

FOLLOWING BLANCA Y ANTONIO

Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a series of articles celebrating sailing's role in youth development for Caribbean children.

Two years ago, Y2A featured the wonderful sailing environs of the protected waters inside the Belize Barrier Reef. Today, youth sailing there is thriving, based on dedication, vision and continuity, though still not without challenges. We'll look at what has become of our 2015 Y2A featured youth Blanca Velasquez and Antonio Ricardez and their performance in the face of challenge.

Compass readers met Blanca, of the San Pedro Sailing Club, in 2015 when she was 15 years old and had just been introduced to racing Laser Radials after her years in Optimists. Benefiting from the ISAF Youth Worlds Emerging Nations Program held in Antigua, Blanca and Antonio Ricardez, of Belize City Sailing School, qualified for ISAF scholarships to the Youth World Championship in Langkawi, Malaysia late that year. In a regatta in which boys and girls race separately, they competed against more than 50 other countries' best youth sailors. Blanca and Antonio each finished ahead of ten of their competitors.



Young Antonio Ricardez and Blanca Velasquez are both working toward careers on the water

The following summer, Blanca competed in the 2016 Sail Canada International Youth Championship (CORK). It was Belize's first foray into CORK and when chosen as the opening ceremonies' standard-bearer, Blanca became an ambassador of sorts. Talk about youth development!

San Pedro Club member Forrest Jones says, "Blanca fought her way through the qualifiers to become one of only seven girls out of a field of 38 to advance to the Gold Fleet (the top third of 146 international male and female entrants). She was the only foreigner among the Gold Fleet girls; the others were all Canadians desperate to show that they were worthy of selection to the highly competitive Canadian International Team and qualify for Worlds. Five of them fought Blanca off successfully. Still, to be the sixth-best girl in this regatta was quite an accomplishment for a 16-year-old with three more years to go before she must compete against adult women. On the last day, her goal was simply to advance her rank. She advanced it five places from 47th to 42nd, out of 49."

In addition to Blanca's accomplishments on the race course, she is a self-motivated student and athlete. According to Jones, "She is a high school senior enrolled in a rigorous academic track consisting of physics, chemistry, biology, math, computer science, English and Spanish. Sometimes there is so much homework that she has

no time to train, even on weekends. Junior year she missed honor roll on a grade of 70 percent in chemistry. On her own accord, she went to summer in chemistry to raise her grade, and succeeded."

Blanca's success hasn't been without challenges. In 2016, the Argentinean sailing coach for her club resigned, leaving the youth competition rudderless. Additional funding challenges have impeded Blanca's regional participation. According to Jones, "Blanca's life has been complex. She has some personal hardships and upsetting things with courage and extraordinary strength, stability, and good judgment."

"Hanne Weaver, 22, the USA's third-ranked women's Laser Radial sailor every Easter and sails with us in our Sunday races. During her last visit, she focused on sending kids to professional training clinics instead of focusing on her own sailing. Unfortunately, in 2017, we hadn't the funds," Jones added.

Jones describes Blanca as "charismatic and a fine athlete all around. She is in track with the discus and is starting pitcher on the women's softball team. School sports compete for her time and attention and offer her team-bonding experiences that teenagers cherish."

"San Pedro Sailing Club's new home venue, Banyan Bay Resort, is building a serious new clubhouse and plans to support a professional coach. I hope these changes will renew Blanca's motivation and reopen opportunities for her to explore sailing potential, which includes Olympic Games aspirations. Olympics or not, she wants sailing to be her profession."

2015 Y2A Featured Youth Antonio Ricardez of Belize City participated in the Youth World Championship Regatta, which ranks with the Olympics in the field of the competitors. Antonio was the youngest sailor in a field of 67 other



in the Boys' Laser Radial fleet.

In the 2016 worldwide Bart's Bash, Antonio took fourth place amidst this Olympic class field of 174 Laser Radials, in which adults and minors, male and females all compete together.

Now 17, Antonio is looking to develop himself in the field of boat charter. His father, Tony, laid the groundwork. Working in charter boat repair and maintenance, he invites Antonio to work beside him during school vacations. Tony says he taught Antonio a lot because he was eager to learn but that Antonio himself learned with the curiosity and skill to solve mechanical and technical problems.

Forrest Jones says, "Antonio has always considered small boat sailing a stepping-stone towards becoming a licensed skipper of big sailboats. During school vacations, Antonio works for his dad at Belize Sailing Vacations, a charter company. He offers American Sailing Association certification, which can lead to Antonio's employment within the charter business arena. Antonio is not only a whiz at sailing but also mechanics. Neither Blanca nor Antonio smoke, drink, or do drugs, and it doesn't seem difficult for them to make good life choices."

Ellen Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard S/V Icarus to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for youth, she supports grass roots and competitive junior sailing, and serves as a sailing development for Caribbean Sailing Association.



ANNEXES ET SEMI-RIGIDES: COQUES ALUMINIUM - HYPALON -



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