

And the rest

Last month we met
Tornado medallist
Lars Grael. Now
it's time to meet
the family...



It doesn't happen often, yet it has happened twice in Brazil's best-known sailing family. Grael family members have headed off to the Olympics competing in separate events and have each returned to their motherland with medals. In 1988 Torben and Lars Grael came back from Pusan with bronze medals for their performances in the Star and Tornado respectively. In 1996 Torben struck gold and Lars added another bronze to his collection. And today, during the current quadrennium no fewer than five Grael family members from two generations are involved in Olympic sailing campaigns.

Brothers Torben and Lars will be skippering different Star boats, and when they return to shore at Olympic class regattas they may well be keeping tabs on Torben's son Marco, daughter Martine and wife Andrea, adding to the remarkable team effort in the 49er, Women's 470 and Women's Match Racing or Laser Radial.

Meet Torben Schmidt Grael

If Torben doesn't top your list of all-time sailing legends, where have you been for the past 30 years? He's won everything

going back to the 1978 Junior Snipe world championship with his brother Lars, to leading Ericsson 4's Volvo Ocean Race team to a commanding victory. Add Snipe, Soling and Star world titles and One Ton and 6-Metre podium finishes and you have a trophy case the envy of any sailor on the planet. Top it off with being the winning tactician in the 2000 Louis Vuitton Cup and challenging for the America's Cup, starting the Grael Project with brothers Axel and Lars and Marcelo Ferreira and raising a very special family. There is no question that he is modern sailing's king and his family is sailing's royalty.

With the 2008-9 Volvo Ocean Race behind him, Torben has returned to the Star with Marcelo Ferreira, with whom he shares the 1996 and 2004 Olympic gold medals and the 2000 bronze. Most recently Torben and Marcelo came through as hometown favourites during the 2010 Star worlds in Rio as the top Brazilians at third overall. Right behind him his brother Lars and Ronald Seifert were fourth.

Inevitably, the Brazilian media went wild along with much of Torben's family. The occasion was special for the many

other Graels who were out on the water that day, particularly uncles Axel and Erik Schmidt, who like Torben and Lars won the Snipe worlds together. Their first of three Snipe world titles was the first sailing world championship that Brazil ever won.

In addition to an Olympic campaign Torben's time is being consumed with old boats. He's been trying to restore the family's cruising boat, a 40-year-old Columbia 40, before the European sailing season swings into gear. Additionally, he is looking forward to the 100th anniversary of *Aileen*, his 6-Metre, in 2012.

Torben most admires (in sailing): Paul Elvstrøm, Torben's twin uncles, Axel and Erik Schmidt.

Meet Lars Schmidt Grael

Between them Torben and Lars Grael have won seven of Brazil's 16 Olympic sailing medals. And, of course, sailing is the number one Olympic sport in Brazil in terms of medals won.

Since Lars's near-fatal boating accident in 1998 Torben has not surprisingly had the edge on Lars in Olympic class sailing, while Lars has been tirelessly championing sporting causes throughout the world.



CARLO BORLENGHI/DPPI

Torben Grae, Volvo winner (opposite), family man and a five-time Olympic medallist. His last gold medal was won in 2004, with Marcelo Ferreira (right) of course, when fluke winds in the Bay of Athens presented one of sailing's greatest windspotters with the perfect stage

Lars is now one of the best-known public figures in his home country and was recently invited by the president of Brazil to become the National Secretary for Sport. Since assuming that role Lars has acquired several other equally demanding positions, including being a member of the World Antidoping Agency and the Brazilian Olympic Commission.

Meanwhile the Grae Project, started by brothers Torben, Lars and Axel and Marcelo Ferreira, has been widely recognised for its accomplishments in promoting education through nautical sport, knowledge of and employment in the marine trades, environmental awareness and good citizenship, and preserving maritime culture.

As well as his current Star campaign, Lars races his ILC 25, *Stand by Me*, locally with his wife, Renata as one of the crew. He will also be getting out his own 6-Metre for two historic regattas this year, including the Preben Schmidt, named after his grandfather. His daughter, Trine, is among his crew. His youngest children, Nicholas and Sophia, are currently carving out fledgling sailing careers in the Oppis...

Sailors Lars most admires: Paul Elvstrøm is number ONE (Elvstrøm and his daughter, Trine, were the only father-daughter team to compete in the Olympics, in the Tornado). Torben, my uncles Axel and Erik Schmidt, and Gastao Brun, plus 'of course', Jochen Schümann, Bill Buchan and Robert Scheidt.

Meet Andrea Soffiatti Grae

Andrea and Torben met sailing Lasers – before the Laser Radial was introduced. She held on in heavy air, but 'I got my revenge in the lighter stuff!' Whether it was the good times that the Brazilian Laser sailors shared together or Andrea's determination, eventually she caught Torben's eye.

In the early years of their marriage Andrea's horse jumping career took precedence over competitive sailing, yet she still found time to compete in the Europe class right up until Marco and Martine appeared. With two infants and the Brazil-

ian economy spiralling out of control in the early 1990s, Andrea put aside her dinghy sailing for a while before she returned, now sailing big boats and often racing with Torben on their IMS 30. The match racing circuit in Rio also required at least one woman on every boat, so Andrea was introduced to match racing and received her indoctrination as the pit woman on her husband's team during the 2004 and 2005 seasons.

In addition to sharing the Match Race Brasil-Rio de Janeiro title last September with her family, Andrea was also a winner at the Chocolates Nestlé Match Cup Rio in December.

At the moment Andrea's match race team is 'drifting' while wedding bells distract skipper Caroline Béjar... So at the Pre-Olympic regatta in Brasilia in February, Andrea raced a Laser Radial for the first time in four years. With the disruptions, Andrea is tempering her own 2012 Olympic aspirations but she is hungry to see Torben, Marco and Martine all competing in Weymouth. As to the number of Graels she wants to see competing in Rio in 2016 – 'Well, six would be nice...'

Meet Marco Soffiatti Grae

Marco, Torben and Andrea's 21-year-old son, has made it through to the last rounds of a slew of Grade 3 match races since 2007, winning the 2009 Match Race Brasil outright. That event was a particularly special highlight because his father, mother and sister all crewed for him along with Marcelo Ferreira.

However Marco has now put aside the ISAF match race rankings having moved into the front of a 49er. Competing with Andre Fonseca, who finished sixth and seventh in the 49er at the Athens and Qingdao Olympic regattas, Marco has qualified for Brazil's Olympic squad for 2010, following victory – by 1pt – in Brazil's 2010 Pre-Olympic regatta in February.

Regarding the Olympics in 2012 and 2016, Marco is clear: 'I hope to see my father and Martine at Weymouth... plus there is still a long way to go before Rio!'

Marco most admires: Paul Elvstrøm, Peter Blake, my father, Robert Scheidt and James Spithill.

Meet Martine ('Tine') Soffiatti Grae

Right after celebrating her 19th birthday Martine headed to Brasilia for the 2010 Pre-Olympics. Her 470 team-mate is Isabel Swan, who with Fernanda Oliveira made sailing history in 2008 as the first female sailors to win an Olympic medal for Brazil. Swan's fanfare had barely subsided when Martine and Kahena Kunze won the Volvo ISAF Youth Sailing world championships in Buzios, Brazil in July 2009.

It really was a once-in-a-lifetime moment when her father presented her with her first world championship trophy. Martine further contributed to the family sailing story when she reunited with Daniela Adler (another famous Brazilian sailing dynasty) to place fourth in the 420 worlds.

Martine and Isabel haven't been sailing together long but they are 'extremely focused' on this year's ISAF World Cup. 'But this year we are testing stuff, results are not our goal. Next year we will decide where we are going...' A confident lady. **Martine most admires:** Peter Blake, my dad and my uncle Lars.

No Grae family member formally coaches any other, but they do help each other out. Marco describes family dinners: 'For some reason we end up with very little conversation but a lot of intense eating! We have always tried to eat together but talking and eating at the same time are bad habits for hungry people so usually we discuss the sailing only after dinner...'

Once hunger is sated the conversation most often turns to logistics, issues raised during a training session or a performance at a recent championship. 'Logistics is a frequent topic when we are all together because,' Martine says, 'my dad has already been through everything we could ever imagine in that respect.'

'But whatever the question, someone in this family usually has an answer...'

Lynn Fitzpatrick

