

Schools line up in a row

ROWING

James Gratton

WHILE South Australians head to the polls this weekend, there will be another hotly contested competition – and the outcome, for some, will be much more important than who is our next premier.

More than 1000 athletes from 15 secondary schools across the state will battle it out at the 96th Head of the River Regatta.

The St Peter's First VIII crew, led by captain Angus Dawson, will look to take home the coveted Gosse Shield after taking the honours in 2017.

"It would mean a fair bit (as) a lot of hard work has gone into backing it up," Dawson, 17, said.

"When you win it doesn't sink in at the time until you

get off the water with all the crowd, mates and family.

"If we execute the plan that we set out each week this will put us in the best possible position."

Walford captain Meg Juers said her crew was also looking to back up its breakthrough 2017 win, 20 years after it last won the race.

"It was breathtaking having the whole school supporting the crew like that – it was just crazy," Juers, 17, of Springfield, said.

"We have been putting down some pretty good times this year and if we can put down those times, the result will come with that.

"As it is my last year, to win it would be just amazing."

Thousands of spectators are expected to line the banks of West Lakes to get a glimpse of the race, which began in 1922 between Adelaide High



Angus Dawson (St Peter's) and Meg Juers (Walford) hope to back up their wins at last year's Head of the River Regatta at West Lakes when the competition takes place this weekend. PICTURE: AAP/ROY VANDERVEGT

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Angus Dawson

School and St Peter's College. Adelaide High won that day, but private schools have dom-

inated the headline 2000m race since it became a regular fixture in the mid-1970s.

St Peter's has won the Gosse Shield 22 times, while Walford's First VIII crews have lifted the Florence Eaton Cup on 17 occasions.

The pursuit of the two trophies has become big business, too, with the schools splashing the cash to gain the edge on their competitors.

In 2014, the HillsValley

Weekly reported Scotch College bought 26 new boats – at an estimated cost of more than \$300,000 – in the lead-in to a season that culminated in its second boys' First VIII win. The schools have, in recent years, brought in some of Australia's best rowers to coach and mentor their crews, including Olympians Amber Halliday, Toby Lister and James McRae.

The prestige of the event,

COMPETING SCHOOLS

Adelaide High
Christian Brothers College
Loreto College
Marryatville High
Pembroke School
Prince Alfred College
Pulteney Grammar School
Scotch College
Seymour College
St Ignatius' College
St Peter's College
St Peter's Girls
Unley High
Walford
Wilderness

and the schools' significant investment in achieving the ultimate success, creates a heightened sense of expectation for the top boys' and girls' crews on race day.

Rowing SA chief executive David Hutton said the event was a highlight on the local sporting calendar.

"It is certainly up there with the state championships as one of our biggest events," Mr Hutton said.

"Some schools have their school bands, drummers and even bagpipes to send off their senior crews."

Rio Olympians Alex Hill and Molly Goodman both competed in the race during their time at Prince Alfred and Wilderness.

Races will start at 8.30am on Saturday, with the headline events at 12.20pm and 12.35pm.