

PRESS RELEASE

ATHENA PATHWAY PROGRAM

ATHENA
PATHWAY



British team for the Women's and Youth America's Cup announce sailing squad and major new sponsorship from Cobham-Ultra

- Hannah Mills OBE and Sir Ben Ainslie announce Athena Pathway squad in the race to win the inaugural Puig Women's America's Cup and retain the Youth America's Cup for Britain
- Mills reunites with Saskia Clark, 8 years after winning Olympic gold together in Rio 2016
- Twelve-strong squad share a resume of 6 Olympic and 22 World Championship medals.
- British tech innovator Cobham-Ultra announces sponsorship of Athena Pathway
- Cobham-Ultra STEM Education Program to promote science in schools in collaboration with Athena Pathway's charity partner, the 1851 Trust

- Announcement welcomed by Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt. Hon Michelle Donelan MP



BARCELONA & LONDON, Feb. 5, 2024. — Hannah Mills OBE and Sir Ben Ainslie have today announced the Athena Pathway squad of sailors that, entered through Challenging Club the Royal Yacht Squadron, will seek to make history by winning the inaugural Puig Women's America's Cup and retaining the Youth America's Cup for Britain.

The team will be supported in this challenge by leading global aerospace and maritime technology innovator Cobham-Ultra, in a continuation of the firm's extensive investment in UK engineering skills and Cobham's provision of ground-breaking satellite apparatus in the 2017/18 Volvo Ocean Race.

Athena Pathway was launched in August 2022 by Mills and Ainslie, the world's most successful Olympic sailors, with the aim of fast-tracking development in high-performance sailing and bringing diversity into the sport and the UK marine industry more broadly. The Puig Women's and Youth America's Cups, taking place alongside the 37th America's Cup in Barcelona in September and October 2024, are a central focus for the Pathway, with the first-time inclusion of a women's event and the renewed emphasis on supporting the next generation representing major progress for the World's oldest sporting trophy in achieving gender equity and raising the sport's profile for young people.



Hannah Mills OBE, skipper for the Women's Team, and Nick Robins, skipper for the Youth Team

Over 300 applications were received for Athena Pathway's Cup squad, with an intensive 18-month trials period, comprising on-water and simulator-based analysis, used to assess the hopefuls' abilities to adapt to the unique skillset required to sail at speeds of up to 100kph in an AC40, the highly technical foiling monohull which will be used in the Women's and Youth regattas.

This process was led by Olympian and former Royal Naval Officer Penny Clark, who has extensive experience coaching the British Sailing Team from youth to podium level, and Olympic 49er bronze medallist Chris Draper, an America's Cup veteran with participations spanning multiple roles, including helmsman for Luna Rossa for AC34 and tactician and wing trimmer for Softbank Team Japan for AC35.

As Athena Pathway's Sailing Programme Manager and Head of Performance respectively, a key focus for Clark and Draper was designing a trials process comprehensive enough to reflect the "strength and depth" of the initial pool of applicants. Beyond looking for "proven winners" and athletes who had demonstrated "enormous potential" at varying stages of their careers, the human machine interface of the simulator provided hugely valuable insight into sailors' capacities to practically apply their theoretical foiling knowledge. The ability to "communicate and stay calm in high-stress situations", Draper said, was also pivotal.



Mills noted that selection was *“a very difficult decision due to the immensely high standard of the sailors who applied”*, but that the process offered an exciting glimpse into a bright future for British sailing:

“It’s great to see the level of talent coming through in the UK and Athena Pathway is focused on supporting and developing this talent both on and off the water – with the longer-term aim of inspiring the next generation into, and through, the sport of sailing.”

With a shared resume of 6 Olympic medals and 22 World Championship medals, the 12 strong squad also cements the reunion of one of sailing’s most successful competitive partnerships, with Mills and her 470 crew Saskia Clark set to race together again for the first time since winning Gold in Rio, 2016.

Clark commented: *“Very excited is an understatement. Hannah and I had a great Olympic career together and I’m looking forward to reuniting, taking all the learnings from our Olympic experiences and applying them into a broader team environment in a new class of boat”*.



The other selected athletes include Tokyo Olympic Silver medallist Anna Burnet, who is set to represent Britain at the Paris 2024 Olympics. Burnet is not alone in this double selection, with Ellie Aldridge, Saskia Tidey and Freya Black also selected to race in both the Olympics and the Youth & Women's America's Cup competitions. Also joining the team is Mills' Emirates GBR SailGP teammate and experienced offshore sailor Hannah Diamond, who has previously competed in the Volvo Ocean race and Rolex Fastnet. The final six Athena Pathway picks are Nick Robins, Matt Beck, Alex Hughes, James Grummett and Hattie Rogers.

With the majority of the team's training to date having taken place on the simulator, preparations are due to intensify over the coming months, aided by the arrival of Athena Pathway's AC40 in Barcelona. The British Senior AC Team, of which Ainslie is Team Principal and Skipper, will continue to play an active role in supporting the development of their female and youth counterparts through facilitating upskilling opportunities within their AC40 two-boating programme. Upskilling is also a focus off the water, with several members of Athena Pathway's shore crew, including Boat Captain Sophie Heritage and Electronics Technician Suzy Peters, currently working amongst Ainslie's team.

Mills is confident that her squad has what it takes to win in the Autumn and hopes that the campaign will provide a platform to further Athena Pathway's goal of inspiring positive change, and the next generation, in sailing and beyond:

"It's an incredible milestone for our sport. These athletes represent a new era of inclusivity and excellence in competitive sailing."



Shonnel Malani, Hannah Mills OBE and Sir Ben Ainslie at the launch event for the Athena Pathway squad in London

Beyond a shared commitment to the perpetual, innovation led pursuit of excellence synonymous with the America's Cup, the goal of inspiring the next generation will sit also at the core of Athena Pathway's partnership with UK-based technology front-runner Cobham-Ultra.

Building on the firm's £5 million pledge to support academically talented students from underrepresented groups in accessing top-tier engineering educations, the collaboration will see the launch of a nationwide schools' programme in conjunction with Athena Pathway's charity partner, the 1851 Trust. The programme will leverage the real-world context and inspiration of professional sailing to educate and engage students in STEM subjects, with the aim of broadening horizons, opening up career paths and driving forward values of diversity and inclusivity in these fields. Shonnel Malani, Chairman of the Board of Cobham and Ultra Electronics, stated:

"We are delighted to back Britain's bid to win the first-ever Women's America's Cup and retain the Youth America's Cup. We are also excited to use the partnership to create excitement about STEM in schools across the country by connecting the marvels of sailing to schoolwork."

This partnership builds on our £5 million pledge to leading higher-education institutions, which allows the opportunity for students from underrepresented groups to pursue an education in engineering. Ultimately, as we look to inspire the next generation to consider studies and a career in STEM-related fields, we are helping build the skilled workforce of the future in the UK.”

This announcement was welcomed by the Secretary of State for Science, Innovation and Technology, Rt Hon Michelle Donelan MP, who stated:

“Since my department was formed, time and time again I have heard how skills is one of the key tenets to Britain’s innovation success story. That is why I am delighted to support this partnership. The programme of activities, focused on supporting and encouraging the next generation to explore science, technology, engineering, and mathematics studies will undoubtedly lead to many of them ultimately pursuing careers in these important sectors.”



Sir Ben Ainslie and students from The Greig Academy use the Athena Pathway simulator at the launch event

Speaking on an immensely exciting year ahead for Athena Pathway, Ainslie said:

“We couldn’t be prouder of what Athena Pathway stands for - giving youth and female sailors more opportunity in our sport. We have selected a high calibre squad and to have someone like

Hannah leading them on and off the water is incredibly inspiring. We will certainly be setting our expectation high as we look ahead to the Women's and Youth America's Cup.

"An innovative company like Cobham Ultra is the perfect partner, and big thank you to Shonnel and his team for supporting us and our vision with the 1851 Trust. We look forward to taking this challenge on together as we build and grow Athena Pathway."

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ABOUT ATHENA PATHWAY

Athena Pathway is a new U.K. programme for female and youth athletes, led by double Olympic Gold Medallist Hannah Mills (OBE). The pathway aims to fast-track development in professional sailing, level the playing field in high-performance foiling and bring diversity into the sport at its highest level, both on and off the water.

ABOUT COBHAM-ULTRA

Cobham-Ultra brings together Cobham and Ultra Electronics, which are UK-headquartered global engineering specialists in aerospace, maritime and communication technologies. With a rich history of pioneering advancements underpinned by a commitment to environmental sustainability within its engineering processes, Cobham and Ultra are renowned for their ability to transcend conventional technological limits, designing and manufacturing sophisticated hardware solutions aimed at improving connectivity, ensuring safety and elevating performance standards in the world's most demanding settings.

ABOUT 1851 TRUST

Founded by Sir Ben Ainslie in 2014, with HRH The Princess of Wales as its Royal Patron, the 1851 Trust is a specialist education charity committed to harnessing the power of athletes and elite sport to inspire young people globally through STEM learning and climate action.