

Sport
Crewmates the eyes for blind sailor

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SAILING: A blind skipper in this year's Sydney to Hobart doesn't consider his condition a problem, with plenty of eyes to help.

Kirk Watson, who suffers from the degenerative disease retinitis pigmentosa, will be the leader aboard **Sailors** with disAbilities in this month's race.

"Kirk's leadership is inspirational, this will be an empowering journey for him and the whole crew," Federal Communications Minister Malcolm Turnbull, patron of the group, said yesterday.

Watson, 40, started offshore racing in his early 20s when his vision was already being affected. He can see a little when the sun is bright but is legally blind.

Sailing in his ninth Sydney to Hobart, Watson stressed his impaired vision was no obstacle to him sailing and didn't represent a hazard to his crew. "There's always a few other people on the boat. If there's something I need to see they let me know," Watson said yesterday.

He will stick primarily to his established role as a mainsail trimmer in addition to the extra decision-making of the skipper.

"Just because you're the skipper doesn't mean you steer the boat," Watson said. "I can steer a boat. It comes down more to the fact there are far better steerers than me (on the boat), so I'm happy for them to steer."

He emphasised sailing was a sport that didn't just rely on vision and that feel was also an important aspect.

"Sailing isn't all about being able to see a sail," Watson said. "There's also the technical side of trimming, and overall strategy."

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