

Let four go for Beijing gold, West urges head coach

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John West, one of the country's top coaches, said yesterday that Great Britain should concentrate their resources on the four for Beijing even though their flagship boat finished out of the medals in this year's world championships in Munich.

There has been increasing speculation that the chief coach, Jürgen Grobler, might put his best rowers in a pair or eight to guarantee gold in the Olympics but West, although he admitted he had no idea of what boats Grobler would favour, said yesterday: "I think it's extremely unlikely that he'll go for the radical options of a pair or an eight, especially as we've got strength in depth." A decision from Grobler is expected in the spring.

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In 2004 West coached the four that Grobler broke up to accommodate his pair of James Cracknell and Matthew Pinsent, who had not won a medal in the previous year's world championships. But West said he hoped Grobler would not shake up the team in an Olympic year. "In 2004 Matt and James didn't think they could win gold in the pair. That's not the case with the four, who believe they can win."

He felt that the same four - Andy Hodge, Alex Partridge, Peter Reed and Steve Williams - could still win in Beijing. "I'm confident that if the four sort out their technical issues and get a better power-per-stroke ration they can win Olympic gold."

West was speaking after Saturday's Head of the River Fours race, when Hodge showed why he is vital to Britain's hopes by stroking his Molesey coxed four to a 16-second win over Leander's top boat.