills. My sister was better than me but I just wanted to get out there as much as I could, after school, weekends and send it!

Windsurfing is freedom, it's a sport you're always learning. You can go anywhere and do anything. It helps me destress and enjoy the moment! Windsurfing has given me so many experiences & friends from around the world, it's crazy some of the things that happen! But the main life lesson is what you learn about yourself, it's allowed me to not try and be anyone else, see my good and bad sides and push myself mentally and physically.

The most memorable windsurfing experience I've had has to be the Olympic Test Event this summer; going into the medal race in 3rd was a real buzz. If I medalled I'd qualify for the Olympics, if not, the Olympic trials continued. I finished 4th. I don't consider myself competitive but it was the best event of my life and I had never been so close to a major championship medal and qualifying myself for the Olympic Games. But I messed qualification up, it hurt a lot, I literally couldn't look at anyone for a few days, ate alone at team dinners and tried to push on. The next comp was only three days after (which I didn't have to compete in if I qualified) so I had to sort myself out and bust out another result. I finished 5th, which gave the selectors the confidence to select me. What a rollercoaster.

We're not angels and when our careers aren't relying on competition results we push our luck with silly things. Anyone who's ever done a windsurfing comp. knows the 'after parties' are loose, enough said there! On the water The RS:X is a beast (politely put), but when you're on it every day you make the most of it. Kieran Holmes-Martin and I have had a bit of a duel over the past year, but whenever we're left to our own devices

we go and try and send it together. One time we were on a jump session out and around Portland Bill; with the tide there the waves can get insane. We had no safety cover and I snapped my UJ and had to stuff the mastfoot through the middle of the board to get home, air gybes and tacks with like a 9.5 metre wing and then stuff it back in the board to get all the way up the harbour in 25 knots. Good times, ha ha! The worst experience windsurfing I've had was in winter when I was at a youth training weekend at Grafham Waters. We had to pour boiling water on our sails as they had frozen rolled up it was so cold. I remember the slipway covered in snow and I had to crack ice from around the lake to get in. I'd forgotten my boots, nightmare! I remember after 30 minutes of sailing rushing back to the slipway and crawling on my hands and knees to my parents. Pretty sure they had to carry me crying, I was a mess. I managed to get some boots from the other parents and head back out though!

It's hard to keep a consistent training program. During the season, February to September, we have one regatta a month. That's 7 days rest/travel, 10 days hard training, 4 days perpetration training for the competitions and the final week competing. It's hard to make training gains during the season because of the racing focus, although your racing skills are better and sharper. From September to February is where you analyse what would make the biggest impact in your sailing and work like crazy on that. For me my downwind sucks, so I've had to break it apart and go into the new season a downwind legend (hopefully). This period of training from September is also great for getting stronger, fitter and most importantly nailing your wave sailing technique whilst the waters warm and the storms are brewing! My inspiration comes from all the people who haven't made it in their Olympic dream, the ones who I've windsurfed with in this small community and shared such great memories with. All the people I've ever windsurfed with are legends, I hope I can do them proud and feel they've been a part of this journey as much I have.



Tom racing in Miami.
PHOTO Richard Langdon, British Sailing Team.

I really love windsurfing, back in 2012 when windsurfing was replaced for kitesurfing I spent a huge amount of time learning to kite then kite race and was determined to be the best at it. I still kitesurf a lot now, but I never truly had the passion for it as I do for windsurfing. The secrets to success are loving what you do, I was never the most naturally talented or fastest kid on the block or had the most money to invest in the best kit, but I definitely loved windsurfing the most. I spent three weeks training in Holland with the Dutch team and windsurfed every day with or without them. At the end, I caught the overnight ferry to Harwich, drove straight to Portland went RS:X windsurfing again, then packed up and headed down to Cornwall for a week, wave sailing every day. It doesn't matter what gear you're on, windsurfing is windsurfing! Pressure is a crazy thing, it makes you do pretty out there stuff. I try and think about it like catching a wave surfing, the paddle into and take off is always terrifying, but you're going to do it no matter how stressful it is. Taking the risk is always better than not knowing if it would be a great wave. If it goes wrong you'll be alright, most of the time. I've had my fair share of fighting it out for last place, but it just motivated me more for the next comp.

I'm a do'er! I love just getting out there and doing stuff, you don't know how good you are or how good you can get if you don't just get out there and do it. I wanted to run a marathon once and ended up having an MRI on my knee and 3 months off windsurfing. Find the fun in giving it a go, you don't know until you try.. but don't run a marathon if you haven't trained for it! When I'm stressed I go windsurfing, windsurfing is simple and you always feel better after it .. unless your seriously hungover, then it's just a mess before, during and after. I'm competitive with myself, that's why windsurfing resonates with me, at the end of the day it's down to you. You learn from your

mistakes and push on, it's frustrating and slow but when you move forwards it's very satisfying. My goal for now is to medal in Tokyo. I'm very driven to get there and send it. I have goals until then, like my light wind downwind technique, which is pretty dreadful at times. I break it down and keep going until my mind melts. Some things just don't click and you find yourself avoiding them, that's when you know you've got a problem and have to work it out.

For a first time competitor at the Olympics it's surreal. Tokyo is sick, where we're sailing from in Enoshima (the Olympic sailing venue) the surrounding coastline is an absolute windsurfing paradise. You see hundreds of clubs, kids & families all ripping out there, and everyone is so friendly. There's a massive windsurfing culture. Even street railings & manhole covers have windsurfers embossed on them! So I'm pumped windsurfing is a big sport out there.

I left school and wanted to be a gardener. I studied horticulture (big word for gardening) and loved it. I soon started to work as a groundsman at Oxford Brookes University, until I earned enough money to sofa surf down in Weymouth & Portland. It was the hardest decision to give that all up and be crazy enough to be a full time windsurfer away from home and chasing my dream! ^{vs}

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