

Kerstin Koeppen

Think dull and boring races. Races where one crew is so dominant that it seems as if the outcome is never in doubt and the award of a Gold medal is a mere formality. That's how it was, with one notable exception over 18 years, between 1985 and 2002 for the German women's quadruple scull. From the outside, we may have wished that they could have made the races a little more interesting but every observer knew that they were watching a superb unit. And with six World Championship and Olympic Gold medals in the quad sculls to her name between 1990 and 1997 Kerstin Koeppen was a key element in that team.

It was the height of the tall blonde haired woman that had brought her to the attention of the rowing coaches at the Dynamo Potsdam club. And it wasn't long before they knew they had a potential winner on their hands. Juergen Grobler, who coached Koeppen in East Germany, had no doubt about her abilities: "She was a tough girl and while she was not the strongest woman, she was technically very good."

That was imperative in a women's sculling system which was by far the best in the world. As Grobler explained: "Just to get into the German quad meant that you had to push out a current World Champion." It was pressure that Koeppen thrived on and she soon established herself consistently in the top seven of East Germany's scullers.

But it was Koeppen's ability to bring a crew together that most impressed Grobler: "She was a really good crew maker, someone who had the ability to hold a crew together." That was first put to use in Tasmania, during the 1990 World Championships, when in East Germany's last World Championships, Koeppen was part of the crew that once again, held off the Russian challenge to take Gold.

Those years after The Wall came down were difficult years for anyone living in the East and Koeppen was no exception. However, she showed her determination by forcing her way into the Olympic double sculls with Kathrin Boron to win her first Olympic title in the Barcelona Olympics.

Four years later, Koeppen was part of the crew that held off the powerful Canadian challenge to take another German Gold in the Atlanta Olympics. That year, her crew also won the Duisburg regatta in a time of 6.10.80, which still heads the record books as the fastest time that a women's quadruple scull has covered 2000m.

Koeppen retired after taking a final Gold in Aiguebelette in 1997. It was the conclusion to a remarkable career. The outcome of her races may have been predictable but it was in recognition of the amazing standards Koeppen needed to attain to sustain that level that she became the second woman to receive the Thomas Keller Medal.