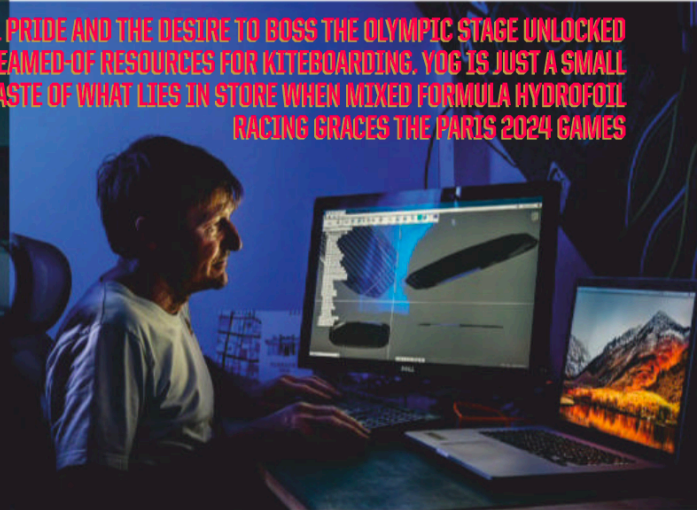


**NATIONAL PRIDE AND THE DESIRE TO BOSS THE OLYMPIC STAGE UNLOCKED UNDREAMED-OF RESOURCES FOR KITEBOARDING. YOG IS JUST A SMALL FORETASTE OF WHAT LIES IN STORE WHEN MIXED FORMULA HYDROFOIL RACING GRACES THE PARIS 2024 GAMES**



Shaping shed precision in Pranburi, Thailand. Once cooled from the oven, the board outline is cut out using a band saw  
Photo: Andrew Bunnag



Craig's business may have started in a garage, but is morphing into something bigger. After sketching the initial board on paper, the design is entered into a 3D computer modelling software for both the board mould plug (used to make the board base mould) and the board core itself  
Photo: Andrew Bunnag



Girl's Youth Olympics podium, left to right: 2nd Nina Font (SPN), 1st Sofia Thomasoni (ITA), 3rd Poema Newland (FRA)  
Photo: Matias Capizzano / World Sailing



Boy's Youth Olympics podium, left to right: 2nd Toni Vodisek (SVN), 1st Adeuri Corniel (DR), 3rd Christian Tio (PHI)  
Photo: Matias Capizzano / World Sailing

The hiccups meant Upeksha had no chance to showcase the Gawa at the first YOG Americas' qualifier event in Cabarete, Dominican Republic. But by the Europe and Africa qualifier last February in Dakhla, Morocco, the Italy team and some of the South Africa competitors were riding the board and turning heads of riders and coaches. By the final qualification round at the TT:R Youth Worlds in Hainan, China, Upeksha had resolved its issues and the tide had turned. Thirty-two of 61 riders were on Gawa boards, including the China and Dominican Republic teams. Their boys took the top three podium spots, led by eventual gold medalist and rising freestyle star, Adeuri Corniel.

By the time the Youth Games rolled around in Buenos Aires in October last year, all but four of the 12 girls and all 12 of the boys were riding Gawas, either the "big" 166 x 42cms or "small" 163 x 37cms. Chandler was elated. "When our boards went to the Youth Worlds in Brazil, my dream was to have just one of our boards at the Olympics. So we couldn't possibly conceive this would happen. It was just beyond our wildest dreams in those early days when we started up in the garage."

Not everyone was so pleased. Some felt the Gawa contravened the spirit if not the letter of the rules that envisaged young

riders battling on easily-accessible freeride twin-tips. Polish coach Tomek Janiak said, "When I saw the Upeksha Gawa my reaction was, it's the 'arms race' again. The idea of the TT:R was to be as close as possible to ordinary kiteboarders to encourage youngsters to participate." Vannucci demurs. "Don't blame Upeksha, blame the other [brands] for sleeping. Some didn't want to register a board, even if they had stock. I think Upeksha did a great thing. Some didn't like the Gawa because it was strange and different, but as coaches we felt it offered us the best chance of qualification."

French coach Antoine Weiss, whose FFV sailing federation ultimately ordered boards for both its YOG competitors, Benoit Gomez and silver medalist Poema Newland, has a different take. Weiss believes the young riders were heavily influenced by the sight of Corniel storming to victory on a Gawa at the Youth Worlds in China and that the Dominican could have won on a standard twin-tip. To a degree, even Chandler agrees. "To set these rules at the start, that it should be run-of-the-mill equipment, 'yes' I see both sides of the argument. Certainly we created a bit of a monster. But in the end we were in the Youth Olympics and people

wanted to win. Those not on our boards could still win, but on our boards it was easier to win."

Upeksha itself is now focused on winning. While YOG was a barely believable success in terms of medals and numbers, commercially Chandler admits it was a "disaster". Boards were never sold for more than 67 percent of list price, often less. "We sponsored the Youth Olympics," said Chandler jokingly. "We continually invested in the best, even though many think we're over priced. But simply put, the cost of construction and materials was very high." With four additional new boards, two for TT course racing and two for TT:R Slalom, Chandler is addressing the price issue with cheaper construction methods that retain all the winning properties of the original IKA-registered Gawas, which will still be available. "Our new boards will be 'BLC', better, lighter, cheaper." And Chandler still harbours the dream of crafting the best jumping board, to top the world again.

Find out more at: [www.upeksha.net](http://www.upeksha.net) KW