

National Optimist Association of India and Corps of Engineers Sailing Club is at the forefront of promoting sailing in India. During the last four decades, we have produced large number of National Champions for the country. The sport has grown considerably. In Asian games 2023 the country won 01 Silver and 02 Bronze medals.

Sub Vishnu Saravanan was the youngest sailor, who represented the country for the Paris Olympics 2024 and went on to finish 18th overall. It is the first time a sailor from the country has bagged a competitive berth for the Olympics twice.

There is a tremendous potential for our sailors to do well at the International circuit with the right amount of exposure in foreign competitions.

National Optimist Association of India and Corps of Engineers Sailing Club has been doing yeomen service to the sport since 2007 wherein we have aimed to spot young talent who can be groomed in the sport of sailing.

We have taken it up on ourselves to train the underprivileged children from the local villages at Pune and Mumbai in the sport of Sailing. Sailing enables them to understand the nature and improve their character to face adversities of life. The sailor learns a very important lesson that when the winds and tides are against us, we change the directions of our sails to reach our destination.

This important lesson brings out the best in these Junior Sailors and when life is difficult for him, he learns to change his attitude or adapt to changing situations in life to become a better person.

Some of our sailors who have learnt their sailing at our club, have been selected and adopted by Boys Sports Company at Bangalore which provides them free education and boarding. These sailors are then picked up by Indian Army wherein he gets a chance to pursue his love of Sailing. One of our products Sub Vishnu Saravanan has graduated from the Optimist Class and is now preparing in Europe for Olympics and recently finished at 3rd position in the under 21 European Laser Class Sailing Championship at Poland. The list of our sailors who have done well are endless. The sailors who have not done well in sailing are also doing well in other spheres since sailing provided them with a strong character to face adversities in life. The participation of these sailors in National competitions, provided them a major boost for further schooling and career. We want to improve our model and train more and more children at various centers across India from the underprivileged communities and provide them with the way of life. We look forward from your organisation, support to buy sailing equipment so that more and more sailors can be trained. These sailing equipments can be directly delivered to us and we are sure that regular updates on their performance would be given to your organization. We would like you to adopt some of our children so that when they become World Champions we could be proud of being associated with the superstars.

The Indian Army is one of the cleanest organisation and we assure you that we would be accountable for every single penny contributed by your organisation and endeavor that you will have rich dividends for the charitable cause you undertake with us.

Email us at noaiopti@rediffmail.com to join us in our quest to produce “Olympic Champions for the Country” little drops of water - make a mighty ocean.

**HISTORY OF THE NATIONAL OPTIMIST ASSOCIATION OF INDIA (NOAI)**

***BY***

***Harry Kapoor***

**Preamble**

***International scenario***

As the Indian yacht racing fraternity knows, some in detail and the majority in patches the Optimist Dinghy is a single hander class for the kids in the age group of 8 to 15 years. It was designed by Clark Mills in America in 1947, Aim of the designer was to introduce a safe, affordable and enjoyable yacht for the young to sail and race instead of on the streets which they were doing with improvisation of bath tubs and sheets of sails.

As always, introducing a new yacht even in America proved a lengthy exercise due to cost, newness, safety, funds and national jealousies for International acceptance. With over 18 years doggedness, International Optimist Dinghy Association (IODA) took shape in 1965.1t prospered and today it has over 1,50,000 registered Opti's - short for the Optimists-on its books. Majority are in GRP construction. Participating numbers are second to the Olympics.

***The Indian scenario-general.***

Serious yacht racing in our country started in Pune in the the School of Military Engineering (SME later on College of Military Engineering-CME) in 1949.Brigadier R.E.Holloway-the last British Commandant- got 8 Wagtails-primitive two hander yachts-'ferried' to the College from Nainital yacht club at a cost of Rs.350 each. Thus the Corps of Engineers Sailing Club (CESC) came into existence. The Brigadier cum Commodore himself compiled a sailing manual and commenced racing sessions on the River Mula which is the 'water' for bridging training of the Army Engineers. Major.K.O.Stiffle - a staff officer of the College was appointed Secretary of CESC. Within a few weeks Wagtail yacht racing became a very popular sport for students and staff of the CME.A few Trophies were donated and two divisions started a daily routine of racing in the afternoons with an occasional race on Khadakvasla lake-the marvelous waters of the National Defence Academy (NDA) about 20 kms away. A few recollections of those days by Harry Kapoor a student officer undergoing Degree Engineering course who became the first winner of the Cooper Cup and nominated as student secretary under Major K.O.Stiffle are:

*Lieutenet Harry Kapoor(student officer undergoing his degree course) recollects-Royal Madras Yacht club also had Wagtail racing at that time and later on a National Championship was hosted by it where spinnakers were used for the first time with half decked Wagtails to cater for the swells of the sea in bad weather. Also Ancient designed Seabird class of dinghies with a crew of 3 were raced in Royal Bombay Yacht Club-(RBYC).Majority of RBYC members were British with a few Parsis and top gentry Indians as nonvoting members. Indian Army Officers interested in sailing were given temporary membership.*

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*In the early 1950's a large number of Staff of SME were British. Commandant Holloway and the British staff had Britishers' heading Army Ordnance units like the ammunition/explosive factories besides the National Chemical Laboratories etc in Pune. They and their families were given temporary membership of the CESC. (this was God send as our Indian families were encouraged to the sport of sailing-(woman and children learned the sport enthustiacally). All this history is dilated to appreciate the advantage Indian Army Engineers had in this sport even ahead of the Indian Navy.*

**In Particular**

The next phase of this sport is interesting in that the CESC seized the opportunity and started looking for a National front for yacht racing. The Yachting Association of India (YAI) was set up in the CME on 15 May 1960 with the honourable Sardar Sujit Singh Majithia then Deputy Defence Miniter as President. and Maj. Stifle as Secretary..The secretariat moved to Burnpur in East Bengal in 1964 with Mr. John Mcregan as execuitive VicPresident.and Major K.O.Stiffle as Honorary Secretary. In1969 YAI moved to the E-in-C branch at New Delhi with the E-In-C becoming the Executive Vice President with Admiral... Chatterjee-Chief of Staff Navy as President Harry Kapoor a 1965 war veteran became the Hony Secretary/ Secretary General YAI later on.

A word about the development of YAI under the regime of Mr.Mcregan and Major K.O.Stiffle during 1960-81 is warranted. In these two decades the YAi matured into a fully fledged universally recognized National Authority for the sport of Yachting in India. It became an active member of the Royal Yachting Association, IYRU and in 1971 got the letter IND instead of K-1 given to all Commonwealth countries. Its realm included yearly National regattas, class assns, an indigenously designed and built yacht-the CBK-which remained a National class till it was taken over by the Enterprize.

*Harry Kapoor, experienced in the sport of sailing in various appointments, in the CESC and backed by the YAI hierarchy Yachting never looked back. Under the dynamic leadership of the YAI located in the country's capitol sailing climbed from a few clubs to numerous in numbers. Indian yachtsmen won the first bronze medal in the Asian Games in 19 72.1t followed by an Arjun Award. And participation in the Olympics in 72. In short within a decade Indian yachting flag had travelled from Indian shores to the Olympics.*

**Birth of the Optimist in India**

Simultaneous with the preparations for the1976 Olympics a glimpse into YAI's project 'catch em young' followed.

* **Catch 'em Young** In mid seventies YAI started examining a younger age group to select and train if we were to be serious for a path to the Asian Games and the Olympics. The two hander Cadet Class up to 18 years age was a good base leading to the Enterprise/Flying Dutchman in the Olympics. Within a couple of years with the help and enthusiasm of well established Sea Cadet Corps Sailing Club in Bombay-(Mumbai now) Cadet class took off with India hosting the Nationals/Asian and World Championships. This would not have been possible for the YA1 without the dedicated support of the CESC and TS Jowhar.
* Boat building-Thanks to the vision and efforts of Maj Stiffle who fortunately remained in the CME for over a decade he set up a boat building complex with very good boat builders/carpenters in his stores yard. Later on a young Major P.S.Pami joined the team. With this set up many Wagtails, Seabirds, CBK and later on Cadet Class and Optimists were built at affordable cost. Binny's of India readily supplied cotton sail cloth and CME turned out ready to sail yachts including the indigeniousy designed CBK.

***The Optimist arrives***

The single hander dream remained unfulfilled till the early seventies, when accidently the Optimist Dinghy was discovered by Harry Kapoor during his visit to the Pre- Olympics in Kiel West Germany in 1971.Harry recollects:

*India's' one yacht entry in the Finn was not doing well. Manager cum Coach Harry was idling during the* 5th *race far away when he saw a fleet of cars carrying families with a 'tiny' hull on the roof top unload near the seashore and by the time Harry had smoked his second cigarette 'A man a very young boy /girl' had unloaded, rigged up tiny yachts with colour ful sails and sailed off for private race on waters nearby. Low and behold the much awaited Optimist had arrived*

***The Optimist matures***

Within a short time after coming back from the Pre-Olympics in Kiel West Germany plans and permission for fabricating Optimists by the CESC were obtained from the International Optimist Dinghy Association (10DA).and an Optimist ready to sail with cotton sails was launched in the CME in Sep 1975.Major P.S.Pammi, on the Administrative staff of the CME who had experience of building the Cadet Class Yachts earlier added another yacht to his credit. It took the CESC almost 3 years to mass produce 6 Optimists and have a first Zonal Optimists Championship at Khakakvasla Lake in 1978.And a year later 12 Optimists participated in India's' first National Championship again in Khadakvasla. During this Championship the National Optimist Association of India (NOAI) was officially recognized with its constitution approved by the YAI. (Harry Kapoor as President……. Major General P.R.Puri then Commandant CME agreed to become the president of honour).Till date this practice of NOAI remaining within the folds of the Corps of Engineer remains.