

Jana Sorgers

Jana Sorgers was an exceptional athlete. Her talent shone out even amongst the brilliance of her contemporaries in the German sculling squad. In a career stretching over eleven years from 1986, she won 9 Gold medals. When she retired in 1996, that was more than any other woman and was enough to see the woman from Dynamo Berlin become the first female recipient of the Thomas Keller medal.

Sorgers came into the East German team with two junior Gold medals to her name and was only 19, when she won a coveted seat in the Quadruple scull which won Gold in Nottingham. It was her strength that impressed the coaches, so much so, that Sorgers was put in at stroke. She was to make that seat her own, winning five of her nine Golds in that seat.

She made herself indispensable to any crew, as East Germany's then Chief Women's Coach remembers: "One year Jana only came 10th in the singles trials, so I had to put her at stroke in the second boat. But in every training piece Jana's crew always beat the first boat, so I had to put her back in of course." Grobler said that Sorgers' abilities at stroke taught him that it is not always the quickest single scullers that make a quad go fast.

But there was much more to Sorgers than her strength and determination. Grobler identified her as a calming influence in the boat, a good balance to someone like Uta Beherns: "Jana came from the North of Germany and there they tell a different type of joke, they are a little more cool and tend not to talk too much."

It was an effective cocktail to have in any athlete. Perhaps Sorgers was at her most effective in the Olympic Games on 1988, when her crew beat a good Russian quad convincingly to take a Gold medal. The year after, Sorgers showed her versatility, this time taking Gold in Bled as bow in a double scull behind Beate Schramm. But she was back in the Quad which took East Germany's last ever Gold medal on Tasmania's Lake Barrington.

Her career finished in a flourish of straight Gold medals from 1994 to 1996, culminating on Lake Lanier, where she took her second Olympic Gold in the Atlanta Games. Sorgers' determination and strength did much to inspire a younger generation of German female scullers, who were to carry the torch that Sorgers had laid down in Atlanta after such a successful career.