

The Young Athlete's Prizes of the Cultural Foundation of the President of the Republic were awarded to cyclist Erik Kangilaski, underwater swimmer Ksenia Belomestnova, table tennis player Viktoria Lohk and disabled swimmers Matz Topkin, Leon Bauer, Brenda Tilk and Robin Liksor.

Evelin Ilves, who four years ago established the Young Athlete's Prize of the sub-fund of the spouse of the President of the Republic, said today, when awarding the prizes, that apart from athletic achievements all the nominees do well in their studies: "Education and sports cannot be competing with each other. How children can combine both activities largely depends on teachers and parents and as we can see, by looking at our prize winners, this can be done very successfully. It is great that schools, sports clubs and families co-operate and together feel proud of the achievements of their young athletes."

Evelin Ilves commended the disabled swimmers, who were awarded the prizes, as an example of children who are able to succeed at regular schools despite their special needs, train on a daily basis and participate in competitions with good results.

According to Evelin Ilves, exercising is a habit to be started while young. The development of youth sports and the success of our young athletes largely depends on physical education lessons at schools, good teachers and also, to a great extent, on young trainers, she stated.

The importance of the contribution of trainers was also emphasised by Erik Kangilaski, one of the prize-winners, who said the words of gratitude on behalf of all the laureates.

According to the local head of Nordea Bank that supports the Young Athlete's Prize, Vahur Kraft, the bank is happy to support capable young athletes who are striving to make it to the top. He added that a uniform team is one of the values promoted by Nordea, and the bank is delighted to award an additional team prize of 3,200 euros. "We believe that one must keep focused on the prize to realise one's dreams and where there is a will, there is a way. Becoming the best requires lots of hard work and sensible choices," Vahur Kraft told.

The Young Athlete's Prizes were awarded to the following athletes:

**Erik Kangilaski** was born in 1998; he studies in the 7th class of Tallinn School of Music and does very well in studies, being equally strong in humanities and the sciences as well as music. Erik began cycling training at Kalev Cycling School at the age of 6; he is currently training at Nõmme Bicycle Club. He has achieved numerous good places in bicycle marathons and championships in Estonia; this year, he is competing for the Estonian cycling team. Apart from sports, Erik is actively involved in music; he plays cello in a string orchestra, sings in a choir and also plays piano.

**Ksenia Belomestnova** was born in 1996 in Tallinn. She studies in the 10th class of Maardu Gymnasium. Regardless of the fact that she often has to miss classes, she is still a straight A and B student. Ksenia started with underwater swimming at the age of 8 at Maardu Underwater Swimming Club and trains every day. Last year, she established a European record in youth class, ranked 4th in European adult championship and became world youth champion. This year, she won four gold medals in the Estonian youth championships. For several years running, the Estonian Sportsdivers Association has elected Ksenia the most successful young athlete and considers her to be one of the most outstanding fin swimmers over the last couple of years.

**Viktorija Lohk** was born in 2003 in Hiiumaa and became a member of SOS Children's Village family at the age of 7; she studies in the 3th class of Lehola School. Viktorija is a straight A student and has graduated with honours from every class. She started table tennis training two years ago and, to date, she has won a number of medals in her age class. According to her trainer, she is very committed to training; she is also very talented and has lots of willpower. In addition, Viktorija also takes part in swimming classes, likes to read and find time to partake in fantasy-rich crafts, and she also likes to draw.

**Robin Liksor** was born in 1999 and studies in the 7th class of Tallinn Secondary Science School. This is what Robin wrote to characterise himself: "I was born without a left arm. I can generally cope in my everyday life, but I am unable to tie strings, eat with a knife and fork and do, for example, the crayfish walk during physical education lessons. As the left and right sides of my body have different weight I must see that my spine will not grow crooked, as this may result in a number of problems. Swimming is a very good form of training to avoid the problem as I will sufficiently move my left hand. Robin started swimming four years ago and has taken part in numerous competitions to date. Robin has diversified interests; apart from sports he also sings in the Boys Choir of Tallinn Secondary Science School, has taken part in the work of the Children's Studio of Puppet Film Foundation, and he has represented his school in swimming,

skiing and cross-country racing competitions.

**Matz Topkin** was born in 1998 and studies in the 8th class of Tallinn Secondary Science School. He uses a prosthetic leg to walk, is missing one hand and his other hand is effectively disabled. Despite everything, Matz does well, he is gutsy and is a good communicator. He does well at school, regardless of the big work load, and he has participated in numerous subject competitions as well as checkers and chess championships. Matz began swimming early – at first only to become aware of the abilities of his body and to move, which is much easier in water. Matz has basically been swimming all his life, minus some longer and shorter breaks. Little by little, he started to take training more seriously and with more awareness and, in 2011, he participated in international competitions for the first time.

**Brenda Tilk** was born in 1994; she studies in 12th class of Kuusalu Secondary School and her class teachers characterises her as follows: "Brenda has willpower and dedication that are worth acknowledging. She does well at school and is well motivated; she is only absent from school when this is inevitable as a consequence of her competition trips. Brenda is very good at time management; travelling to training places take 2 hours of her day." Brenda began swimming at the age of 3, at a rehabilitation centre. She was diagnosed with connective tissue illness and, therefore, her joints are deformed and she has stunted growth. Swimming is the only activity that has helped her to retain her mobility without needing any support equipment. She started with serious training in 2006; she has taken part in all the swimming competitions for disabled people in Estonia and has also competed in the Czech Republic and Germany. Apart from swimming, she also takes photography and cooking classes.

**Leon Bauer** was born in 1995. He studies in the 10th class of Õismäe Russian Lyceum of Tallinn, taking active part in school and class life, and successfully combining studies and sports. Leon is diligent and well motivated. He suffered from post-natal injuries to his left hip and thigh and is blind in his left eye. All this does not prevent him from sports, however, as Leon started swimming five years ago.

Supported by the Young Athlete's Prize and Estonian Association of Swimmers with Disabilities, these four young athletes have the chance to take part in the German open championship in Berlin, where athletes were classified; this is required to be able to participate in competitions organised by the International Paralympic Committee in the future, attempt to gain access to European and world championship and the Rio Paralympic games of 2016. Leon, Brenda, Matz and Robin all received a qualification, i.e. a competition class that matches their disability. Brenda brought two and Robin five medals home.

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The Young Athlete's Prize is presented by the First Lady's Foundation of the President of the Republic's Cultural Foundation. The prize is intended to acknowledge young, under-21-year-olds with very good academic achievements. The prize is earmarked and intended to cover training and competition costs. The purpose of the sub-fund of the Cultural Foundation is to promote exercising habits and healthy lifestyle of children and school students. The Young Athlete's Prize is awarded twice a year by the sub-fund of the Cultural Foundation in co-operation with Nordea Bank.

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