

# HELENA SCUTT —

@SAILING ENERGY / US SAILING TEAM



It's pretty unlikely that you haven't heard of Helena Scutt if you followed the 2016 Rio Olympic sailing events — she and Paris Henken finished in the top 10 of the 49er FX class. The 49er FX, a leading-edge skiff specifically developed for female Olympic sailors, made its debut in Rio. Helena will again break new ground in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics, competing in the mixed-class catamaran division on the foiling Nacra 17 with skipper Bora Gulari. The Olympics have never included foiling boats, and Tokyo should prove to be remarkably exciting on this front. And, if you think the 49er FX is a challenging platform, the Nacra 17 is certain to take things to a whole new level of competition with a maximum speed of somewhere in the mid-20s.

*"I was 15 and burned out of a soccer freak phase."*

Helena was born in Cheltenham, England, 26 years ago. When she was 2, her parents up and moved the family to Seattle, Washington. (It wasn't until

**Helena Scutt, with Bora Gulari, on the foiling Nacra 17 on July 31 at the Hempel Sailing World Championships in Aarhus, Denmark.**

2012 that Helena received her US citizenship, and in 2016, just days before she left for Rio, her parents too became citizens. Helena describes this as "an especially patriotic time" in her life.)

Helena was introduced to sailing at a very young age when her father would take her out on a J/24 called *Rajun Cajun* on Lake Washington. "Then he put me in summer camp at Sail Sand Point, a nonprofit community boating center in Seattle, when I was 11," she says. Her father continued taking her out on a variety of dinghies, ensuring she got time at the helm, and introduced her to flying on the trapeze. "But it wasn't until I was 15 and burned out of a soccer freak phase that I learned to race (in Lasers) and soon got hooked on the thrill of a 29er," says Helen.

Helena's 16th year was a real turning point in her racing progress. She and her sailing partner Katy Cenname campaigned their 29er with the help of coaches Ben and Jen Glass. "Within a couple of years we were on the US Sailing Development Team, and that's when my

Olympic dreams were planted. At a team training camp at the Olympic Training Center in Colorado Springs in 2010, I got to meet Olympic sailors and share the excitement with sailing friends my age, and it started to feel like something I could achieve if I worked really hard."

Studying for her degrees in biomechanical and mechanical engineering at Stanford University, Helena joined the sailing team and focused her first two summers on racing the 29er and the 49erFX. When Helena was a sophomore, the 49erFX was designated as the new women's skiff for the Rio Olympics, and Helena began thinking of an Olympic campaign because of her experience sailing the skiffs.

"The following year, Paris Henken and I teamed up at the suggestion of US Sailing Team head coach Luther Carpenter and high-performance director Charlie McKee. In 2013 and 2014 we could only race in the summers because of school, and it was hard feeling like we never got to sink our teeth into real training.

"I used to pore over a couple of books written by the US Women's Soccer Team that covered everything from mindset and attitude to specific drills and game-day routines. So those sparked my dreams of athletic excellence, with

# FOILING THE NACRA 17

the pinnacle of that being the Olympics," recalls Helena. "Fast forward several years, and the decision to go full-time sailing meant postponing my master's degree. It was an easy choice to take a chance on the longtime dream."

Her dream was realized in Rio. "Rio was life-changing, and I'm really proud of how Paris and I sailed there. Our goal was to make the medal race (top 10), which was outperforming our ranking, and we achieved that, and won a race as well, which was the icing on the cake. I embraced focusing on the process and the

result took care of itself. That is a harder mindset to practice than it sounds, and it is part of what I'm working on going into 2020. Trusting the process and giving my best to what I control... letting go of the rest. The best thing is these sailing/campaign lessons apply to life, too."

Perhaps a significant portion of her success comes from those around her whom she looked up to. Aside from Helena's father, early coaches and others who helped to motivate her along the way, she calls out specific individuals as particularly important in her quest to succeed. "Jen Glass was not only a coach but a mentor of mine throughout a few very formative years — my first couple of years racing, while I was still in high school. Anna Tunnicliffe has always represented excellence in American Olympic sailing to me. Pamela Healy became a mentor for me in the last few months before the Rio Olympics, and I'm very grateful for her support as well."

Her years-long effort to compete at this level has challenged her in many ways, and yet her motivation never seems to diminish. "I'm very competitive. At the same time I believe the saying that you don't conquer your competition, you conquer yourself. The idea of being the best in the world motivates me because it means you have opened yourself up to tremendous growth. And I have to say, the most energizing thing about an Olympic sailing campaign is watching it transform from a personal project into



**Helena's first regatta, sailing with her dad, was the 2004 Enterprise Worlds in Cork, Ireland. Her Aunt Jane had been women's world champion helm multiple times, sailing with her Uncle Nick. "The waves were tall enough to make the boats around you disappear from view!" — photo courtesy Helena Scutt**

a community effort. The transformation from an individual endeavor to thousands of people following along, helping and supporting you because you have inspired them, is the coolest feeling."

Helena says that she and Bora have earned significant support from the US Olympic Committee and received grants from St. Francis Sailing Foundation and Seattle Yacht Club Foundation. Their sponsors include Futuramic and Harken. "Other sponsors enable us to cover our expenses, such as equipment and travel. Support from friends and family is a big part of our budget and we couldn't do it without their generosity," she says.

says. The injuries, aside from her carpal tunnel, were sustained after getting hit by another boat during the 2013 49erFX World Championships.

"Each time I have fought to heal as fast as possible and get back in the saddle because I love what I do. Especially in the new foiling Nacra 17; I know it can be dangerous and scary at times. But that's part of my sport; it wouldn't be my type of racing if it was slow boats far away from each other — so I embrace it."

Other challenges include "extensive time away from home, and learning to work with a teammate under pressure."

**Helena sailing the Laser Pico with her father, Oliver, on Lake Washington in Seattle.**



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But getting through these trials, she remembers a few core principles that she's taken to heart: "To truly grow, you must be outside of your comfort zone; to accept criticism, make sure that your desire to improve is stronger than your desire to be right; and most easy things are not worth doing... as in, it's challenging because it's worthwhile."

Helena and Bora's training routine may not be that of Anna Tunnicliffe's (whose could be?), but it's intense and noteworthy. "During a training block, we sail five to six days per week for an average of three hours per day. I go to the gym for strength training or cardio three to five days per week, depending on how much we are sailing. A training day includes cooking and eating the right fuel, warming up (30 minutes of stretching, etc.), boatwork (can be four hours some days), sailing (usually three



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**Helena signs autographs for kids at FAST USA/Treasure Island Sailing Center earlier this year.**

hours), recovery stretching/icing (half hour to one hour), video debrief (one hour), and campaign administration/logistics (varies)."

When Helena and Paris were training for Rio, they practiced in Long Beach in

May, "because it's fantastic for two-boat tuning." But for heavy weather they focused on sailing out of Richmond YC and also in San Diego because that was Paris's hometown. "In the near future, Bora and I look forward to some sailing out of the new base on Treasure Island organized by FAST USA."

It's not often in the sailing community (in any sporting community for that matter) to come across a young woman who has been competing for only 10 years and is poised to race in her second Olympic challenge. But from all indications — competitors beware! She and Bora are going to put up one heck of a fight. Read more about their campaign at [www.gulariscuttracing.com](http://www.gulariscuttracing.com), and see [www.teamusa.org/us-sailing/athletes/Helena-Scutt](http://www.teamusa.org/us-sailing/athletes/Helena-Scutt).

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