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Cracknell set for surprise comeback

By Rachel Quarrell

(Filed: 10/11/2005)

More than five hundred crews will set off from Chiswick Bridge on Saturday, at 12.30pm, to row the reverse Boat Race course in the annual Head of the River Fours competition.

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King back in training

Tottenham's Ledley King has been in full training with the England squad and is likely to take the holding midfield role during the friendly against Argentina.

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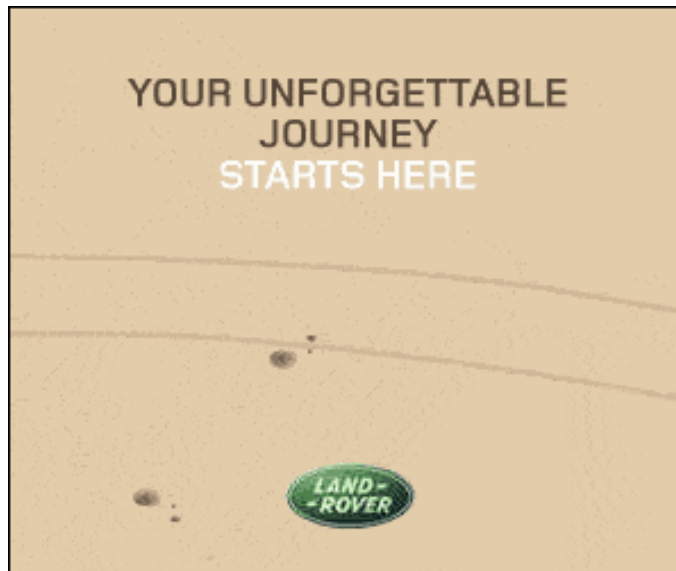
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Among the current British squad is one rower that nobody, least of all himself, expected to see: James Cracknell has been called up as a super-sub for his club, Leander.

Although notionally in the middle of a year away from the sport, Cracknell has not yet formally retired. He is also about to row the Atlantic with TV presenter Ben Fogle, so despite only a few sculling outings since the Athens Olympics final, he is fair game.

Hence the call from Britain's chief coach, Jurgen Grobler. "He left me a message - 'I need your help, call me.' I knew what he was up to," said Cracknell, "so I left it until as late as possible, and I was right - it was the Fours' Head."

It seems to be a besetting sin of rowers that they just don't know when to stop. After Sir Steve Redgrave's famously rescinded "If you see me in a boat again, just shoot me" and four months of 'will-he, won't-he retire" from Sir Matthew Pinsent last year, it's Cracknell's turn.

The double Olympic gold medallist took 12 months away from the sport following Athens, and then ducked questions about a return to competition by announcing his intention to row 2,535 miles to the West Indies in a 23ft tub, with Fogle, in Chay Blyth's Atlantic Yachting Race.

The duo leave for the Canaries, for a week's final

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preparation, on Nov 19, but practice was disturbed a few days ago by Cracknell's erstwhile coach, Grobler.

"I told him I hadn't rowed since the Olympic final," said Cracknell.

"He said 'the stream will take you,' but if you're going to jump into a boat for a scratch race, the Fours' Head isn't ideal. It's very flattering to be asked. I'm quite fit, but I haven't done any lactate [high intensity] work recently.

"I've got tickets to the England-Australia match (kick off 2.30pm), but I'm going to go anyway, just not do the hospitality beforehand."

▶ [27 August 2005: Grobler relishes fresh challenge](#)

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