

Interview with Tomorrow's Lithuanians

by Jennifer Virškus

ONE DAY AFTER HIS 19TH BIRTHDAY, KAROLIS Janulionis successfully defended his overall title in Alpine skiing, to become the first Lithuanian to hold titles simultaneously in sailing and ski racing, for two consecutive years. Being a member of the “Kalnų Ereliai” ski team in Vilnius in the winter and the “Bangpūtys” sailing school in Kaunas in the summer, while attending Vilniaus Licejus can certainly keep any teenager on his toes. Balancing two different sports is never easy, but when they both require extensive travel and time away from schoolwork, it gets even harder. Via email and in English, Karolis found a little time in the ski-team van to talk with *Lithuanian Heritage* about skiing, school, and how to stay on the boat.

– **Which sport did you learn first, sailing or alpine skiing?**

– I think I started both of them around the same time, as hobbies with my family, so it is quite hard to say which one I learned earlier. Though as a sport I think I started to sail earlier than to ski.

– **What was the first boat you ever sailed?**

– As most of the world's sailors, I started with optimist. It's the most appropriate boat to start with, since it's quite easy to learn all the basics with it.

– **What is the first event you ever competed in?**

– I started in the Lithuanian Optimist Association Cup. I took 40th place from around 60 participants, but I was really happy because it was my first race on the national level.

– **What are currently your main classes?**

– Now I'm sailing Laser Radial and next summer I'll be moving to Laser Standard.

– **What is your current world/European/Lithuanian ranking?**

– As my current class isn't an Olympic class, I am only involved in European rankings. Last season I finished in 7th place in the overall rankings in Laser



TOP: During a training camp on the glacier in Kaprun, Austria, October 2010. **ABOVE:** Slalom training in Schladming, Austria during a two-week camp organized by the European Ski Federation, October 2010.

Radial class for men in Europe, and won most of the events held in Lithuania where I am currently number one.

– **Last summer you competed in the 2010 Youth Sailing World Championship in Istanbul, Turkey. Can you describe this experience, both in and out of the water?**

– It was an amazing experience. This championship in my opinion is on a different level than most of the regattas I have attended. The organization both in and out of water was perfect and just as we expected from the Turkish people. Every little detail was planned and prepared, starting with breakfast and throughout the day on the water, until evening. It was a really valuable experience for any sailor.

– **During sailing competitions, we often see pictures of sailors hiking so far out of their boats it seems at any moment they could go into the water. How do you stay on your boat?**



At the Volvo Youth Sailing ISAF World Championship, held in Istanbul, Turkey, July 8-17, 2010.

– We are gripping the hiking straps with our toes and supporting our thighs on the deck, which is quite enough to stay on the boat. However sometimes during certain maneuvers we lose our grip and then one of two things happens: you either regain your balance after a moment, or you fall into the water.

– How do you train as a sailor? How is this same or different from ski training?

– It is really good that in both sports I need similar muscle groups, so when I do any physical training, it benefits both skiing and sailing. When training on-water, we spend around the same amount of time as when skiing—about two hours—though there aren't any chairlifts so we get a little less rest.

– What advice would you give to young sailors, just climbing aboard their first Optimist?

– Never give up. The faster you get both some wins and some losses under your belt, and the more you keep working on it, the faster you will progress and achieve your goals.

– You currently hold the title of Lithuanian champion in both sailing and alpine ski racing. How do you balance these two sports, and how do they influence each other?

– They both are more or less seasonal sports. As long as they don't interfere with each other too much I am quite capable of combining them both. It is great that I participate in sports year-round, so my physical condition doesn't drop too much during any time of the year.

– Where is your favorite place to ski?

– I have only visited mountains of Europe and from those I like Italian Dolomites the most for their great weather, ideally prepared slopes, amazing powder, and

of course, the sea nearby.

– What are your goals in sport? Do you have different ambitions in sailing from skiing?

– I think the dream would be to participate in the winter and summer Olympic games. If I could reach that, it would be amazing.

– What activities do you enjoy on dry land?

– I really like playing soccer and I would never say no to Frisbee. Even though I don't have too much time for these activities, I try to do them every time an opportunity shows up.

– What is your favorite subject in school?

– I think that would be English, because in my opinion it is the most useful, and it's pretty easy for me.

– With two sports that both require large amounts of travel, how do you balance athletics and academics?

– For this I am grateful to my teachers, who let me leave when I need to, and take all my tests when I come back. Sometimes it gets tiring, but it is really worth it.

– What other languages do you speak?

– Besides English and Lithuanian, I speak a little Russian and know several words and phrases in Polish and German.

– Few teenagers anywhere in the world are as well-travelled as you are. How do you feel this has impacted your life?

– I think travelling impacts my whole life. Discovering different cultures and visiting new countries gives a huge amount of not only of racing experience, but also life experience.

– Finally, what do you want to be when you grow up?

– This is the question I am still looking for an answer for. ■■

■ If you would like to help support Karolis this season, or for more information about the "Kalnų Ereliai" ski team in Vilnius, or the "Bangpūtys" sailing team in Kaunas, please visit his clubs' websites: www.kalnuereliai.com or kaunas.sailing.lt.

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Jennifer Virškus is a freelance photographer and writer from Colorado, who has been working with kids in Lithuania since 2005. She is spending the winter in the U.S., but hopes to return to Lithuania soon.