

Changing the Climate for Youth Sailing

Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a series of articles featuring the "Caribbean youth or adult next door" and celebrating junior sailing's role as a life skill that might lead to employment within the marine industry as an adult.

If you've visited Bequia in the northern Grenadines, you know the robust feeling of Port Elizabeth and the large protected harbor of Admiralty Bay with its numerous sandy beaches — ideal for beach starts and boat storage. This is just the climate for youth sailing. And, sail they do! Double-enders, Optimists and sailing dinghies of all description dart amidst anchored boats on any given day.

In this seeming haven for youth sailing, organized programs have struggled for consistency. Enthusiastic parents and local instructors come and go. Sponsorship from local organizations and companies has ebbed and flowed. Support has been spotty from national ministries of sports, youth development and/or education.

Now, with its board in place and the by-laws and constitution drawn up, Eddie Brown, president of the St. Vincent & the Grenadines Sailing Association, is eager to finalize the paperwork to get the SVGSA officially established.

Just as the St. Kitts & Nevis Sailing Association (SKNSA newly formed in 2014) was propelled forward by the notion that sustainable junior sailing can only stem from a constant source of funding and management, youth leaders in Bequia came to the same conclusion. Both SKNSA and SVGSA hope to achieve consistent youth programs by formally organizing into an association recognized and supported by both one's own NOC (National Olympic Committee) and interna-

tional organizations such as ISAF (International Sailing Federation) and IODA (International Optimist Dinghy Association).

The emerging SVGSA has a diverse make-up of leadership including the current SVG governor general, a lawyer (who is presently formalizing the association paperwork), and Allick Daniel, founder of Bequia's Traditional Sailing Academy. Under SVGSA member Andrew Mitchell's direction, Bequia Youth Sailors have competed successfully at Optimist races within the region. Once they bump up against the elite youth sailors of Curacao, the BVI and the USVI, they see the need for a program that can give them similar opportunities of consistent coaching, clinics and competition.

Go, SVGSA!

Y2A Featured Youth

Oreokay Joseph, 15 years old
Member: Bequia Youth Sailors, St. Vincent & the Grenadines

Favorite boat: Optimist

During the 2011 Carriacou Regatta, a buoy for the local working boats was placed adjacent to the starting line for the Optimists and Lasers. This created confusion, especially for assertive young sailors like Oreokay Joseph who positioned himself with speed on the starting line. At this, his first off-island regatta, he sailed a red Opti with "Oreokay" written across the side. Over the line early, the frustration of re-starting well behind everyone else was written across his face. But he didn't give up. By the weather mark, he'd passed all but one other sailor. Rounding the mark, a local powerboat swamped Oreokay's Optimist with its wake. Righting, and then bailing furiously, he again fought his way back. Finishing second, it was the only race of the regatta in which he didn't take first place.

Like "Elvis", he earned the right simply to be known as "Oreokay".

This interview caught him in the midst of training for the June 12th to 14th St. Lucia National Championship. He'll compete along with teammates Jojo Adams and Drew Mitchell. In last year's races, he was usually first to the weather mark but the French sailors were able to pass him on beam reaches and downwind. Therefore,

he is practicing keeping the boat flat while reaching and how to pump the sail to keep it on a plane.

Oreokay's favorite school subjects are physical education, maths and English.

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Rising racing sailor Oreokay Joseph competes skillfully in both Bequia's traditional double-enders and in internationally recognized Optimists. Next goal, Lasers



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When asked if his junior sailing brought any life skills, he indicates that sailing the boats and racing in places like Carriacou give him material to talk and write about at school. He's also raced in St. Lucia and Curaçao. Captaining double-ender *Y Knot* in the 2015 Bequia Easter Regatta, he captured first overall in Class 4: "It is hard to race 'cause it keeps dancing."

"I support my club by helping when the boats need fixing," he says. Oreakay would like to train in Lasers next year. His message to Caribbean youth: "If you like something, stick to it and never give up until it's done."

Y2A Featured Adult

Omari Scott, 32 years old
Employment: Head Coach for Coral Reef YC Optimist Program and US National Team Optimist Coach

Fresh out of a two-year college in Antigua, Omari Scott was eager to apply his education and earn money in his new accounting position at FedEx. He was not exactly enthused when US college recruiters, who had read about him in *Caribbean Compass* and *All At Sea*, came a-knocking. Nonetheless, the prospect of bettering himself won out. In his first year at Hampton University, Virginia, transitioning from racing one-person dinghies to collegiate two-person 420s and Flying Juniors was difficult. He eventually excelled in both collegiate racing and obtaining a degree in Sports Management. Graduating in 2008, job prospects in sports management in the US had dried up owing to the economic recession.

Omari returned to the Caribbean and took a position as St. Lucia National Sailing Coach. Tasked with developing both recreational and elite racing sailors, his success in sending young St. Lucian sailors to high-level regattas in Martinique, Canada and the Optimist Youth Olympics landed him a coaching position with the Royal BVI Yacht Club. For the next three years he lived on Tortola, preparing young BVI sailors for the US, South American, North American and World Optimist Championships and sending them to clinics in Argentina and Germany.

In 2014, Omari was a pre-regatta clinic coach in St. Thomas. A young sailor in attendance from Coral Reef YC, Florida competed in an international event shortly after returning from St. Thomas. He won! His parents and club members attributed his tremendous strides to Omari's instruction. CRYC lured

Omari to his "dream home" as Head Coach of their Optimist Program.

"Success is allowing everyone to do their job," Omari says. He appreciates working in a setting where "I concentrate on seeing that the kids are well trained and



Antiguan sailor Omari Scott has coached young racers in St. Lucia, St. Thomas, Tortola and Florida. He is now the US National Team Optimist Coach

performing well. In the Caribbean, one person does everything from instructing intermediates to elite sailors, administrative stuff, pretty much everything. You get burnt out."

At five years of age, Omari lived near the Antigua Yacht Club and his older brother started attending a

summer sailing camp there. "My parents were not AYC members but my dad was bartender there for 20 years. He knew everyone." Omari felt comfortable in and around the water, fishing, snorkeling, scuba diving and spearfishing. Initially, AYC had only Lasers. Small Omari was ballast crewing for the older boys. AYC soon acquired Optimists. Coach Karl James stimulated Omari's passion for racing. Sailing both weekend days and three weekdays consistently, by nine years of age he was racing in regional events in St. Maarten, St. Croix and St. Thomas.

Omari was recently named US National Team Optimist Coach, and youth sailors he has worked with represent one third of the US National Team. They have qualified for the British Nationals, an international event in Belgium, the Optimist World Championship in Poland, and the European and North American championships.

With his degree and experience, Omari sees many things he can do in the future: sports management within the NBA or soccer, college coaching, recruiting or directorship (preferably for his alma mater, Hampton University). "I will still do big boat racing, but I prefer dinghy sailing. It's more exciting to me because of its shorter and more numerous races."

Omari: "Learning sailing is one thing, but being around a coach that you look up to is another. Hearing the same messages that you hear from your parents, but when you hear that from a coach, a young person realizes 'I should really listen to this'. It means a lot for a young man. He thinks to himself, 'This is important and I should take it seriously.' I want people to see me as someone who, beyond coaching, gives good advice on how to get along in life."

Ellen Ebert Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard Boldly Go with partner Jim Hutchins to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she serves as Sailing Development Chair on the Caribbean Sailing Association. Visit <http://caribbean-sailing.com/youth/youth-programs> for more information.

If you have a person in mind who would make a good candidate to be featured in Y2A, please submit to ellenbirrell@gmail.com.

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