



JÜRI AT THE FINN GOLD CUP - TALLINN 2013 - PHOTO VASILIJ KRAVCHENKO

Jüri Šaraškin – *Grand Old Man* of Estonian sailing

„You can't change the world, but you can change yourself!“ This is what Jüri used to say and this was the first thing Finn superlegend August „Gus“ Miller remembered when talking about him. However, Jüri Šaraškin has made a big difference, especially in sailing.

Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, decorated 112 people this year, marking the 101st anniversary of Estonian independence. Jüri was a recipient of the Order of the White Star, 5th Class for his contribution to Estonian sailing.

Article about Jüri was made in February 2019 by Piret Salmistu for Estonian Maritime Magazine PAAT

Childhood in Pärnu

Jüri was born in Pärnu on the 21st of September 1938. This is where he went to school and fell in love with the sea.



Jüri's uncle Anatoli Jansen was a vet but a huge fan of the sea and he gave Jüri a big toy yacht. They often went out on the sea together with his passionate seafarer friend Apolloni Tšernov who renovated old ships as a hobby. Jüri still talks about the trips the three of them took on *Irida* with great nostalgia and treasures *Irida's* compass he salvaged when the ship was dismantled.

JÜRI WITH HIS TOY YACHT – PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

His first time on a yacht was quite random when he was in fifth grade. “We must have been good students, because our sports teacher took me and my classmate to Pärnu Yacht Club one day,” recalls Jüri. The yacht they

took out on Pärnu river was a *Valeur*-type boat *Aul*. Then, several years later, in 1953, he got reacquainted with sailing. The rules started to relax only after the death of Stalin, but in those days, yachting was prohibited for anyone younger than 16. Nevertheless, Jüri managed to enrol on helmsman courses. “There were four of us on the courses but I’m the only one still involved with yachting,” he says.

In the beginning he was involved in rowing too but, after the team disbanded, he dedicated himself to sailing. This year and a half of rowing was quite successful though - in 1956 their 4-man boat was fourth in youth sailing, losing the USSR championships medal with just a second.

Life in Tallinn and the Kalev Yacht Club

In 1957 Jüri graduated from the secondary school in Pärnu and went to Tallinn University of Technology to study marine engineering. He continued sailing in Kalev Yacht Club in Pirita where, according to his words, a very extraordinary set of people gathered.



KALEV'S ICE SAILING GANG IN THE 1980S - PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Social interaction was quite different in those days. Jüri recalls how there was a big stove heating the entire workshop. Sometimes they all gathered around it, cooked potatoes and pork and talked. About life and stuff.

“Being a student was not easy and I had to find a job. In the freshman year mum supported me until Christmas but then I started playing in a (Horre Zeiger) band to make money. As I had studied in a music school in Pärnu, I could play the saxophone and clarinet. Later I played contrabass and sang too, when the occasion called for it.”

Jüri found employment as an engineer in the factory of sports vessels in Tallinn but quite soon left and went to the Institute of Electrotechnics. The new job was much more interesting than drawing screws and bolts he had had to do in the previous place. In the institute he was on the team developing the Estonian minicomputer STEM that calculated metal cutting profiles. It was 1962. The first computer of its kind was commissioned by a factory in Kirov, Russia. “But I was a student and on top of work I had to write my thesis.”

After graduating, in 1962–1990, Jüri pursued an academic career and he is **Doctor of Science in Technology**, D. Sci. (**Tech.**) since 1972.

Sailing to the top



ON A 5,5 MR BOAT WITH OTTO RAUD -
PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

In the end of 50s Jüri and Otto Raud built a 5.5 mR boat *Pagi*. In 1960 they won the Estonian championships on it and almost got to go to the Olympics. "Otto was on the USSR national sailing team already and he asked me to join. We worked well together."



JÜRI ON FINN BOAT. PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Then in 1961 he switched to Finn class. In 1960, Aleksander Tšutšelov from Kalev Yacht Club brought home an Olympic silver from Rome, having lost to the Danish sailing genius Paul Elvstrøm. The wooden Finn boats for the USSR were built in Tallinn and there were hundreds of them here. For example, the multiple Olympic winner Valentin Mankin's Finn was number 636. Mankin has claimed Jüri was his "friend from sporty youth". It was Mankin who taught Jüri the tacking skills that sustained him even in the heaviest weather.



FINN LEGENDS AT THE
FINN GOLD CUP 2013
IN TALLINN, ESTONIA -

FROM LEFT: VIKTOR
POTAPOV, 1972
OLYMPIC BRONZE;

ALEKSANDER
TŠUTŠELOV, 1960
OLYMPIC SILVER;

GUS MILLER,
LEGENDARY FINN
SAILOR.

PHOTO: ROBERT
DEAVES

Jüri worked at the Institute but trained every day in Pirita with Valdur Kose. Unremitting training was not in vain – his best results were a second place in the Baltic Regatta and sixth in the USSR championships among the 20 professional sailors of the time.

When in the 1970s Jüri was asked to go professional, he declined the offer, as he earned much more with his doctorate and he did not want to be away from family. This was also the end of his active Finn career. "I sailed on Finn for twelve years and in the last two years I got my Estonian championship medals on zero hours of training."



Jüri was the Estonian champion on Finn three times – 1964, 1968 and 1970.

Jüri is an eight-time Estonian Offshore sailing champion. These titles are all from the Moonsund Regattas. Jüri also raced the very first Moonsund Regatta in 1958 from Riga to Haapsalu. His last Moonsund was the anniversary (50) regatta in 2007.

ENE AT THE MOONSUND REGATTA – PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

From water to ice

In those days ice sailing was very popular in Kalev Yacht Club. Ice sailing was practiced on various boats but then rumours about a DN, designed in 1936–37 in Detroit News, had reached Estonia.

As they had got the specifications from Poland, Jüri proposed they built their own boats here. DN boats are fast and light, which makes them popular to this day. This proposal was met with scepticism, but nevertheless, Jüri started to build them together with Olev and Endel Vooremaa. Jüri's boat was the first one they completed. It looked old-fashioned but was really fast.



JÜRI ON MONOTYPE AND DN SR1 – PHOTOS: PRIVATE COLLECTION

This means Jüri was the first one in the entire Soviet Union to sail on a locally-made DN-class ice boat, sail number SR 1.

“Our first competition was in Poland. Endel Vooremaa used Örtegren sails and was fourth. Then I made new drawings and we built new boats for me, Otto Raud and Olev Roosma. The sailors looked alike, the boats looked alike and trims were similar. The Austrians laughed at us and called us *Russischer Standart*. But afterwards, when all first five places were won by Estonians, it was not so funny any more.”



JÜRI AT AN ICEBOAT REGATTA - PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

Jüri has a funny story from when they were building a boat with Enn Normak. “We had all the components and sides and went to another workshop to assemble the boat. We laid down all hull parts ... and then left for the pub. Why? Because we had two ports, two of the same left side. We just couldn’t stop laughing. Happens to the best of us.”

In 1978 Jüri was 4th in the DN-class World Championships and 3rd in the Europeans. In the USSR he won Silver once (1970) and Bronze three times (1969, 1972, 1979). He has won Estonian Championships twice (1975, 1976).

Team effort

Jüri has never worked as a coach but has offered a lot of help and support to Esko Rechartt, who took the 1980 Olympic gold to Finland. Jüri was the attaché of the Finnish team, which meant being both the coach and the meteorologist as he knew Tallinn bay best. “When they arrived (to train for the Olympics), Jüri said Esko’s shoulders were hard as rock.” Jüri recalls. “But a sailor must be just the opposite - relaxed. One must be like a snake, ready for the strenuous 20-30 minutes. This meant we swapped his usual training for swimming and that did him much good.” This one-month period was important for Jüri as well: “I learnt from the Finnish team (managed by Börje Nordberg) about management and leadership and the gained knowledge has served me my entire life. Good teamwork, vital in every field of life, was their forte.” Jüri is convinced one must keep learning “otherwise you can teach only the stuff your teachers have taught you.”



ESKO RECHARDT, FINN-CLASS WINNER, 1980 MOSCOW OLYMPIC GAMES, TALLINN – PHOTO KAIUS HEDENSTRÖM



JÜRI ŠARAŠKIN AND REIN OTTOSON – PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

From today's coaches in Estonia he appreciates Rein Ottoson. His sailors have two advantages over their competition: strength and almost no injuries. And they have the week leading up to the competitions very well worked out. "Russian peers used to panic when they saw Rein arrive with his trainees."



JÜRI AT AN ICE SAILING REGATTA WITH THE LEGENDARY VELLO JÜRJO – PHOTO: ESTONIAN YACHTING UNION

Jüri has extensively worked as ice sailing judge and principal race officer, most recently on Poland in 2018 at the DN European and World Championships. "We have some really professional ice sailing race officers here in Estonia. Last year we saved the day in Poland when the local team fell ill and there was no one to take over. So, our people stepped in. And it was very interesting for us too. We have applied many things learnt from that time. Our skills help us get important races here. Our professionals and events organised by them are highly regarded."



DN REGATTA – PHOTO: JAAK NIRGI

Engineering skills, wisdom and guts to ask smart questions

Studying engineering has clearly impacted his sailing, both the results as Finn and DN sailor and his career as the Chief Measurer and technical consultant of the International Finn Association.

In 1981 Jüri built an autonomous underwater vehicle. “What is interesting is that the Americans had their own version. I saw a picture of it after I had completed mine, which was 30 m longer but otherwise similar. The vehicle, as wide as a dinner table, was pulled on a 600 m cable. It had two probes that measured thermocline and registered water conditions. The Soviets wanted to study currents in order to exploit them for the benefit of their submarines to exploit them. So, they needed information about the layer where water temperature and salinity change. The vehicle was constructed to move at the speed of six knots - as it was designed on the knowledge I had gained from sailing. And it worked. They say this apparatus is still in use.”

“People are ashamed to admit when they don’t know something. But not knowing is normal. You know something but there is always someone who knows more. It’s not a sin. You should never shy from asking. It applies to sailing too. Sometimes people ask why I don’t disqualify anyone. My answer is – there is no need – my job, first and foremost, is teaching.”



Jüri and the others could race at the 1967 Hanko Finn Gold Cup thanks to the financial help from his friend Peter Tallberg. Jüri’s boat was not in accordance with the class rules. “Peter Tallberg’s brother brought tools from Helsinki, I fixed my boat and was allowed to race. And then the chief measurer Vernon Forster told me: now we measure your boat and then you go to Tallinn and teach the Russian measurers how a Finn must be measured. This is where it all started.”

PETER TALLBERG AND SON MATIAS ON STAR IN 1980 OLYMPIC REGATTA – PHOTO KAIUS HEDENSTRÖM

Chief Measurer of the International Finn Association

In the summer of 1978, during the pre-Olympic regatta, Jüri met August „Gus“ Miller in Tallinn. The Latvian race officers were fighting with each other and could not get the racecourse right. “Gus approached the committee boat and asked if there were no sailors in Tallinn who could mark the course properly. And I had to respond that we were not allowed to. This is how we met and now we are friends. Gus was a professor of biochemistry at the Ann Arbor university and thanks to him I was one of the first people in the USSR to see the American supercomputer Cray that was used for military purposes but also for drawing boats for the America’s Cup. Thanks to Gus I could go ice sailing in America. And he was the one to invite me to the International Finn Association.”



Gus Miller met the Estonian sailors in the 60s when their ice boats raced in Detroit. Back then Miller worked in a local workshop where the participants attended to their boats. Later, when the Americans raced in Tallinn, the Estonian guys helped them in return. This is how they became friends. Gus Miller was extremely happy when the Finn World Championships finally took place in Estonia (Pärnu, 1994). The second time Gus Miller got to race in Estonia was in 2013, at the Finn Gold Cup in Tallinn. At 78 he was the oldest participant.

GUS MILLER AT THE 2013 FINN GOLD CUP IN TALLINN – PHOTO: ROBERT DEAVES

Gus Miller met the Estonian sailors in the 60s when their ice boats raced in Detroit. Back then Miller worked in a local workshop where the participants attended to their boats. Later, when the Americans raced in Tallinn, the Estonian guys helped them in return. This is how they became friends. Gus Miller was extremely happy when the Finn World Championships finally took place in Estonia (Pärnu, 1994). The second time Gus Miller got to race in Estonia was in 2013, at the Finn Gold Cup in Tallinn. At 78 he was the oldest participant.



Jüri’s academic background and experience have helped him develop many methods and means for better and more precise measuring of centreboard boats. Thanks to him Finn boats can be measured in a way that guarantees their conformity at races. As race officer he has contributed to six Olympic games: 1980, 1992–2012.

JÜRI AT LONDON OLYMPICS IN 2012 – PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION

“Officials are elected at the Finn Class annual meeting and should you get voted in, you will have the post for the entire year. I have managed to be on this position for 20 years and they still keep me,” is Jüri happy. “But it requires earning the trust of the sailors, coaches and suppliers. I have had guts to tell them things that initially might not be pleasant but later they have thanked me. And the sailors rely on me, they aren’t afraid to ask stuff and tell me things, and that too has not come overnight. This trust can never be abused or that day will be my last on this job. This kind of mutual reliance is the foundation of progress and improvement, which is so vital for the class. Nowadays many other classes have also introduced the measuring strategy I use.”



JÜRI AND RICHARD HART RECEIVED THEIR PLACE IN THE FINN CLASS HALL OF FAME IN 2015 – PHOTO: FINN FOCUS

“Richard Hart and I have made the class rules as simple as possible. We wrote everything down in simple sentences. Tony Watts, the IYRU chief measurer of the Moscow Olympics, has even said that complex sentences should be forbidden in any regulations or rules. And this is what we have aimed to achieve. And it works and everybody is happy because there are no disputes or misunderstandings due to complicated wordings anymore.”



Jüri does not like the ruling of the World Sailing Council to vote Finn Class out of the Olympics. Contrary to popular belief, Paul Elvstrøm never claimed that Star and Dragon are boring and slow classes and must be replaced by something faster and more attractive. “All Olympic classes have had to prove themselves. Now there is even no boat yet, but the decision is there already.” Finn is viable and the fact that every year there are hundreds of participants in the Masters and some don’t even get in, is another proof of its popularity.”

Jüri has built several measuring tools for different boat classes (Finn, Euro, Yngling) in order to increase precision. The most recent instrument has been for ORC: this is a very precise measuring tool for determining the weight of the sailboat.

Master sailmaker out of sheer necessity

How did Jüri become a sailmaker? “Out of sheer necessity. We got some old Finn sails and had to make them usable again. When my son Peter started on the Optimist in the 70s, we had a nice red sail made for him in the then Leningrad. We made it from an old spinnaker and it was easy as the material was quite light. Just for comparison – we had 100 g material back then compared to the 140-gram one used nowadays on Optimists. His red sail was unique, and his mum enjoyed following him, as he was easy to spot among the other white sails.”



PETER ON THE LEFT AND HIS OPTIMIST WITH THE RED SAIL – PHOTO: GUSTAV GERMAN

JÜRI'S SAIL WORKSHOP IN THE ATTIC OF HIS NÕMME HOME - PHOTO: PIRET SALMISTU



FIRST SAIL MAKING ATTEMPTS – PHOTOS: PRIVATE COLLECTION



Now the sail loft is in the attic of Jüri's Nõmme home. This is where they fine-tune North Sails sails. According to Jüri, the first rooms to be finished in the house were the workshop in the attic and the sauna on the ground floor. Living quarters came later. They offer full North Sails services: there is no other way if you want to be a respectable supplier.

“When world champions come, they get priority service. It is of utmost importance because our sea is different. As is trimming. A lot has changed with the appearance of new and much stiffer sails – old expertise is not pertinent anymore. When a sail is old and hangs heavy, you cannot use it in rough weather anymore. Therefore, we have modified a lot of them here.”



PETER'S OPTIMIST WITH A RED SAIL. PHOTO: GUSTAV GERMAN

Peter watched his father when his Optimist sail was in the making. And later he was already hands-on when his 470 sails needed trimming. Today Peter is a sailmaker and an official representative of North Sails Estonia.

Three generations of sailors – Jüri, Peter and Tristan

Peter has followed in his father's footsteps. He has been sailing since childhood and raced at two Olympic Games.



ON THE LEFT - PETER ŠARAŠKIN AND PAAVO PETTAI AT THE 1988 REGATTA. PHOTO: NATIONAL FILM ARCHIVE

ON THE RIGHT - PETER ON KATARIINA II ORC C CLASS EUROPEAN CHAMPION IN 2018 – PHOTO: NIKOS PANTIS



PETER IN ITALY. AT THE HELM OF MELGES 24 IN THE SUMMER OF 2018 – AT THE MELGES 24 EUROPEANS

PHOTO: ZEROGRADINORD/IM24CA



And Peter's son Tristan is also into sailing. Last summer he was 8th in the Zoom8 World Championships in Finland. Jüri is his biggest fan and often accompanies him at regattas. "It felt very natural when Tristan started sailing and no-one had to push him into it."

According to Anne, Peter and Tristan are very different. If Tristan is very polite and quiet, also during competitions, then Peter used to be his complete opposite.

She tells a story from when they were sailing in Palamòs in 2018. The big waves seemed very scary, but the kids adapted to the conditions very fast. "This is what makes sailing so great," says Jüri, "the conditions are always different, and you must know how to adjust to them. This requires both strength and wit. Versatility is what makes sailing so special: it trains both decision-making skills, mind and body."

PETER AND TRISTAN ŠARAŠKIN. ESTONIAN YACHTING UNION SEASON FINALE IN 2017 – PHOTO: ESTONIAN YACHTING UNION

An international family



**ANNE AND HER FIGURE-SKATING PARTNER PEETER LAUR
- PHOTO: PRIVATE COLLECTION**

Jüri's wife Anne Šaraškin used to be a figure-skating champion and later a figure skating judge. She retired in 2008 at the age of 70. Anne became a judge because Jüri was still actively sailing and away a lot at regattas. She wanted to have an activity that would be like a hobby and use her professional know-how.

Jüri and Anne have not travelled together a lot as one always had to be at home for the kids when the other was away. And Anne gets seasick, so they do not get to go out on sea together. "It's not for me at all," she admits.



ANNE ON THE JURY OF "STARS ON ICE" - PHOTO: VIKTOR BURKIVSKI

Meeting several royals is like a cherry on Jüri's international-scale life.

"In 1961 in Helsinki, the soviet team had uniforms that did not enable relieving oneself on the sea. I was running towards the toilet when I was stopped by a team member from Moscow as his vocabulary of ten words in English was not enough to talk to Olav V of Norway. I started to interpret but my discomfort grew gradually. When the eking realised my situation, he ordered: "Run! And come back immediately!"



The second time was in Athens in 2004. We were at a reception and I was talking to the then ISAF president Paul Henderson and Harald V of Norway joined our conversation. So, I told him the funny story of meeting his father. He laughed to tears and asked his aide: "Will you take a mental note or have to write it down?"

KING HARALD V OF NORWAY IN FINLAND AT 8MR WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS IN 2013 - PHOTO: PIRET SALMISTU

"I'm also amazed at the memory of Felipe VI. I was introduced to him in Kingston Canada in 1995 where Felipe was part of the Spanish Olympic team. Then, a couple of years later in Hyères, when I was with Jali Mäkilä and the Finnish team at the regatta there, a bus turned in one morning with a Soling on the trailer. Felipe stepped out of the bus and walked up to me to talk. Both he and his security guy remembered both my name and where I was from. We chatted for several minutes.

And I have chatted with Constantine II of Greece in the canteen queue. He won Olympic gold on a Dragon in 1960 in Rome."



JÜRI RECEIVING THE ORDER OF THE WHITE STAR, 5TH CLASS, FROM THE PRESIDENT. PHOTO: ARNO MIKKOR

Jüri's contribution has recognised on several occasions:

- Former member of the Estonian Ice Sailing Federation and the Sailing Federation Presidium.
- Decoration of honour of the Estonian Yachting Union, 2013.
- Silver medal of merit of the Finnish Sailing Federation, 1981.
- Invited member of Helsingfors Segelklubb (HSK), Finland
- Hall of Fame of the International Finn Class since 2015.
- Honorary member of Kalev Yacht Club, Pärnu Yacht Club and the Estonian Sports Association Kalev.
- Lifetime achievement award in 2019
- Kersti Kaljulaid, President of the Republic of Estonia, decorated 112 people this year, marking the 101st anniversary of Estonian independence. Jüri was a recipient of the Order of the White Star, 5th Class for his contribution to Estonian sailing



Finn superlegend August „Gus“ Miller remembering Jüri:

“Jüri is someone who knows how to both lead and follow by example. He has had a positive impact on so many people around the world. I first met him in 1978 and I remember thinking from his first words then, "This guy has an exceptional mind.”

One of Jüri's favorite sayings is, "You can not change the world but, you can change yourself."

PHOTO: ROBERT DEAVES