

Mrs. Evelin Ilves today awarded the Young Athlete's Prizes of the First Lady's Foundation of the President of the Republic's Cultural Foundation. This time, the prizes were awarded to ballroom dancers Mr. Oliver Kips and Ms Kristina Morozjuk, fencer Ms Erika Kirpu, and footballer Ms Anete Paulus. The prize winners were chosen from 150 applications.

According to Mrs. Evelin Ilves, it is highly important to begin in childhood with physical activity and also to maintain a healthy lifestyle and active attitude in life: "Sports is the most effective way to teach young people the consistency, capability, and ability required to overcome difficulties. Sports is also a sphere that should accompany every individual through life, from early childhood."

Ms Erika Salumäe, a member of the advisory board of the First Lady's Foundation, added that very good academic achievements serve as one of the pre-requisites for receiving the prize. "I'm sincerely happy with the fact that so many interesting and capable candidates applied for the prize. I was pleasantly surprised with the fact that we have so many young athletes with such good academic achievements," said Ms Salumäe.

Ms Erika Kirpu, who took the floor on behalf of the winners of the Young Athlete's Prize, thanked Mrs. Evelin Ilves and Nordea Bank for their support of young athletes despite the economic recession. She added that the prize is very welcome, as it is not easy to be a top class athlete and have excellent academic achievements.

Mr. Vahur Kraft, the CEO of the Estonian branch of Nordea Bank, believes that sporting endeavours represent a good way of testing one's abilities and developing one's willpower. "Hopefully, more and more people from different regions of Estonia will be infected by the healthy lifestyle germ," Mr. Kraft remarked.

The ballroom dancers, Mr. Oliver Kips and Ms Kristina Morozjuk, are competing in the junior class and have won the Estonian Champion's title in their respective class four times, and since 2005 they have won the Estonian Cup for Latin-American dances. Mr. Kips and Ms Morozjuk were awarded 25,000 EEK to cover their training expenses.

Ms Erika Kirpu, a fencer, is a multiple winner of the Estonian and European champion's title and cups, multiple Champion of the Nordic countries, and a winner of international tournaments. Ms Kirpu was awarded 17,000 EEK to purchase fencing equipment.

Ms Anete Paulus, a footballer, plays with Pärnu Football Club; she has been a member of the Estonian National Youth Football Team for five years and of the Estonian Women's National Football Team for two years. She won a silver medal with Pärnu Football club at the Estonian Championship in 2008 and a bronze medal in 2009. Ms Paulus was awarded 8,000 EEK to purchase sports equipment and to cover training expenses.

The Young Athlete's Prize is intended to recognise young, under-21-year-olds with very good academic achievements. The prize is earmarked and intended to cover training and competition costs. In the future, the prize will be awarded twice a year – in spring and in autumn.

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