

# What Are MNAs

## — and Why Does Caribbean Youth Sailing Need Them?

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

An insufficient supply of qualified instructors is a chief reason why junior sailing programs in the Caribbean struggle for sustainability. In Culebra, Puerto Rico, and other islands — although Optimist dinghies and facilities, and even funding, were available — programs went dormant owing to this challenge. A Member National Authority (MNA) can combat this problem by utilizing their country's National Olympic Committee's affinity with the International Olympic Committee and its available monies to fund instructor training. Additionally, any child can sail for fun, but if he or she aspires to compete in sailing as a sport on an international level, it's an advantage to live in a country with a sailing authority — an MNA — recognized by World Sailing, the international body governing the sport of sailing.

Defined by World Sailing (formerly ISAF), Member National Authorities (MNAs) are the principal members of that body and are responsible for the decision-making process that governs the sailboat-racing world.

In order for a country to have an MNA, it must first form a national sailing federation or agree upon an organization to represent it. After meeting certain standards and establishing rapport with their country's National Olympic Committee, the sailing federation can apply to World Sailing for MNA status. St. Vincent & the Grenadines established its national sailing federation in 2015, and it became an MNA the same year.

Instead of listing the Caribbean countries that have MNAs, it is simpler to list those that don't: Dominica, Montserrat and Anguilla. Martinique and Guadeloupe, as departments of France, fall under the French Sailing Federation and, thus, do not have their own MNAs. Anguilla is not recognized by the International Olympic Committee because of its status as a British Overseas Territory.

Groups of countries are designated geographically around the world. Twenty-six national MNAs in the Caribbean Region are known as "Group O". Each MNA has an equal vote at the General Meetings of World Sailing. There is a General Meeting of MNAs held annually with a General Assembly held once every four years. The next World Sailing General Assembly will be held in Barcelona, Spain in November.

MNAs funnel specific regattas and events held in their respective countries to World Sailing and these are included in the World Sailing online calendar. They represent World Sailing to sailors in their designated countries and their sailors to World Sailing. The MNA reports to and requests funding for training, events and athlete travel to the International Olympic Committee through their National Olympic Committees.

How can Caribbean nations support junior sailing development through MNA efforts? To learn how they acquire funding and assist local youth to reach elite sailing status, let's look at what is going on in Antigua.

Until 1995, the Antigua Yacht Club (AYC) served as the MNA for Antigua & Barbuda. With the growth of additional yacht clubs, especially the addition of a very active Jolly Harbour YC in 1993, the Antigua Barbuda Olympic Committee demanded that sailing form an MNA. The Antigua & Barbuda Sailing Association (ABSA) emerged. The ABSA then, as it does now, performs a supportive role and obtains funding for yacht clubs and major regattas that provide initiatives and the thrust for youth development. Initiatives come from our members," says Geoffrey Pidduck, president of ABSA.

"Today's youth starter programs are handled by the National Sailing Academy with its base in English Harbour and sub-base in Jolly Harbour. Advanced sailing programs are put on mainly by AYC and JHYC. The Olympians of 1992 in Barcelona — Franklin Braithwaite, Paola Vittoria, Carlo Falcone, Karen Portch, Ty Brody and subsequently Karl James — along with National Sailing Academy director Elizabeth Jordan, continue to play active roles in youth development and are the key representatives to the National Olympic Committee," says Pidduck.

The ABSA includes four member clubs, six major regattas, the National Sailing Academy, two sail-training hotels and eight Olympians. The MNA's effectiveness is a direct result of the efforts and leadership of its members.

Pidduck summarizes the major responsibility of ABSA as an MNA as follows:

- To sanction sailing events in Antigua & Barbuda;
- to represent the aims and objectives of World Sailing in helping to ensure good governance;
- to develop and promote sailing, especially among the youth of Antigua and Barbuda;
- to help select, promote and establish one-design classes;
- to represent and promote the sport of sailing in Antigua and Barbuda;
- to assist athletes, clubs and regattas on obtaining funding from World Sailing Olympic Solidarity and the government's Sports Ministry;
- to work with member clubs and regattas on obtaining appropriate training and qualifications for sailors and instructors;
- and to establish in Antigua & Barbuda a continuous and successful economic tourism based on sailing and yachting activity.

Antigua's accomplishments are numerous. Their youth development is manifest in people like Antiquan Karl James, who is a graduate of early training programs in Lasers and other dinghy programs as well as a participant in larger boat racing. Today he is a pillar of both the land-based and sailing community of Antigua. Pidduck says, "Many (youth sailors now) have their own businesses or work as sail-makers, riggers, yacht crew and captains; they own or operate marinas, and coach or instruct sailing. Many have gone onto advanced education and are contributing to Antigua or their new adopted countries as airline captains, sailing coaches in the USA and more."

AYC youth program members were crew on Jim Smith's *Comanche* in the Sydney Hobart Race and Atlantic record crossing. As well, they have participated in the grueling Volvo Around the World races. They have been selected for America's Cup Oracle challenges with Antiquan racing sailor Shannon Falcone, who has done three Cups, including the exciting last one. Pidduck adds, "Antiquan youth participate in all our major events, most notably Antigua Sailing Week, Antigua Classic Yacht Regatta, RORC Caribbean 600 and The Super Yacht Challenge".

Olympic hopefuls get funding to attend key development regattas. Coach Karl James,

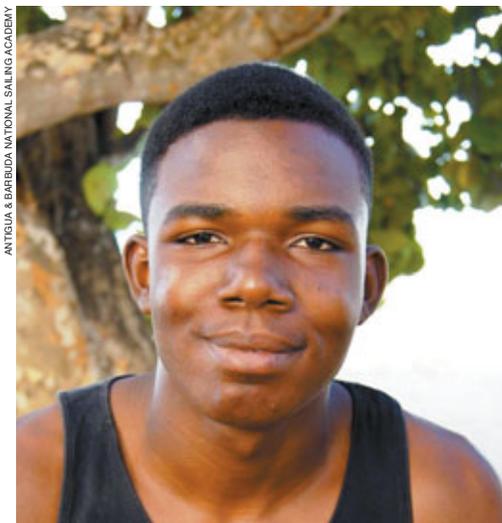
along with 17-year-old Laser sailor Jules Mitchell, participated in the Youth Sailing World Championship in Malaysia, held December 26th, 2015 to January 4th, 2016. In July, Mitchell and Vincent Anfi, along with Coach James, represented Antigua at the Laser Radial Youth in Ireland. Mitchell, again in Laser Radial, along with Rocco Falcone and Louis Bayev in 29ers, with Coach James, will compete in Auckland, New Zealand at the 2016 Youth Sailing World Championship. Antiguans are preparing to send their first foiling kitesurfer to the 2018 Youth Olympics in Argentina.

AYC hosted the Optimist North American Championships 2015 at the historic Nelson's Dockyard, seeing 176 sailors from around the world. Owing to its great success, Antigua hosted OPTINAM 2016. Pidduck says, "Hosting these regattas continues to increase interest in our young Antiguans for sailing. Antigua continues to support the Caribbean Sailing Association's Annual Dinghy Championships being held this year in St. Martin, on October 7th and 8th.

"International events which represent opportunities for our sailors include Sunfish races in Curaçao and St. Maarten, and Radio Controlled and 505 events in Barbados, Guadeloupe and Martinique," he adds.

"Funding and support for sailing is obtained from Olympic Solidarity, government and sponsorship from our supportive local community and from donors, which include yacht owners, local business and generous others," says Pidduck.

He indicates that while MNAs must appeal for funding through their National Olympic Committee, which is focused on getting athletes to the Olympics, Antigua's MNA has been successful at obtaining support for Optimists (a non-Olympic class boat) and for non-Olympic sailors to attend events in North America, Europe and Caribbean venues. They employ the World Sailing Olympic Solidarity Program to accomplish this. Another non-Olympic class boat, the two-person RS Feva, is being looked at by Antigua's National Sailing Academy both as a performance boat for young sailors with a "need for speed" and as a stepping stone toward getting more women interested in performance racing. Application to the National Olympic Committee has been submitted.



Along with five other young Antiguans, 16-year-old Tyrese Loctar recently became an RYA-qualified Dinghy and Keelboat Sailing Instructor. His goal is to become an engineer on a megayacht, and this qualification will add to his credentials when he starts to apply for employment in this field

Though Pidduck advocates MNAs availing their constituents of World Sailing funding mechanisms, he says, "I think it is unrealistic for athletes, in their quest to become world-known and more competitive, to expect to rely on donors, including Olympic Solidarity, to the point of 100 percent. Sailors must use their own talent, money and initiative." Having as many elite youth sailors as Antigua does may be enviable but it has been a long, hard road.

Antigua's National Sailing Academy is active in leading the way. They recently hosted a Royal Yachting Association Instructor Training (see this month's *Regatta News*, page 15), and a World Sailing Group O Youth Worlds Emerging Nations Clinic in 2015. The joint facilities of Antigua Yacht Club and the nearby National Sailing Academy make Falmouth Harbour a popular dinghy-training center.

Bill Canfield from St. Thomas attests, "Highly motivated and driven parents are key for taking youth from good sailors to elite competitors. The achievements by St. Thomas Yacht Club programs come largely from committed parents and starting the children at six years old."

Pidduck adds: "It takes a variety of creative people to recognize opportunity, and listen and understand what sailors want. For example, who would ever have picked the historic Nelson's Dockyard as a venue for an Optimist regatta, when indeed Antigua has 365 beaches to launch the fleet from? It worked well beyond expectations for OPTINAM 2015 and resulted in a repeat for 2016. It turns out that in addition to good breezes these little 'ankle biter' Optimist sailors love good waves. On an added note, on the evening of the 2016 prizegiving it was announced that the Dockyard and environs was declared a World Heritage Site.

"Attendance at the Caribbean Dinghy Championship, the Caribbean Laser Championships, the Premier's Cup in Tortola, and the Optimist Caribbean events should be required before a single nickel is contributed to (youth) sailors with aspirations for international events outside the area. These events are close to home and usually have excellent visiting sailors to compete against. Yet, I think that our young people and some who influence them are neglecting these opportunities," Pidduck observes.

An incoming tide raises all ships. Thus, while MNAs are not in the business of supporting grass-root sailing programs, they contribute to each country's ability to stimulate and support youth in bettering themselves through the mental and physical acumen that is fostered by sailing and racing.

*Ellen Birrell attributes her opportunity to cruise the Caribbean aboard S/V Boldly Go to life skills built in childhood. Believing swimming and sailing are essentials for island youth, she supports grass roots and competitive junior sailing and serves as chair of sailing development for Caribbean Sailing Association (<http://caribbean-sailing.com/sailing-development/the-future-of-caribbean-sailing/>).*