PAGES OF HISTORY OF YACHTING IN LITHUANIA

By Venantas Butkus **2004.09.18**

It is hard to tell when Lithuanians started yachting, but the fact is that already in 1884 there were some Lithuanian yachtsmens in the association *Memeler Segel-Verein* in Klaipeda. In the beginning of the 20th century yachting was practiced on some Lithuanian lakes. The first Lithuanian yachting club was founded in 1921 in Kaunas. In 1923, after Lithuania had recovered Klaipeda region (after 500 of Germany subordination according to the Meln's peace concord between Lithuania and Teutonic order, which was signed in 1422), enthusiasts of yachting got an opportunity to yacht in the Curonian Lagoon and the Baltic Sea. Until 1939, when Nazi Germany annexed Klaipeda region, yachting was mainly developed in Klaipeda and was mainly sea-oriented.

Yachting in the sea was introduced by Klaipeda sea scouts who founded their organization in 1924. Having received a loan, they bought a sailing motor boat of 14.5 m length and 20 t capacity, which had been seized from smugglers, and gave her the name of *Budys (On Duty).* On October, 1926, after some repairs, young yachtsmen took *Budys* out to the open sea. That was the first registered sea yachting step in XXth century of independent Republic of Lithuania. Later *Budys* and other Lithuanian sea yachts visited most Baltic ports. Yacht *Gulbe (Swan)* sailed up to London in the summer of 1933.

In 1933 the Lithuanian Yachting Union was founded, and in 1935 it joined the International Yachting Union. By the initiative of this union, with the support of the Ministry of Education and the House of Physical Culture, a yachting school was founded in Klaipeda in 1936. For practical training of students the school purchased a sea yacht *Zalciu Karaliene (Queen of Grass Snakes).* The number of yachts in Klaipeda was constantly increasing. The Lithuanian Yachting Union, the Klaipeda Yachting Club, the yachting club *Santaros*, the water sports club Riflemen's Union, other organizations and private persons had yachts of various classes.

In the summer of 1938 the Lithuanian Yachting Union organized the first international regatta in Klaipeda and Nida. In the same year a yacht-racing contest in Lithuania was included in the program of International Olympic Games for the first time. Lithuanian yachtsmen successfully competed in international regattas. The first victory in international contests was gained for Lithuania by the crew of the yacht *Zalciu Karaliene*, which won the first prize within its class in Gothland regatta of 1937.

In 1939, when the Nazis occupied Klaipeda region, sea yachts were sheltered in Sventoji fishing harbor, whereas the yachts of Olympic classes were distributed among Lithuanian water sports club. Yachting moved to the lakes. It was popular in Kaunas, Siauliai, Telsiai, Trakai. During the war an inland waters yacht-racing championship was held the Rekyva Lake close to Siauliai.

Occupation of Lithuania and military actions destroyed the country's yachting base, ruined the stock and scattered the yachtsmen. However, yachting in Lithuania was not totally extinguished. As soon as the war was over, in 1945, the yachtsmen of Vilnius organized the first yacht-racing contest in Trakai. In the beginning of 1946 Klaipeda Yachting Club was restored. Yachting in Kaunas started recovering in 1948. Later yachting clubs were founded in Siauliai, Nida, Plateliai, Elektrenai and other places. Every summer yacht-racing contests were held in inland waters and the Baltic Sea.

After foundation of new yachting clubs in Kaunas and Klaipeda, large yachting centers with training classes, hangars, workshops and hotels were built. In 1979 the Institute of

Physical Culture (Kaunas) started qualifying yachting coaches with higher education. Almost all yachting clubs had yachting schools for children and youth. This support helped Lithuanian yachtsmen to achieve high sporting results. In spite of strong competition, they often defeated yachtsmen of the former USSR. Saulius Tamkvaitis, Arvydas Balciunas, Tauras Rymonis, Saulius Pajarskas, Vladas Balciunas, Deivis Galaburda and others became champions and prizewinners of the USSR. The highest score in Olympic yacht-racing belongs to Gintautas Mince from Kaunas, who became champion the USSR in Class 470 three times.

Yachting in the sea was renewed only in 1967, when Lithuanian yachtsmen purchased the first sea yacht after the war *Banga-2*. After that, many sea yachts were bought by large state enterprises, but sailing was allowed only within the territorial waters of the USSR. Nevertheless, sea yachting was rapidly gaining popularity. The crews of Lithuanian yachts guided by captains R.Budvytis, O.Kubiliunas, I.Miniotas, A.Zavisa, B.Zumbakis, R.Dargis, S.Kudzevicius and others successfully competed in regattas organized by yachting sports organizations of the USSR, Poland and the Democratic Republic of Germany.

The voyage across the Atlantic Ocean of three Lithuanian yachts *Lietuva, Audra* and *Daile* became a significant event of 1989 in both the sporting and the political sense. The first transatlantic sailing in the history of our country was dedicated for restoration of Lithuania's independence. It was actively supported by numerous companies, organizations and private persons.

In 1992-1995 the yachts *Lietuva* steered by Steponas Kudzevicius and Kaunas yacht *Laisve* guided by Ignas Miniotas made the old dream of Lithuanian yachtsmen come true – they sailed round the world. At the turn of the years 1994 and 1995 the yacht *Aura* guided by Jonas Limantas sailed around Cape Horn for the first time the history of Lithuanian sea yachting.

Changes in Lithuania after restoration of independence forced yachtsmen to make some improvements. In 1992 the Department of Physical Culture and Sports established a National Yachting Centre in Kaunas yachting club, the main task of which was to prepare high-class sportsmen able to compete in international yacht-racing contests. By efforts of this new organization, for the time in the history of Lithuania, our yachtsmen participated in the Olympic Regatta in Barcelona in 1992. It opened the doors to World and European championships. With some financial support and more experience Lithuanian sportsmens of Olympic racing yachts achieved excellent results. In 1997 Raimondas Siugzdinis won the titles of European and World champion in Class *Laser R*, and the national team of Lithuania became world champion in the team contest.

At present the Lithuanian Yachting Union (LBS) unites 22 yachting clubs and associations, sea scouts and other officially registered public organizations developing yachting sports. Every year approximately thirty yacht-racing contests are held in the Baltic Sea and Lithuanian inland waters. LBS counts approximately one thousand members.

Translated by Jurgita Ruskyte